The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy. The "Essais" of Leibniz

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO

THE IMPOSSIBILITY AND NECESSITY OF THEODICY
LEIBNIZ'S "ESSAIS"

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Springer

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

Works by Leibniz

D   *Gothofredi Guillelmi Leibnitii... Opera omnia, nunc primum collecta, in classes distributa, praefationibus & indicibus exhornata*, studio Ludovici Dutens, 6 vols., De Tournes, Genevae 1768.

E   G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Opera philosophica quae extant latina, gallica, germanica omnia*, instruxit J.E. Erdmann, 2 vols., G. Eichler, Berlin 1840; reprint Scientia, Aalen 1959.

GM   G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Mathematische Schriften*, hg. von CI. Gerhardt, 7 vols., Asher, Berlin 1849 ff.; reprint Georg Olms, Hildesheim 1962.

FdCL   L.A. FOUCHER DE CAREIL, *Lettres et opuscules inédits de Leibniz*, Librairie Philosophique De Ladrange, Paris 1854; reprint Georg Olms, Hildesheim-New York 1975.

FdCNL   L.A. FOUCHER DE CAREIL, *Nouvelles lettres et opuscules inédits de Leibniz*, A. Durand, Paris 1857; reprint Georg Olms, Hildesheim-New York 1971.

TS   G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Theologisches System*, hg. von C. Haas, Verlag der H. Laupp'schen Buchhandlung, Tübingen 1860; reprint Georg Olms, Hildesheim 1966 ("f." after a page number refers to the following odd numbered page, as the edition includes both the German and Latin texts).

GP   *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, hg. von C.I. Gerhardt, 7 vols., Weidmann, Berlin 1875 ff.; reprint Georg Olms, Hildesheim 1960 f.

COUT   L. COUTURAT, *Opuscules et fragments inédits de Leibniz*, Felix Alcan, Paris 1903; reprint Georg Olms, Hildesheim 1961.

A   G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, hg. von der Preussischen [now Deutschen] Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Reichl, Darmstadt 1923 ff., Koehler Verlag, Leipzig 1938 ff., Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1950 ff.

S   G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Lettres et fragments inédits sur les problèmes philosophiques, théologiques, politiques de la réconciliation des doctrines protestantes (1669-1704)*, publiés avec une introduction historique et des notes par P. Schrecker, Felix Alcan, Paris 1934.

GRUA   G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Textes inédits d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre*, publiés et annotés par G. Grua, 2 vols., Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1948.

CF   G.W LEIBNIZ, *Confessio Philosophi*. *Ein Dialog*, hg. von O. Saame, Klostermann, Frankfurt a. M. 1967 ("f." after a page number refers to the following even numbered page, as the edition includes both the German and the Latin texts).

English Translations (the quotations, taken letter for letter from the texts indicated below, occasionally contain slight modifications, which will not be indicated):

L-A   *The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence*, edited and translated by H. T. Mason, with an Introduction by G. H. R. Parkinson, Barnes & Noble – Manchester University Press, New York-Manchester 1967.

L-C   *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence, Together with Extracts from Newton's Principia and Opticks*, edited with introduction and notes by H. G. Alexander, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1956.

T   G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Theodicy*. *Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, edited with an Introduction by Austin Farrer, translated by E.M. Huggard, Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1985 (the symbol T will be followed by two page numbers, the former referring to the French original in *GP VI* 21-436, the second to the English translation indicated).

Phil. *Ess*. G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis & Cambridge 1989.

A   G. W. LEIBNIZ, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, translated and edited by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996. The pages are not numbered in this edition. It contains, however, marginal references to the page numbers in the Akademie der Wissenschaften Berlin edition (see above). I will therefore

follow the page numbers in the Gerhardt edition with those in the Akademie edition, which will serve as a reference to the English edition.

LP   LEIBNIZ, *Logical Papers*, A Selection Translated and Edited with an Introduction by G. H. R. Parkinson, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1966.

MaOth   G. W. LEIBNIZ, *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*, translated with an introduction and notes by Robert Latta, Garland Publishing, New York & London 1985.

PhPL   G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, A Selection Translated and Edited, with an Introduction by Leroy E. Loemker, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht-Boston 1969[2].

PhT   G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Philosophical Texts*, translated by Richard Francks and R. S. Woolhouse, with an Introduction and Notes by R. S. Woolhouse, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998.

DM   G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Discourse on Metaphysics and related Writings*, edited and translated, with an introduction, notes and glossary, by R. N. D. Martin and Stuart Brown, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York 1988.

SR   G. W. LEIBNIZ, *De Summa Rerum. Metaphysical Papers, 1675-1676*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by G. H. R. Parkinson, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1992.

INTRODUCTION

"Cum Deo"

1. Theodicy

The term "theodicy" was coined by Leibniz, and is commonly held to indicate an aspect of religious apologetics with far more ancient origins. This commonly held view notwithstanding, Paul Ricoeur, a philosopher of notable authority where these matters are concerned, has argued that we can only legitimately refer to "theodicy" with reference to those systematic doctrines of divine justice, founded on an ontotheological system of reference, which belong specifically to the modern age and for which Leibniz's *Essais de Théodicée* provided the prototype.[1] I believe that some light can be shed on this difference of opinions by stating that the term "theodicy" refers indistinctly to two types of discourse which, whilst doubtless connected, are not identical. On the one hand, it indicates the *justification* of God against the accusations levelled against Him due to the existence of evil in the world and, on the other, a *doctrine* of divine justice. Although both discourses address the same issues, they occur under different circumstances and adopt different points of view, to the extent that it would be possible for either to occur without the other. When Ricoeur limits the legitimacy of the definition of "theodicy" to the ontotheological doctrine of divine justice, he clearly has the second significance in mind. Indeed, he too refers to the precedent and more ancient "levels" (myth, wisdom, gnosis) of mankind's intellectual endeavours in the face of the enigma of evil.[2]

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[1] Cf. P. RICOEUR, *Le mal. Un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie*, Labor et Fides, Genève 1986, pp, 13 f., 26. H. HÄRING, *Das Problem des Bösen in der Theologie*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1985, presents an approach similar to that of Ricoeur, from this point of view. Although he presents three distinct definitions of 'theodicy', he nonetheless argues that the term "understood in its strictest sense" indicates "an attempt to present a systematic justification of God in the face of objections levelled at Him due to the existence of evil (and above all of suffering) in the world, inasmuch as it is His creation." "Such an attempt," continues Häring, "rests on a rigorously defined conception of God, which does not concur unconditionally with the biblical and Christian conception." From now on, for brevity's sake, I will refer to Leibniz's *Essais de Théodicée* with the shorter title *Theodicy*. I will use the same term without an initial capital letter to refer to theodicy in general, as a literary genre or philosophical problem.

[2] Cf. *ibi*, pp. 18ff. Ricoeur, too, already perceives in the "biblical domain" that God is, on some level, on trial (cf. *ibi*, p. 20).

Since, however, the defence and justification of God against the accusations brought against him as a consequence of the existence of evil is also encompassed by the term "theodicy", let us first of all consider this significance. It would be impossible to determine when, in the history of human culture, the first such theodicy was attempted, and it would be an arduous task to follow its manifestations back through time to its most ancient religious and mythic manifestations. We must say, however, that theodicy was not born together with the first emergence of mythical belief or of religious faith. Neither did it coincide with the appearance of evil in the world. It rather originated with the first occasion on which a human being made accusations against divine justice regarding the presence of evil in the world. This, obviously, tells us nothing about the origins of theodicy from a chronological point of view. However, if it sheds little light on the "when" of theodicy, it does prove significant when we come to consider the "how" and, thus, the very definition of theodicy. Theodicy is an apologetic response to accusations levelled against God due to the existence of evil in the world.

The meditation and prayer of the believer in the face of evil therefore have nothing to do with theodicy. Such meditations may, at times, be uncertain and dramatic in their expression of pain suffered or of nostalgia for a lost ideal, of bitter disappointment or moral frustration, but they are always respectful of the divine mystery and divine justice which they address. Even when they take on an apparently provocative character, even their most drastic assertions mask an interrogatory, imploring, prayerful inner meaning, which does not impede adoration, but rather serves as its prelude. Judaeo-Christian tradition provides some extremely illustrious examples of this kind of dramatic meditation on divine mystery, such as, for example, the Psalms, several of St. Paul's Epistles and St. Augustine's *Confessions*.

The accusation of God is a completely different matter. Even when it assumes the interrogatory form of a sceptical doubt – *si Deus est, unde mala?* – it implies an assertion: God does not exist. In this case, there is no meditation, albeit tortured and difficult, on the mystery of divine justice, but rather an outright rebellion. God comes under accusation or His existence is denied. In the face of these accusations, believers cannot but take up the gauntlet and engage in apologetics in favour of God, in theodicy. The sceptical objection against divine justice, in which ever of its formulations, be it the famous epicurean argument or the more practical form recorded in the Psalms – "Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself 'He will not call me into account'?"[3]– moves believers to apology. They themselves are unable to comprehend the mystery of divine justice, but their adoration fuels the impulse to proclaim that justice wherever it is challenged: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have"[4].

There is another, more radical objection against God, besides scepticism: gnosis. Gnosis does not challenge God because He is unjust, but rather because he is

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[3] *Psa* 10:13.

[4] *1Pet* 3:15.

just. God is the demiurge of the cosmic order which gnosis perceives as the root of all evil and the prison of elect spirits. If the sceptical objection can be summed up with the formula: *si Deus est, unde mala?* the gnostic objection can be expressed with another question: *nisi a Deo, unde mala?* The gnostic accusation is more radical than that of the sceptics, because it does not conclude by denying God but rather with hostility and rebellion against the divinity, Whose power is recognised. It is true that gnosis counterpoises the evil demiurge to an unknown, good and redeeming God. Yet this latter is separate from the world, distant and unapproachable, while the demiurge is the creator and lord of the world and the accusations levelled against Him imply a radically and definitively negative judgement of the meaning of the world and of history. The theodicy of antique pagan traditions, like that of Judaism and of Christianity, arose in answer to the sceptic and, to an even greater extent, to the gnostic objections.[5]

We might ask ourselves whether theodicy is still necessary in the present day. On the basis of what has been said so far, we should answer that, for as long as accusations, be they sceptic or Gnostic, are levelled against divine justice, believers must continue to confront the necessity of theodicy. It is true that nowadays, in various narrow and elite sections of our culture, nihilism seems to have put down such profound roots that the problem of God has been removed to the extent that even to criticise Him would appear an exercise in futility. It is difficult to believe such an attitude entirely novel in human history and custom, as soon as we observe that it is already clearly figured forth in Psalm 14. Nevertheless, even in such extreme circumstances, the necessity of theodicy remains for the believer, since the very situation whereby the problem of God has been removed to such an extent that He is no longer even subject to accusations is clearly the fruit – clearly presupposes – the substance of the accusations in question. Even if they are not pronounced, they are nonetheless professed.

There are those who deem theodicy impious, inasmuch as it assumes to justify God, who needs no human justification. These suggest instead that believers should accept suffering in silence, without any attempt at justification.[6] To these we cannot

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[5] The following studies, among many others, treat of the theme of theodicy from various different cultural points of view: H. GOITEIN, *Das Problem der Theodicee in der älteren Jüdischen Religionsphilosophie*, Teil I, Diss., Mayer & Miiller, Berlin 1890; K. GRONAU, *Das Theodizeeproblem in der altchristlichen Auffassung*, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1922; A.-D. SERTILLANGES, *Le problème du mal*, 2 vols., Aubier, Paris 1948, 1951; G. GRUA, *Jurisprudence universelle et Théodicée*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1953, pp. 346-357; F. BILLICHSICH, *Das Problem des Übels in der Philosophie des Abendlandes*, 3 vols., A. Sexl, Wien-Köln 1936, 1952, 1959; M.B. AHERN, *The Problem of Evil*, Schocken Books/Routledge & Kegan, New York – London 1971; G.L. PRATO, *Il problema della teodicea in Ben Sira*, Biblical Institute Press [Ànalecta Biblica 65], Roma 1975; H. HÄRING, *op. cit.*

[6] This thesis is maintained in manyfold forms, for example, by J. SPERNA WEILAND, *La Théodicée, c'est l'athéisme*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, "Archivio di Filosofia", LVI (1988), n. 1-3, pp. 37-50; A. PEPERZAK, *Dieu et la souffrance à partir de Leibniz*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*,

but respond that impiety indeed lies at the origin of theodicy, but it is the impiety of the accuser of God, not of His defence. In his intimate moments of meditation before God, the believer might indeed elaborate upon the scandal of evil and the mystery of divine justice, but he is here confronted with an accuser of God, who will not limit himself to uttering curses, but will raise objections, expounding at length upon justifications and argumentations, throwing down the gauntlet of refutation. Under such circumstances the believer cannot remain silent: out of loyalty to God, to Whose glory he is duty-bound to bear witness; out of loyalty to mankind, whose hope is put to the test by the accuser of God; out of loyalty to the accuser himself, who, perhaps, in some more-or-less hidden recess of his mind, is concealing a hope for an answer which will set him free. For all of these reasons, believers have always attempted theodicy, an endeavour which, due to their incomprehension of the divine mystery which they are experiencing, will always appear imperfect, perhaps even impossible, but nevertheless indefeasible: an endeavour to bear witness to their faith and hope.

This task has been approached in various different ways. The most essential and concise response is surely that of simply restating, in words and deeds, the creed. Such a choice, however, leaves no space for explicit apologetics. We are here treating of a practical testimony to the positive outcomes of a moral conduct based on faith and hope. As I will suggest later, such a practical manifestation is, without a doubt, of great importance. Indeed, herein lies the very culmination of theodicy, the moment at which it is truly understood and manifests itself as a *practical theodicy*. Yet matters are somewhat different if such a response is perceived as an alternative and even a refutation of theodicy itself, based on the presupposition that every argumentation is impious and doomed to defeat in the face of the stronger arguments of the adversary. Such is the case with fideism, in all of its forms, including that supported by Bayle, which presented the most immediate stimulus for Leibniz's *Theodicy*.

Yet the profession of faith can also be more or less amply justified and argued, thus assuming the form of an *apologia*. Both the pagan thought of the Greeks and the Romans and Judaeo-Christian traditions have developed along these lines. The motivations put forward may refer to axioms or dogmas on the assumption that they are self-evident and universally accepted. In Graeco-Roman traditions these refer primarily to the cosmic order or to the conception of evil as privation of being. In early Jewish traditions, the fundamental principle is the goodness of creation. The Christian tradition assumes and interweaves all of these themes. Where there exists a written revelation, as in the case of Judaism and Christianity, arguments often refer back to or offer an exegesis of the sacred text in order to shed light on the enigmas of the present situation.[7] All of these forms of apologia have been tried and tested: they have shown themselves legitimate and effective and retain these qualities to the

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cit., pp. 51-74; H. LÜBBE, *Theodizee una Lebenssinn*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 407-426.

[7] A good example of this kind of theodicy, which refers exclusively to the revelation, is *The Wisdom of Sirach*. Cf. G.L. Prato's accurate analysis (*op.cit.*).

present. At times, however, apologetics has also supplemented the authority of revelation and tradition with the persuasive power of rational argument. This is surely partly due to the fact that sometimes objections themselves are expressed and justified with rational arguments. Since he finds himself in a debate situation, the apologist will be strongly conditioned by the dialectical attitude adopted by the accuser. Nonetheless I believe that, in addition to this latter, apologists have been moved by far deeper motives in choosing to include rational and philosophical argumentation amongst their defence strategies. Going back as far as patristics and medieval dialectics, and yet more vigorously in the modern age, there existed a perception in the accusation of divine justice and the denial of the meaning of the world of an implicit threat to the very substance of reason. Thus, as Kant pointed out,[8] any conclusion about divine justice is inevitably a conclusion about reason itself: any theodicy is also a logodicy.

2. *Philosophical Theodicy*

When a theodicy assumes the form of rational argument, it presents itself as a philosophical theodicy. Leibniz was by no means the first to adopt such a path. Ricoeur himself identifies a precise ontological conception at the basis of St. Augustine's "exclusively ethical vision of evil."[9] Nonetheless, Leibniz's *Theodicy* is without a doubt one of the clearest and most elaborate examples of philosophical theodicy, to the extent that it has become, for many, paradigmatic. Philosophical theodicy, then, consists in the defence of divine justice through philosophical argumentation. That such an argument may consist exclusively in a philosophical doctrine of divine justice is taken for granted by many (including Ricoeur). For the time being, I would ask my readers to suspend their judgement on this point. I would ask that my readers have the patience to wait until the end of the present study before drawing any conclusions on this matter. Indeed, we already come across a rejection of such an identification in Kant. In a draft fragment of the essay *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*, Kant presents the following definition of theodicy:

> What we do not imply when we refer to 'theodicy' is the automatic repulsion of objections levelled against a supreme goodness and wisdom as a consequence of the physical evils and vices to be found in the world on the part of a faith in that goodness and wisdom and founded on aims of a highly universal nature, set out in the world and united with the moral law within us, which is absolutely admirable and elevates our own selves above nature. We refer rather to a

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[8] Cf. I. KANT, *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee*, Akademie Ausgabe, vol. 8, p. 255; Eng. trans. *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, in I. KANT, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. by A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 17.

[9] Cf. P. RICOEUR, *op. cit.*, pp. 23 f.

methodical process of justification whereby divine order and government of the world are justified, that is to say evidently demonstrated, taking worldly considerations as a starting point, on the basis of a sufficient sense of coherence with divine wisdom inasmuch as we can conceive of it.[10]

However, in the definitive text of the 1791 essay, this definition is significantly muted:

> By "theodicy" we understand the defense of the highest wisdom of the creator against the charge which reason brings against it for whatever is counterpurposive in the world.[11]

The very difference between the definition given in the essay and that in the draft permits Kant to oppose to "doctrinal theodicy" an "authentic theodicy" *which is also philosophical*.[12]

Let us then leave aside, for the time being, the question as to whether philosophical theodicy must necessarily consist in a doctrine of divine justice and turn our attention to this latter significance of "theodicy." That this notion of theodicy as a doctrine of divine justice is not identical with the former definition of theodicy as the justification of God should already have been made clear above: the justification of God is also possible without a doctrine of divine justice. Although it may, at first sight, appear somewhat more surprising, we should also venture to add that a doctrine of divine justice can, in a certain sense, also be formulated in the absence of the justification of God. This thesis underpins the arguments of those who describe modern philosophy of history as a secularised theodicy. As before, I will here examine the position adopted by one exemplary thinker: Odo Marquard.

Marquard, too, whilst recognising the antiquity of the questioning of God's goodness, considers theodicy as a peculiarly modern product: "where there is theodicy, there is modernity and where there is modernity, there is theodicy."[13] He gives two reasons for this. First of all, theodicy is only possible in the modern era during which, due to an improvement in living conditions, "impotence and pain are no longer obvious and normal."[14] Secondly, it is only since the modern era that theodicy has become a necessary means to refute Marcionism, in the wake of the

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[10] I. KANT, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie Ausgabe, vol. XXIII, p. 85.

[11] I. KANT, *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee*, cit., p. 255; Eng. trans. cit., p. 17.

[12] This difference was observed, albeit in a somewhat different sense, in G. CUNICO, *Da Lessing a Kant. La storia in prospettiva escatologica*, Marietti, Genova 1992, pp. 191 f.

[13] O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, in IDEM, *Apologie des Zufälligen. Philosopische Studien*, Reclam, Stuttgart 1986, p.14.

[14] *Ibi*, p. 15.

failure of the medieval refutation on the basis of the theme of free will.[15] Modern theodicy would be of a paradoxical or, to use Marquard's term, "ambivalent" character.[16] To clear God of charges of injustice due to the evil in the world, it eliminates God altogether and imputes exclusive responsibility to the autonomy of mankind.[17] The denial of God's existence in the modern age thus has theodicical roots, aiming to clear Gods name. To this end, Marquard cites Stendhal's assertion that "God's only excuse is that he doesn't exist" and Nietzsche's declaration that "God has died of his pity for man."[18] What we are dealing with here, in Marquard's words, is a "methodical atheism *ad maiorem gloriam Dei.*"[19]

Modernity would thus consist in the passage from theodicy to the philosophy of history, in the sense that a transition is made from "theodicy through optimism," such as that of Leibniz, to a "theodicy through autonomy," i.e. in the absence of God.[20] We are left with the problem of where Leibniz fits into this conception of the relationship between theodicy and modern philosophy of history, since it seems that Marquard considers him to participate in modernity inasmuch as he takes part in the "tribunalisation of the modern reality of life" [21] but to be excluded from modernity inasmuch as he is exemplary of "theodicy through optimism."[22] Aside from this, what interests us here is the fact that Marquard presents a conception of theodicy as a doctrine of divine justice without justifying God in the face of accusations of injustice. The very existence of God is denied, but this does not cancel out the doctrine of divine justice. This latter is de-theologised, but continues to stand in support of the enduring meaning of the world despite the existence of evil – i.e. inasmuch as it constitutes a philosophy of history.

Marquard's position has the great merit of clearly tracing the relationship between modern philosophies of history and theodicy, of unveiling many of the former as being, at heart, secularised and atheist theodicies. It also, rise to a doubt:

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[15] Cf. *ibi*, pp. 15 f.

[16] Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Idealismus und Theodizee*, in IDEM, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie. Aufsätze*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1983, pp. 63, 65.

[17] Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., pp. 18 ff.; IDEM, *Idealismus und Theodizee*, cit., pp. 57 ff.

[18] Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., p. 20.

[19] O. MARQUARD, *Idealismus und Theodizee*, cit., p. 65; cf. IDEM, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., p. 18.

[20] Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Idealismus und Theodizee*, cit., p. 62.

[21] Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., pp. 11 ff.

[22] Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Idealismus und Theodizee*, cit., p. 62.

does the only difference between theodicy in its true sense and philosophies of history understood in the terms of Marquard's reading lie in the displacement of the accusation from God to man, in the "acquittal"[23] of God at the expense of man, or is there a more radical difference? It seems to me that Marquard underestimates the significance of *mystery*. Theodicy, in the traditional sense of the term, defends God against accusations of injustice in the constant awareness that the presence of evil in a world created by a just and good God is a facet of mystery. By eliminating the transcendent figure of God, lord of history from their horizons, modern "secularised" philosophers of history, remove this sense of mystery.[24] Right from the start of his argument, and in a manner fully coherent with his sceptical standpoint, Marquard tends to exclude any consideration of mystery. For example, as I have already indicated, he attributes the appearance of theodicy to the new and modern experience of the non-obvious and non-inevitable nature of evil. Whilst such a consideration is no doubt correct and telling, it is far from exhaustive. It seems to me, rather, that it is the awareness of evil as a mystery which induces mankind to confront the problem in religious terms and thus also to engage in theodicy. On the other hand, the elimination of mystery which sometimes, if not always, characterises modern thought, permits a philosophy of history without any reference to the transcendent divine (naturally, whether such philosophies of history are capable of reaching any satisfying conclusions is another matter). To recapitulate and conclude, a consideration of theodicy as a philosophical doctrine of history in the face of the problem of evil, detached from the justification of God, demonstrates that the two meanings of "theodicy" are not identical – that they can, rather, be disconnected completely. Yet it has also emerged that, in a doctrine of history without the justification of God, we lose not only reference to God, but also all sense of mystery, since these two elements are inextricably connected.

3. *The Theodicy of Leibniz*

The elimination of mystery, however, is also the fundamental accusation which Ricoeur can ultimately be said to level at Leibniz's theodicy. Indeed, Ricoeur's criticism rests, not so much on Leibniz's reference to onto-theology, as on the extent to which his discourse is based on the "logic of non-contradiction and systematic totalisation," which assumes to reconcile propositions which are irreconcilable: God is omnipotent; his goodness is infinite; evil exists:[25]

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[23] Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., p. 13.

[24] I here abstain from dealing with the question as to whether Kant, who Marquard certainly places amongst the developers of modern theodicy, effectively dispenses with any sense of mystery – a supposition regarding which, nonetheless, I have my doubts.

[25] Cf. P. RICOEUR, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 26.

Theodicy thus appears to represent a struggle for coherence, in response to the objection that only two of these propositions can be compatible, and never all three at the same time […]. The author fails to take into account […] the fact that the task undertaken of *thinking* – yes of thinking about *God* and of thinking about *evil* in the face of God – may not be exhaustively pursued by means of our anti-contradictory reasonings and our inclination towards systematic totalization.[26]

The optimism of Leibnizian theodicy would represent an alternative to faith in mystery:

Its failure lies in this very pretension that one might attain to a positive balance in the scale of good and evil on an almost aesthetic basis. It fails because we are faced with a degree of evil, of pain for which no known perfection seems able to compensate.[27]

Expressing a viewpoint very close to that of Ricoeur, Virgilio Melchiorre highlights yet more clearly the inadequacy of Leibniz's philosophical theodicy in the face of evil as mystery:

If evil is an undeniable reality, the ways of theodicy, at least as they are outlined by Leibniz, are impracticable. If, indeed, evil is defined in terms of contradiction – as an assertion or presence of something which cannot ultimately constitute itself in being – only two equally impossible pathways remain for theodicy: the first leading us to attribute the contradiction to the very being of God, the second, in order to avoid such an absolute contradiction, leading us to deny the existence of evil. Leibniz's *Theodicy* can be read as an emblematic case of this impossibility.[28]

This criticism of Leibniz is remarkably acute and consistent. It is essentially identical with the arguments put forward by those who accuse Leibniz in underestimating, or even ignoring the gravity and the drama of the scandal of evil. Amongst those who, acutely aware of the awful reality of evil and of the necessity that mankind, for the sake of honesty and truthfulness, should in no way undervalue this reality, at least two particular tendencies can be identified. On the one hand there are those such as Sergio Quinzio who, out of loyalty to humanity and to the human condition of evil and suffering, maintain that a denial of divine justice is inevitable:

Due to the very fact that God, inasmuch as the believer can know Him through the revelations of His works afforded to us through history, is not perfectly omnipotent, true justice eludes even God.[29]

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[26] *Ibi*, pp. 13 f.

[27] *Ibi*, pp. 27 f.

[28] V. MELCHIORRE, *Per una teodicea simbolica*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., p. 115.

[29] S. QUINZIO, *La giustizia impossibile*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., p. 685. The article is reprinted in IDEM, *Radici ebraiche del moderno*, Adelphi, Milano 1990, pp. 131 ff.

Not even after the final day, when our tears will be dried by the hand of God and those who mourn will be comforted, will justice be perfectly served […]. There will remain an overwhelming backlog of incidences of "useless suffering" endured by man and beast. Some faults will be forgotten, others punished. Some good works will be awarded, others forgotten.[30]

On the other hand, there are those, such as Luigi Pareyson who, out of the same sense of the necessity of honesty in the face of suffering, call into question not God's justice, but the philosopher's ability to understand it: "Philosophy has sought to 'understand' evil and suffering but, partly due to the radically incomprehensible nature of both and partly due to the type of reasoning with which they are approached, it has only succeded in wilfully overlooking them or cancelling them out altogether.[31]

> Theodicy conceives of God and suffering as mutually exclusive, without recognising the fact that they can only be truly perceived if we recognise that they can only be truly affirmed together. In this way, theodicy loses sight of the incandescence and virulence of evil and a veil of oblivious, torpid disinterest falls over the whole issue.[32]

The first of these two attitudes, taking the negative reality of evil as its starting point, challenges divine justice itself and, only indirectly, every attempt at the theodicy which seeks to defend it. The second, instead, challenges not divine justice but only and specifically philosophical theodicy precisely because its rational instruments render it unable to defend God without cancelling out evil.[33]

This objection that philosophical theodicy, due to the rational instruments on which it depends, would be unable to truly comprehend the mystery of divine justice and the reality of evil without cancelling out the latter is to be taken very seriously. It is far more serious than the other objection, already cited, that theodicy is presumptuous, since God does not seek human justification. This latter thesis in fact expresses a radically fideistic conception of religion. Such a conception is far from common and, besides this, can surely not be considered uniquely legitimate. Indeed, the very fact that it denies any possibility of dialogue with non-believers casts serious doubts as to the relevance that such a religion might have in the broader cultural

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[30] S. QUINZIO, *La giustizia impossibile*, cit., pp. 687 f.

[31] L. PAREYSON, *La filosofia e il problema del male*, in "Annuario Filosofico", 11(1986), p. 8; cf. p. 10. M. Van Overbeke (*Le pari optimiste de la meilleure des communications possibles*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 75-83) presents a critical discussion of these kinds of position, which contains some telling observations.

[32] L. PAREYSON, *Filosofia della libertà*, il melangolo, Genova 1989, p. 17.

[33] In addition to the authors already cited (Ricoeur, Melchiorre, Pareyson), many others adopt a similar stance. Cf., for example, J. GREISCH, *Faut-il déconstruire la théodicée?*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 647-673; P. HENRICI, *Von der Ungereimtheit, Gott zu rechtfertigen*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 675-681.

context. The former objection, instead, does not depend on a specific and debatable conception of religion, but calls philosophical reasoning and its ability to confront mystery directly into question. This is a challenge from which philosophy cannot afford to shy away. For philosophy to grant unconditional recognition to such an assertion would be to concede its absolute defeat.[34] Herein lie the origins of a great part of the diffidence which afflicts Leibniz's *Theodicy* and which makes it so exemplary as a model for any philosophical theodicy of a rational kind at the present day.

We must still recall one more type of criticism levelled at Leibniz's theodicy. Unlike the others, this critique belongs exclusively to the field of philosophy and it is more widely upheld implicitly than its limited number of explicit declarations would give us to believe. This critique can be best summed up as an accusation of philosophical irrelevance. Such a criticism is often implied in the emphasis that many place on the *Theodicy's* occasional origins and the assumption that it was written for a non-specialised audience. They stress the origins of the work in a series of conversations between Leibniz and the queen of Prussia, Sofia Carlotta, who invited Leibniz to write down his arguments against Bayle and others. This is certainly historically true – it is, indeed narrated by Leibniz himself – and does not per se represent a criticism. Nonetheless, such a criticism is implied when these facts are recalled in order to suggest that the *Theodicy* is nothing more than a work of *philosophie pour dames*, without philosophical relevance.

From a rather different standpoint and as part of an analytical discussion of theodicy in the seventeenth century, Sergio Landucci, in his interesting study of *Theodicy in the Cartesian Age*,[35] also accused Leibniz's *Theodicy* of irrelevance. He argued that the modern debate on theodicy had taken inspiration from various irreconcilable issues present in Descartes, had been developed by various authors, with Malebranche playing a decisive role, and had been brought to a definitive, negative conclusion by Bayle:

> Of the period spanning from Descartes to Bayle, we may well suggest that it was the critical moment in the history of this millenia-old problem. At the very centre we come across Malebranche, with his unprecedented new insights, which immediately underpinned the final outcome with which, by now, we are all familiar. Bayle brought us what is doubtless one of the greatest modern cases against any form of 'Christian philosophy,' whether it take on a rationalised form or even that of mere 'deism.'"[36]

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[34] I here refer to "philosophy" in the sense in which Leibniz himself understands it – that is to say, as critical rationalism. Different thinkers conceive of "philosophy" in different ways: Pareyson himself maintained that philosophy could, even in modern times, continue to serve a useful function in interpreting religious experience.

[35] S. LANDUCCI, *La teodicea nell'età cartesiana*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 1986.

[36] *Ibi*, pp. 11 f.

With Bayle, then, the case was closed so definitively that any attempt to reopen the argument – and Landucci is here referring above all to that of Leibniz – would be nothing more than a restating of old arguments which had already been refuted, devoid of any philosophical relevance. As Landucci writes:

> There is one omission which I should here take the time to specifically justify: that of Leibniz. This choice was based on the fact that, although the *Theodicy* brings together much of Leibniz's thought *en masse*, with regard to our specific theme, i.e. his response to Bayle, he limits himself to posing once again, abeit in a form somewhat altered in accordance with his personal inclinations, the very arguments which Bayle had already completely demolished. Indeed, he even raises points which had already been undermined by Malebranche. In this sense, Leibniz's response does nothing more than bare witness to the manner in which the Bayleian outcome represents a point of no return in the Western intellectual tradition. Kant would solemnly bear witness to this fact a hundred years later, with his aptly entitled essay *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*.[37]

In the face of all of these problems and criticisms which plague theodicy in general and Leibnizian theodicy in particular, the present study aims to present a reading of Leibniz's work which will question his arguments without prejudice but also, at the same time, leave the space for Leibniz to offer us an authentic expression of his own philosophical thought. I began work on this study because I had the impression, in which I have since been confirmed, that Leibniz's *Theodicy* offers a treatment and development of the issues in question which is of far more interest than commonly held critical opinion has given us to believe and that, when read without presumption or prejudice, it often emerges as a remarkably different text from that which it is stereotypically assumed to be. I was driven, on the one hand, by a theory that, if philosophy can prove itself able and entitled to seek out truth, it cannot be excluded from the exploration of such fundamental issues of faith as that of theodicy, nor can faith do without the assistance of philosophical apologetics, if it does not wish to isolate itself from language, communication and cultural dialogue. On the other hand, I was moved by the historical fact that, even if the Marburg School, who represents a key point of reference in my own philosophical research, did not, generally speaking, appreciate this aspect of Leibniz's philosophy, the School nonetheless considered Leibniz's thought as a cornerstone in the history of critical idealism. I would thus assume that, if not the letter, then at least the spirit of that critical idealism which, at least in Kant and Cohen, paved the way to theodicy could be traced back to Leibniz.

The present study, then, is by no means intended as a general study on Leibnizian thought. Indeed, many of the most important themes of Leibniz's philosophy are only briefly touched upon, or even omitted entirely. It has no particular objectives on a historiographical or philological character, to the extent that

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[37] *Ibi*, p. 13.

you will find that Leibniz's works are here cited, by and large, without any attention being paid to chronology and to historical evolution of the author's thought. Similarly, unpublished passages are normally quoted without any indication being given of corrections, deletions and addition. I have not even attempted to provide an exhaustive and systematic analysis of all of Leibniz's works on the themes with which I am concerned. In approaching the various topics, I have sought to provide, from time to time, the broadest possible indication of cross-references in Leibniz's oeuvre for the purposes of comparison and in order to afford the greatest possible range and depth to the present reading of the *Theodicy*. Notwithstanding this, I lay no claims to exhaustiveness. My true objective has been to offer an organic reading of Leibniz's *Theodicy*, situating it in the broader context of the author's thought as a whole. For this reason, the *Theodicy* is my key text of reference, although I constantly refer back to other works in the Leibniz canon, where they may serve to support, clarify or further develop my readings. Of course a critical reading is impossible without questioning the substance of the text studied. The questions which I intend to ask have been gradually developed over the course of the present introduction: what, exactly, is the meaning of Leibniz's *Theodicy* and how does he set out to express it? What is its aim and what methodological approach is adopted? To what extent is it still relevant? Furthermore, is theodicy in general, and philosophical theodicy in particular, to be considered a valid and effective exercise? If this is the case, under what conditions? To answer these questions, I have presented a systematic reading of the *Theodicy* whereby, after having first investigated, in accordance with the order set out by Leibniz himself, the objective of theodicy, the "true piety" (Chapter One) and its main instrument, reason (Chapter Two), I then move on to treat of the apologetic arguments with which the main body of Leibniz's work is concerned (Chapter Three). I have sought to identify the foundations and justifications, first of the metaphysical arguments (Chapters Four and Five) and then, in a somewhat more radical step, of the existence of God and the reason principle (Chapter Six).

Having thus presented my research, outlining its limits and its intentions, I can do no more than entrust it to the reader, in the hope that (s)he, without neglecting to engage in a careful and rigorous critical exercise, will nonetheless follow Leibniz's benevolence towards the text being read: "I am naturally inclined," he writes, "to latch on to that which is praiseworthy, almost without paying any attention to that which is blameworthy, above all when the former aspect is prevalent. I do not read books to censure them but rather to profit from them. It is for this reason that I find good everywhere, although not always in the same quantity"[38].

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[38] *GRUA* 103.

CHAPTER ONE

TRUE PIETY

It is a fact well known that the *Preface* to a work always poses various intrinsic difficulties with which its author must grapple. Like the initial prelude to a work of music, it must give voice to all the main themes of the composition. To simply list the themes is not enough. Otherwise the "Table of Contents" alone would suffice. The author must rather already seek to give some sense of their complexity and diversity, together with their unity, despite not really being able to fully explore their meaning. An author who did not know when to abandon each theme, after briefly introducing it, but sought rather to follow it through to its conclusion would not only write a book without a *Preface*, but would probably also end up writing a singularly "baggy monster" of a book, failing to pass beyond or even to do justice to the first theme due for consideration in the *Preface*.

Yet more complex, then, is the task of providing a commentary on a *Preface*, since a commentary should, by its very nature, offer an exhaustive analysis and explanation of its subject. To this we should add a characteristic and commonly recognised difficulty of Leibnizian thought: namely, that, even though Leibniz does not express himself in a systematic manner, he is a profoundly systematic thinker, in the sense that every part is always inextricably connected to the whole and no single argument can be fully understood in isolation. To borrow Michel Serres' astute analogy,[1] Leibniz's philosophy is like a network, made up of myriad threads, each of

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[1] M. Serres (*Le système de Leibniz et ses modèles mathématiques*, 2 vols., Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1968, p. 14) writes "To understand the systematic nature of Leibniz's thought, it would thus seem that one should construct a grid, seeking to constitute thereby the plan of the labyrinth; or, rather, two grids: one expressing the 'philosophical' notions and the other serving a reference function, constituting the mathematical model – all this before considering their respective relations. Every region of these grids has the figure of a kind of stellar node (or 'apex'), each thread of which, be it efferent and / or afferent, intersects with the whole or a part of all the other apices and is reunited with them. It appears, in brief, that Leibniz always took the greatest possible care to multiply these connections and intersections, to connect each point with all the others along the greatest possible number of roads or, where possible, with all the roads possible: combination, composition, expression, conspiracy." Further on (p. 18) Serres continues: "The idea of a system thus does not seem in any way to be reducible to the idea of a unique or irreversible order of reasonings or themes, which would draw its evidential strength from the unity of its starting points and interconnections. It presents itself as an ordered and multilinear system of intersections. Any given point of the whole is situated along a certain number of inferential lines and, as a consequence, at the crossroads between them. Hence, even if one wishes to follow a given inferential order, it is always possible to return to the point in question along one path or another. A system, therefore, is characterised by this facet of having a multiplicity of possible return routes." Serres' approach to Leibniz's thought is excellent and offers a satisfactory account of its systematic and polyhedral nature. It is able, moreover, to definitively pass beyond the earlier diatribes

which interlaces with the others to form unitary structures so that, not only is the analysis of every single part essential for a clear understanding of the whole, but an exhaustive consideration of any single part cannot be undertaken without an awareness of the whole. In analysing the *Preface* of Leibniz's *Theodicy*, I will therefore limit myself to outlining the main themes, which are to be developed in more detail later on, bearing in mind that these issues will arise repeatedly throughout the present study, both individually and in terms of their architectonic or, perhaps, symphonic interconnections.

1.   *Truth and Appearance*

The text opens with a definition of "true piety," and the development of this definition occupies the whole of the first part of the *Preface*. Nonetheless, right at the very beginning, Leibniz makes an observation which is of the utmost importance and should not escape our notice. He attributes the fact that true piety is the privilege of the few to "human weakness" and adds, by way of explanation, that

> We are impressed by what is outward, while the inner essence of things requires consideration of such a kind as few persons are fitted to give.[2]

He goes on immediately to justify this consideration with a discussion of the "outward forms of religion": that is to say, of the "ceremonial practices" and "formularies of belief," which are praiseworthy if they are "appropriate to maintain and to express that which they imitate," but are, instead, negative if they stifle and obscure true piety.[3] Yet the argument introduced here is of a vaster importance: we are essentially concerned with the relationship between truth and appearance.

In these first few lines, this relationship is already treated as complex and far from unequivocal. Appearance can express truth, or hide it: truth is inevitably faced with this dual potential of appearance. It is well known that, for Leibniz, the supreme principle of truth is that of identity without contradiction.[4] Yet although this principle offers an absolute condition as to why one thing is true and another false, it is not in itself sufficient to determine the truth or falsity of a proposition or piece of knowledge. A clear example of this situation is the determination of future

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concerning the primacy of the one or the other aspect in Leibnizian philosophy, without, however, losing sight of the precious contributions which each of those unilateral interpretations has made to our understanding of Leibniz's philosophy (on this point, cf. M. SERRES, *op.cit*., pp. 24 ff., 78, 532, 640).

[2] *T* 25/49.

[3] Cf. *ibidem*.

[4] Cf. *GP V* 14 f.; *VII* 299 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 225); *COUT* 230, 363 ff., 368 ff., 387 f. (Eng. trans. *LP* 53 ff., 57 ff., 76 f.]).

contingents: the identity principle ensures us of their determinacy, but not of how they are determined.[5] This uncertainty of knowledge applies not only to the future, but also to the past and present; and this is exactly because, when judging the truth of the contingent, we cannot trust unconditionally in appearance and because appearance cannot be taken as an indubitable expression of truth.

As is well-known, Leibniz was far from accepting the Cartesian approach of methodical doubt, which he considered over-scrupulous, as a *formido oppositi*, difficult to distinguish from scepticism. On the contrary, he held the judgement of appearances to genuinely lie within the reach of human knowledge:

> Since, in truth, it is not always granted us to see for ourselves the *a priori* reasons behind all things, we are naturally inclined to have faith in our senses and in the weight of authority and, most of all, in our intimate perceptions and in the diverse perceptions which conspire amongst themselves. We are naturally inclined to trust our senses and to believe identical those things between which we find no difference. If we did not believe in appearances where there is no clear reason not to, we would no longer do anything. Indeed, those things which are as certain as my own reflections and perceptions are to be considered sufficiently true. This is a point on which we must argue against the sceptics.[6]

Indeed, Leibniz is so convinced of the reliability of this kind of *a posteriori* knowledge that he affords it the same status amongst his "principles of metaphysical certainty" as the identity principle:

> *Principle of moral certainty*. All that which is confirmed by many indicators, which could not be found together except in truth, is morally certain, that is to say is incomparably more probable than the contrary.[7]

It is worth considering, then that this sense of the methodical reliability of knowledge founded on appearances plays a primary role in the concept, fundamental for Leibnizian physics and gnoseology, of the *phaenomenon bene fundatum*. Moreover, responding to Foucher's objections to his system of pre-established harmony, Leibniz recognises, in a manner to some extent anticipating the Kantian perspective, the reflexive character of philosophy and its need to take phenomena as its starting point echoed an expression attributed to Plato by Simplicius:[8]

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[5] "This meant that the Christian schools, and above all the Thomists, following their founder, were right to sustain that the truth of future contingents is determined. All of which is equivalent to applying the general rule of contradiction, which is the principle of all our universal knowledge, that every intelligible enunciation, with regard to the present, past or even the future, is true or false, even if we do not know where truth lies" (*GRUA* 479).

[6] *COUT* 514.

[7] *COUT* 515.

[8] Cf. SIMPLICIUS, *In Aristoteles de caelo commentaria*, ed. J. L. Heiberg [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, vol. VII], G. Reimer, Berlin 1894, p. 488.

> All hypotheses are made with a special purpose in view, and all systems appear by way of afterthought [viennent après coup], in order to safeguard phenomena or appearences.[9]

Yet Leibniz is equally aware of the fact that appearances are not always reliable. On a strictly logical level, "false" is simply "not true": "That which is not true is false. This stands equally as a definition of the false".[10] Yet on the gnoseological and practical levels, "falsity" is a far richer and more complex notion, precisely because appearance comes into play. Falsity is not simply error, but error which "takes on the guise" of truth.[11] In adopting this notion of "falsity," Leibniz places himself within the great tradition of critical philosophy,[12] which originates in Plato and is carried forward after Leibniz in the philosophy of Kant. The conceptual relationship between the *Preface* to Leibniz's *Theodicy* and Plato's *Sophist* should be clear to all.[13] Leibniz writes that the "formularies of belief" and ceremonial practices are the appearances of the true principles and the true virtues. If they are the *expression* of the principles and virtues, they are true appearances or images, "shadows of the truth" which they imitate. If, instead, they take the place of truth, they are false appearances, superstitions, "shadows of the truth" which they obscure.[14] We are dealing here, almost literally, with the difference between "the art of representation" and the "art of appearance" described by Plato in the *Sophist*.

The notion of the false as being not simply the opposite of the true but rather an error which deceives by assuming the appearance of the truth is one of the main reasons behind Leibniz's refutation of Descartes' rule of evidence. In criticism of the writings of the Cartesian Schweling, Leibniz writes

> I am surprised that he writes, on p.89, that in falsehood lies no clarity or vividness. It would then follow that falsehood would never have the appearance of truth.[15]

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[9] *GP IV* 496; Eng. trans. *MaOth* 325.

[10] *COUT* 230.

[11] Cf. *GP II* 576.

[12] With the expressions "critical philosophy" and "critical idealism," I refer, from here on, to a perspective and philosophical tradition drawn above all from Hermann Cohen. For further details, see my *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, Eng. trans. J. Denton, State University of New York Press, New York 1997.

[13] Cf. PLATO, *The Sophist*, 235d-236d. It is possible that, writing this page, Leibniz also has in mind *Heb* 8:5.

[14] Cf. *T* 25/101.

[15] *GP IV* 328.

As a direct consequence of this very surreptitious verisimilitude on the part of falsehood, methodical attention and exhaustive demonstration on the part of the intellect will be required if the line is to be drawn between truth and falsehood.

We should finally note that if Leibniz, arguing against Descartes, attributes the responsibility for distinguishing the true from the false to the intellect, not to the will, he nonetheless by no means underestimates the influence of the practical sphere on the possibility of an individual being deceived by the falsehood of appearances. He thus sustains the individual's ultimate responsibility for his / her judgements. It is true that, when writing against Descartes, he notes

I do not admit that errors are more dependent upon the will than upon the intellect […]. Hence we make judgments not because we will but because something appears.[16]

However this does not mean that the focus of the intellect cannot be "obscured" or deviated by practical interests, habits or vices. In the *Nouveaux Essais,* Theophilus observes to Philalethes:

I am amazed that your astute friend should confuse 'obscured' with 'blotted out', just as your allies confuse 'non-existent' with 'not appearing'. Innate ideas and truths could not be effaced, but they are obscured in all men (in their present state) by their inclination towards the needs of their bodies and often still more by supervening bad habits.[17]

And in his critical notes to a text by Stephan Nye, Leibniz remarks:

The present error is not voluntary. Nonetheless, past desire is usually one of the causes of error.[18]

Hence the falsehood which, for Leibniz, leads the intellect into error of judgement and the will into error of choice, stems solely from the deviation of the intellect from the right path. However, at the same time, the attention of the intellect may be invalidated by mistaken interests of a practical nature, which are rooted in sensible appearances and in vicious past habits. The intellect and the will are mutually influential in the individual's decline into deception. Deception thus emerges as a perversion of the individual's rational judgement, which has practical origins. Here emerges, for the first time, one of the many aspects of evil as a perversion of reason – an important theme in the *Theodicy*. This is another concern which links Leibniz's thought back to the tradition of critical philosophy and forward to the philosophy of Kant. This notion emerges, with reference to cults, in the following passage from a letter from Leibniz to Landgrave of Hessen-Rheinfels:

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[16] GP *IV* 361; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 387.

[17] GP *V* 91/*AVI/6* 100; cf. *GP III* 403 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 195); *IV* 362 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 388), 452 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 58); *V* 191 f./*AVI/6* 206.

[18] *GRUA* 253.

The simplicity of a cult is not always a sign of its purity. For my own part, I acknowledge that it is necessary to excite the attention of men through recourse to the senses, just as long as the sense does not deprive the spirit (whose capacities are often saturated by images from the senses) of that spiritual and truthful adoration which God demands. It is for this reason that the images, stories, hymns and music, the words and expressions which strengthen our perception of the perfections of God, of His greatness, His justice and His goodness towards us, which make us detest sin and which turn our spirit towards good are admirable. Yet we should not allow ourselves to become tangled up, attaching ourselves in this way to creatures and formalities, as is too often the case.[19]

I have here sought to briefly highlight a theme which is only hinted at in the *Preface* to the *Theodicy*, but which will be developed considerably in the remainder of the work and in particular in the *Preliminary Dissertation*. In the problematic and ambiguous relationship between truth and appearance lies the domain of "mystery" – a key notion throughout Leibniz's *Theodicy*, without which it is impossible to grasp the unique quality of Leibnizian discourse. I will treat of this vital theme later on, when I come to analyse the *Preliminary Dissertation*. For now, it will suffice to remark that the concept of mystery is inextricably tied up with my entire reading of the *Theodicy*.

Further study of the relationship between truth and appearance also sheds light, more immediately, on Leibniz's affirmation that the fact that only the "few" practise true piety, while the "many" content themselves with mere formality is down to human weakness. Thus Leibniz does not attribute true religion to an intellectual aristocracy and superstition to the ignorant masses. The deviation from the one to the other stems from weakness, not ignorance. Indeed, in the brief history of religion which Leibniz traces in these pages, superstition is depicted as the defect of the "pagans" and the "pagans" are by no means ignorant barbarians. He is, instead, alluding to the cultures of classical antiquity, which he describes as societies in which religion was the prerogative of an intellectual aristocracy, of a sacerdotal caste, which hoarded up all knowledge of mysteries, oracles and wonders, whilst the multitude were kept in a state of ignorance which made them easier to dominate. On the contrary, according to Leibniz, Moses and Jesus Christ, with the authority of law-givers, made of true piety the religion of a people, in the former case, and the religion of nations, in the latter.

Leibniz also acknowledges, on various occasions, the possibility of practising authentic devotion without fully penetrating its motives:

it is not necessary that all who possess this divine faith should know those reasons, and still less that they should have them perpetually before their eyes. Otherwise non of the unsophisticated or of the feeble-minded – now at least – would have the true faith, and the most enlightened people might not have it when they most needed it, since no one can always remember his reasons for.[20]

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[19] *GRUA* 194 f.

[20] *GP V* 480/*AVI/6* 497; cf. *GP V* 492/ *AVI/6* 510.

This possibility always remains open, thanks to the grace of God and because it is not unreasonable, when a matter lies beyond one's own capacities of comprehension, to place one's trust in an authority, once it has been recognised as such. Leibniz makes explicit his approval of the doctrine of the Roman church, whereby "implicit faith"[21] is sufficient.

One might at this point raise the objection that Leibniz hereby justifies the very formalism which he had condemned. Yet the difference between true and false appearances, discussed above, allows us to overcome this objection. As Leibniz writes, "ceremonial practices" and "formularies of belief" "would be valid provided there were nothing in them inconsistent with truth unto salvation, even though the full truth concerned were not there"[22]. These are necessary to true religion and were stipulated by its founders Moses and, subsequently, Jesus Christ, the "divine founder of the purest and most enlightened religion".[23] Such formalities are only negative when they are false, that is to say when they mask a lack of religious substance, as in the case of Paganism, or when they express a distorted and false religion, as do "some Christians," about whom Leibniz complains and against whom he directs his *Theodicy*.[24]

If, then, there exist formalities which are true and useful for religion, it is absolutely necessary that there also exist, first and foremost, a *truth* to which they give expression. This truth, for Leibniz, is rational:

> Our religion would be a pathetic thing indeed, he writes, if it lacked arguments, and it would be no better than that of Mohammed or of the Pagans. If such were the case, we could not offer reasoned responses to those who required them, nor could we defend faith against the impious or even against those scruples which often trouble the anxious faithful.[25]

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[21] Cf. *GP V* 502 f./ *AVI/6* 520 f.

[22] *T* 25/101.

[23] *T* 25/49 f.

[24] The manuscript published in *GRUA* 46 ff., and in particular pp. 60 f., would seem to suggest the influence, which is anything but improbable, of Toland on Leibniz, regarding this critique of the neo-paganism and anti-Christianity concealed by contemporary Christianity. It is nonetheless noteworthy that, whilst the manuscript in question identifies this heresy in the Church of Rome and in other Christian confessions, Leibniz instead directs his polemics against specific ideological approaches such as libertinism or fideism.

[25] (*GRUA* 20; cf. 22). On the necessity of the rational bases of faith, without which there would be no reasonable criteria for choosing Christianity over any other religious persuasion, cf. *T* 67/91; *GP V* 477/*AVI/6* 494; *GRUA* 18; *TS* 15.

As a consequence, the more enlightened faith is, the more robust it will be. Above all, it is only through enlightenment that faith can attain to its true fullness, resolving itself into the love of God: "One cannot love God without knowing his perfections, and this knowledge contains the *principles* of true piety".[26]

2. *The Fundamental Truths of Faith*

Should we ask which are the fundamental truths of faith according to Leibniz, two precepts immediately and clearly emerge: the existence of a creating and provident God and the immortality of the soul. All the other precepts of faith are secondary to these and founded upon them. This emerges right from the opening pages of the *Theodicy* and in particular in the remarkably concise and effective history of religion which Leibniz includes in his *Preface*.[27] Since Leibniz is dealing with "natural religion",[28] it seems strange that he attributes to it a historical development. Indeed, in reality, the development described does not refer so much to the presence of the fundamental contents of faith in the heart of man, which is, in some sense, albeit implicit, innate, inasmuch as it is connected to human reason itself. Instead, it refers to the manner in which these contents have been made explicit and developed over time in "laws" or "dogmas" so as to constitute a positive religion. These two aspects of faith – permanent, natural religion and historically-formulated, positive religion – lend a complex double trajectory to Leibniz's history of religion. On the one hand, he presents three distinct movements – Paganism, Judaism and Christianity – as successive stages in religious development. On the other, he tempers this over-simplified and over-schematic vision with constant emphasis on the continuity of natural religion.

Paganism therefore emerges as a culture without any real religion, unaware of the truths of faith, devoid of any dogma, and hence enslaved by empty superstition and the arbitrary impositions of false priests. "Abraham and Moses" – i.e. Judaism – "established the belief in one God, source of all good, author of all things".[29] Judaism, therefore, brought to light the first fundamental truth of faith, the existence

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[26] (*T* 28/52). "There are few individuals who truly understand God's love for all things, yet herein lies the principle of true religion. This love is all the greater for being the more enlightened. I believe that idiots sometimes have it without knowing, but those who have it by demonstration have it in a more concrete and perfect form, since, with practice, the practical will conform to the theoretical" (*GRUA* 161).

[27] It is probable that Leibniz's history of the religions is influenced by Toland (cf. *GRUA* 46 ff. And Grua's famous note) However, this does not detract from the fact that Leibniz adopts the position and develops its implications on his own accounts.

[28] *T* 26/51.

[29] *T* 26/50.

of a unique creating and provident God, and establishes this principle as the founding law or dogma for the positive religion of its people. Yet only "Jesus Christ brought about the conversion of natural religion into law",[30] with the explicit and authoritative formulation of the dogma of the immortality of the soul. With this final perfection and with the conversion of the Roman Empire, "the religion of the wise men became that of the nations",[31] spread further, into Africa and Asia, by Islam. These, then, are the distinct historical stages whereby natural religion was formulated into positive religion – of the "conversion of natural religion into law".[32] The contents of this religion, inasmuch as they constitute the unalienable heritage of humanity, also flowered forth at times in those cultures and periods in which they had yet to be formulated in dogma or during which they were obscured by superstition. Even then, however, they were recognised by "wise men," i.e. by those who were furthest advanced in reason. Nonetheless, they did not yet constitute a "public dogma".[33] With regard to the existence of a single God as creator and benefactor, Leibniz remarks:

> Peradventure the wise men of other nations [i.e. aside from the Jews] have sometimes said the same, but they have not had the good fortune to find a sufficient following and to convert the dogma into law.[34]

Similarly, with reference to the immortality of the soul:

> it was consistent with his [Moses'] ideas, it was taught by oral tradition; but it was not proclaimed for popular acceptance until Jesus Christ lifted the veil.[35]

What is yet more important to observe, if we are to correctly understand the *Theodicy*, is that, according to Leibniz, the two fundamental truths of religion are rationally demonstrable:

> Indeed, we cannot understand and preserve the foundations of faith without reasoning.[36]

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[30] *T* 26/51.

[31] *T* 27/51.

[32] *T* 26/51; cf. G*P IV* 462 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 68); *E* 445.

[33] *T* 27/51.

[34] *T* 26/50.

[35] Ibidem. This may be a reference to *2Cor* 3:14.

[36] *GRUA* 22. Whether or not Leibniz really managed to demonstrate this truth is another matter. For now, I will disregard this matter altogether. It will be dealt with in the final chapter of the present study, with regard to the existence of God.

The other stipulations of faith, which derive from these, can be maintained by reason but cannot be demonstrated.

This difference, which is of great importance for Leibniz, is also what distinguishes natural theology, the truth of whose principles can be rationally demonstrated, from revealed theology. The truth of the "mysteries" of revealed theology cannot be rationally demonstrated "because it springs from revelation." Yet, the possibility can be rationally demonstrated "against the insults of infidels and atheists".[37] Herein, indeed, lies the very task of philosophical theodicy.

"The idea of God and the truth of his existence"[38] are, for Leibniz, innate ideas.[39] Moreover, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are necessary postulates, without which there would be no foundation for law or morality.[40] More dramatically yet, without faith in the existence of God, we would be left with the despairing vision "of an orphan world, abandoned to chance".[41] Yet even this is not the most crucial point. What is most fundamental, as I already remarked above, is that these two fundamental concepts of faith "can and should be proved".[42] This process of demonstration may prove arduous, as Leibniz writes (probably to princess Sophia):

> all those who have learned a little metaphysics begin first with the demonstration of God's existence and the immortality of our souls, which, in my opinion, are the fruits of all our studies, since they constitute the foundation of our greatest hopes.[43]

Nonetheless, the process of demonstration is always possible and necessary. Without such a demonstration, human faith is but lukewarm and unable to withstand temptations[44] and above all doomed to fall into fideism ("those who have sought to destroy natural religion and reduce everything to revealed religion"), mysticism or the crudest form of metaphysics ("fanatical [...] or barbarous" philosophy).[45] Leibniz gives various examples of the demonstrability of the two fundamental dogmas of faith. We need only call to mind his *Confessio naturae contra atheistas*,[46] in which,

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[37] Cf. *GP I* 61.

[38] *GP V* 416/*AVI/6* 497.

[39] Cf. *GP III* 249 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 288).

[40] Cf. *GP III* 389 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 423); *V* 82, 413/ *AVI/6* 89 f., 432; *VII* 511.

[41] *GP III* 416.

[42] *GP V* 89/ *AVI/6* 97; cf. GP *VII* 509.

[43] *GP IV* 290; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 235.

[44] Cf. *GP V* 176/ *AVI/6* 190.

[45] Cf. *GP V* 61/*AVI/6* 68.

[46] Cf. *GP IV* 105 ff.(Eng. trans. *PhPL* 109 ff.).

famously, he goes so far as to present a demonstration *in forma* of the immortality of the soul.[47]

I will treat of Leibniz's demonstration of the existence of God in the final chapter of the present study. For the time being, it will suffice to clearly outline the thesis of His demonstrability:

> we have no need of revealed faith to know that there is such a sole Principle of all things, entirely good and wise. Reason teaches us this by infallible proofs.[48]

The demonstration of the immortality of the soul is, famously, an integral and highly important part of Leibniz's metaphysics of substance and, as such, would require a lengthy exposition. However, I will neglect this matter for now, in order to remain as concise and focused as possible in treating of the problem of theodicy. I will here limit myself to indicating several fundamental characteristics of the Leibnizian conception of the immortality of the soul, which constitute a useful point of reference for the study of the *Theodicy*. First of all, for Leibniz, substance is imperishable and maintains its *individuality* in both man and beast.[49] Leibniz makes this point in his polemics, not only against Descartes and the Cartesians, but also against Locke, in particular when maintaining (in reference to the theory of perception) that the soul is immortal *by nature* and not *by grace*.[50] Leibniz insists of this point, because the theory of immortality conceded by grace, and thus of the natural mortality of the soul, "does not have good consequences".[51] Leibniz acknowledges that the moral consequences do not constitute a convincing argument: "I do not thereby concede that the rule of truth depends on our interests and I do not wish to here mix theological reasons with the philosophical".[52] Although the natural immortality of the soul can also be demonstrated philosophically by means of rational

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[47] With regard to the immortality of the soul, cf. Also Leibniz's letter to the Elector Johann Friedrich of Hannover, published in *A II*/l 110 ff.

[48] *T* 75/98.

[49] Cf. *GP II* 99 f. (Eng. trans. *L-A* 124 f.), *V* 64 f./*AVI/6* 72; *VI* 515 f., 534 f. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 557 f.), 542 f. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 588), 609 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 644), 620 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 214 f., 223); *VII* 315, 330, 530; *COUT* 15 f.; *FdCL* 68.

[50] Cf. *GP III* 249 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 288), 291 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 285); *V* 24, 48, 51 f., 148/*AVI/6* 55, 58 f., 162; *GRUA* 379. On the meaning and importance of Leibniz's theory of immortality by nature, cf. E. CASSIRER, *Leibniz' System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen*, Text und Anmerkungen bearbeitet von M. Simon, in IDEM, *Gesammelte Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe*, vol. 1, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 1998, p. 374, which, however, neglects the moral and religious motivations for this stance. Cassirer goes on to dwell on the "personal" character of the immortality of the human soul (cf. pp. 394 ff.).

[51] *GP III* 291; *Phil. Ess.* 285.

[52] *GP V* 24.

argument, Leibniz nonetheless considers it useful to alert his readers to the dangerous consequences of its refutation. These consequences consist in the necessity of denying the individuality of the soul beyond death and thus of conceiving of its survival in terms of a dissolution into the "sea of divinity," i.e. in the universal soul of the "Averroists" and of "certain wicked Quietists".[53] Secondly, Leibniz insists on the unique qualities of the human soul: it conserves not only individuality, as do the souls of beasts, but also the *personality,* whereby it is counter-distinguished as a "spirit" or "*mens*." Personality does not consist in "memory" alone, since this is also present in the souls of beasts,[54] but rather in the memory of self, reflection and the self-awareness which permits the intelligent soul to pronounce itself as "I":

> […] – having the ability to utter the word "I", a word so full of meaning – does not merely remain and subsist metaphysically, which it does to a greater degree than the others, but also remains the same morally and constitutes the same person. For it is memory or the knowledge of this self that renders it capable of punishment or reward.[55]

This unique quality of the human soul constitutes the individual as a moral being, forming the basis for his / her moral freedom and responsibility. It opens up the dimension of justice and love and, in a word, renders him / her a citizen of that perfect "city" of which God is the just monarch:

> But so that we may judge by natural reasons that God will always preserve not only our substance, but also our person, that is, the memory and knowledge of what we are […], we must join moral to metaphysics, that is, we must not only consider God as the principle and cause of all substances and all beings, but also as the leader of all persons or intelligent substances and as the absolute monarch of the most perfect city or republic, which is what the universe composed of all minds together is, God himself being the most perfect of all minds and the greatest of all beings.[56]

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[53] *GP* V 52/ *AVI/6* 59; cf. *GP VI* 535 f. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 558 f.); *GRUA* 67. On the position of the averroists, cf. also *T* 53 ff./134 ff.

[54] Cf. *GP IV* 526.

[55] *GP IV* 459 f.; Eng. trans *Phil. Ess.* 65 f.; cf. *GP II* 57 (Engl. trans. *L-A* 64); *IV* 462 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 68); *V* 218 ff./*AVI/6* 236 f.; *VI* 542 f. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 588), 600 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 209); *VII* 316, 332,530 f.; *COUT* 16; *FdCL* 69. A comprehensive overview of these aspects of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is, famously, to be found in Leibniz's *Remarques* on the *Rorarius* entry in Bayle's *Dictionnaire* in *GP IV* 524 ff.; partial eng. trans. *PhT* 198 ff.

[56] *GP IV* 460; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 66; cf. *GP IV* 462 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 67 f.); *VII* 316, 332, 530 f.; *COUT* 16; *FdCL* 69. A typical outline of Leibniz's doctrine of the immortality of the soul, with particular attention to its theological and moral implications, can be found in the *Systema theologicum* (cf. *TS* 191 ff.).

The moral prominence of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is of primary importance to Leibniz, to the extent that it prompts him to adopt an unusually cutting tone in response to the divergent Cartesian conception:

> I therefore assert that the immortality of soul, as established by Descartes, is useless and could not console us in any way […], this immortality without memory is completely useless to morality, for it upsets all reward and punishment. What good would it do you to become the King of China under the condition that you forget what you once were? Would that not be the same as if Good created a King of China at the same time as he destroyed you?[57]

Leibniz thus envisions a "natural religion" founded on the dogmas of a creating and provident God and of the future life of the immortal soul, awarded for virtue and punished for sin – a conception very similar to that which prevailed throughout the Enlightenment. In the period between 1600 and 1700, when the European intellectual consciousness opened itself up to a greater, livelier and more thorough debate than had ever been known before or since, in which all of the possible religious and anti-religious outlooks came face to face and entered into conflict, "natural religion," although not the only perspective, was surely one of the most significant. It is, then, no surprise that Leibniz, a thinker immersed in his own times like few others, in direct and active contact with the entire European cultural debate, intellectually curious about every new idea and willing to accept that which was valid in every proposition ("It is my general maxim to disparage almost nothing and to draw such profit as can be sought out everywhere"),[58] should be sensitive to these ideas ("As far as Deism is concerned, of which the English clergy is accused in a book by an anonymous author, if only we were all at least deists, that is to say well persuaded that everything is governed by a sovereign wisdom!").[59] This becomes even more apparent if we consider Leibniz's profound and indefaticable commitment to the cause of religion, to its defence against attacks and polemics, to the reconciliation of the different Christian confessions, to the "religious organization of the Earth."[60] Nonetheless, we should not lose sight of the peculiar quality of the Leibnizian conception of natural religion.

First of all, it is placed neither in opposition nor in substantial equivalence to the positive religions. Natural religion, i.e. religion consonant with reason, is instead presented by Leibniz, as we have already seen, as the proof and reinforcement of the Christian faith, with which it coincides, and as an argument for the superiority of Christianity over positive religions. Yet this is not the most interesting aspect of

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[57] *GP IV* 300; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess*. 243.

[58] *GP III* 384; cf. 133, 187, 391, 620; *GRUA* 103.

[59] *GP III* 180.

[60] Cf. J. BARUZI, *Leibniz et l'organisation religieuse de la terre d'après des documents inédits*, Felix Alcan, Paris 1907.

Leibniz's approach, from the point of view of the present study. What should here be underlined most of all is that, in Leibniz, the affirmation of the reasonableness of faith does not imply any denial of mystery. On the contrary, the reasonableness of faith actually helps to conserve mystery and is even, from some perspectives, instrumental and necessary to mystery itself.

Although Leibniz knew John Toland and appreciated his ingenuity (despite holding certain reservations), we need only consider the title of Toland's most famous work, *Christianity not Mysterious: or, a Treatise Showing that there is nothing, in the Gospel contrary to Reason, not above it: and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd a Mystery*, [61] to realise that the agenda of Leibniz's *Theodicy* is far removed from and, from different points of view, antithetical to Toland's. For Leibniz, as we shall see, in the Christian faith *almost everything is a mystery* and must remain as such, even under the scrutiny of reason. Only the two fundamental dogmas are not mysterious but can be rationally demonstrated. On these the reasonableness of religion is founded, but not, however, in the sense that every mystery of faith should be eliminated and faith itself reduced to these two dogmas, nor in the sense that these fundamental truths should permit us to somehow "unveil" the mystery of the other consequent truths, but rather because they permit us to *rationally accept* mystery as such and to *uphold mystery* against the enemies of faith. Leibniz, then, does not espouse a *non-mysterious Christianity* but rather a *rationally mysterious Christianity*. This conviction is of primary importance to the *Theodicy* and is, to my mind, the only legitimate approach to philosophical theodicy.

3. Light and Virtue

Let us now return to Leibniz's definition of "true piety" (*solide pieté*), so as to examine its two aspects: "light" (*lumière*) and "virtue" (*vertu*).[62] First of all, though, in order to immediately rule out any preconceptions that Leibniz conceives of a merely philosophical faith, I would note that he speaks of faith as a "devotion" (*devotion*), which, although it may become "choked in ceremonial",[63] is otherwise a "sincere religion".[64] This is not just a term which Leibniz has unthinkingly lifted from common usage. In the following pages we will see that for Leibniz true faith is love and tenderness for God, a faithful and laborious adhesion to divine providence, referred to as *Fatum Christianum*. In other words, it effectively represents man's utter devotion to God, instead of a mere philosophical standpoint.

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[61] J. TOLAND, *Christianity not Mysterious: or, a Treatise Showing that there is nothing, in the Gospel contrary to Reason, not above it: and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd a Mystery*, London 1696 (cf. *T* 83/170).

[62] Cf. *T* 25/49.

[63] *T* 25/50.

[64] *T* 28/52.

The two aspects of "true piety" – "light" and "virtue" – are complementary and reciprocal in a manner which is worth clarifying in order to avoid misrepresenting and exaggerating the primacy of the intellect which, nonetheless, continues to represent an important aspect of Leibniz's argument. We should, indeed, not forget that we are here only considering one specific application of one doctrine – that of the primacy of the intellect over the will – which is characteristic of Leibnizian psychology as a whole: of his psychology of man and, so to speak, of his psychology of God. The primacy of the intellect over the will is central to many aspects of Leibniz's philosophy: his doctrine of free will, his polemics against arbitrarism, his doctrine of creation, his principle of the best, his approach to the mechanism of the possibles, etc. It thus represents an important facet of Leibniz's thought, which I have no intention of obscuring or underestimating. Neither, however, should it be emphasised to the point of obscuring every other dimension, with the result of falsifying the true sense in which Leibniz conceives of the intellect's primacy. As Cassirer rightly stresses:

> The possibility and right of intellectual autonomy are conceded for every individual, and every individual is deemed capable thereof. Herein lies the fertile heart of Leibniz's ethical "intellectualism." It would, instead, constitute a radical misreading of this doctrine to suggest that it means to situate the criterion for judging the value of personality in the intellect. On the contrary, considered from an ethical point of view, knowledge only draws its value from the latter element, which we already came across when defining thought: that is to say, from the force and purity with which the "rational will" is already prefigured in the consciousness. It is certainly true that knowledge as a quiescent possession is fruitless from an ethical point of view. Yet this is neither an adequate nor a sufficient conception of knowledge, even if it is considered from a psychological point of view. This should be understood as a motif which embraces and pervades the consciousness in all its entirety and thus concretises and determines in accordance with itself also the internal disposition and overall aims of the agent personality. The force with which this motif and tendency act upon the future is relatively independent from the level of consciousness which has been reached at the present time [...]. The notion whereby, in pre-Kantian ethics as a whole, the practical element should be subordinated *tout court* to the theoretical element therefore requires certain essential limitations from the point of view of the founders of modern philosophy.[65]

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[65] E. CASSIRER, *op. cit.*, p. 389. With regard to this approach of the Marburg school, which highlights, together with the scientific also the practical dimension of Leibnizian rationalism, cf. also, and perhaps even more crucially, the study by A. GÖRLAND, *Der Gottesbegriff bei Leibniz. Ein Vorwort zu seinem System* [Philosophische Arbeiten, ed. H. Cohen e P. Natorp, vol. I, fasc.3], Töpelmann, Gießen 1907. H.G. Gadamer also focuses on the significance and practical value of Leibniz's (*Metaphysik im Zeitalter der Wissenschaft*, in AA.VV., *Akten des Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover 14.-19. November 1966, vol. I: *Metaphysik - Monadenlehre*, in "Studia Leibnitiana", Supplementa vol. I, Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden 1968, p.12: "The individual being attains to fulfilment as a will, making the best possible rational choices. This is certainly a Leibnizian formulation. It is the formulation of divine wisdom, according to which it recognises *compossibilitas* as the measure of what can be. Nonetheless, in my opinion, this remains eternally as a human task, which has never been as urgent and significant as at the present day when, as human beings, we must learn to track down with our reason the greatest possible good to be drawn from an earth which is becoming ever smaller."

To sum up, in Leibniz's "true piety" virtue doubtless requires knowledge but, at the same time, the final end of knowledge is virtue and knowledge itself has no intrinsic value. "Light" is fundamental to the true faith, but only inasmuch as it bears the fruit of virtue, just as virtue is fundamental, as the final end of "light," as the effective practice in which "true piety" consists. Returning, for a moment, to the brief history of religion outlined by Leibniz, it is worth considering that the passage from pagan "superstition" to "true piety" is not the passage from a practice devoid of dogma to an intellectual religion, but rather from a blind practice to an enlightened one. Similarly, the behaviour of strong spirits and false preachers, who pollute the doctrinal sources of faith[66] constitutes a return to the errors of antiquity,[67] an imitation of the pagans,[68] inasmuch as it presents a doctrinal alibi for practical conduct: "they have the hardihood to make the Divinity accessory to their licentious way of life".[69]

The relationship between "light" and "virtue," then, should be understood in terms of a truly *practical reason*:

For in doing one's duty, in obeying reason, one carries out the orders of Supreme Reason.[70]

What needs clarifying first of all, then, is that for Leibniz "practice is the touchstone of faith",[71] and that "there is no piety where there is not charity".[72] Leibniz is so convinced of this that, in a letter to Thomas Burnett, he expresses the opinion that the socinians should not be punished because "their false opinions have no influence on

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[66] Cf. *T* 29/53.

[67] Cf. *ibidem*.

[68] Cf. *T* 33/57.

[69] *Ibidem*.

[70]*T* 27/52. As I have already indicated, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the practical interest of reason in Leibniz by A. Görland (*op. cit.*). Görland underlines the practical dimension of Leibniz's philosophy: "The main aim of philosophy [for Leibniz] consists in being able to stimulate the soul to the exercise of virtue" (p. 34). To this end, he quotes the *Eclaircissement* to the 1705 *Considérations sur les Principes de Vie et sur les Natures Plastiques*: "The principal aim of philosophy must be a knowledge of God and of the soul which will stimulate the soul to love God and practise virtue" (GP *VI* 548). It is certainly true that Görland stretches his reading of Leibniz a little too far in a "kantian" direction in suggesting that "the concept of God" is "a product of moral reflection" (p. 15), and therefore considering the idea of God as a mere "postulate" of practical reason (cf. pp. 66 ff.). This interpretation is no doubt a reductive reading of Leibniz's real intentions; but Görland's emphasis and capacity to do justice to the important but often-overlooked practical dimension in Leibniz is nonetheless praiseworthy.

[71] *GRUA* 499; cf. 105, 581.

[72] *T* 28/52; cf. *GRUA* 14. Baruzi (*op. cit.*, p. 279) also underlines the indissoluble link between faith and charity.

practical usage",[73] and, as he writes elsewhere, "I believe that heresy lies not so much in theory as in practice".[74] Besides, as Leibniz writes in his *Nouveaux Essais*:

> true happiness requires less knowledge but greater strength and goodness of will, so that the dullest idiot can achieve it just as easily as can the cleverest and most educated person.[75]

"Insight must be joined to fervour",[76] writes Leibniz, and this metaphor is worth clarifying. It means, on the one hand, that "fervour is attended by insight";[77] but on the other hand, it also suggests that a presumed light without fervour points to a false piety. Both of these defects are reproved by Leibniz for quietist mysticism, since they are not alternative to each other but rather complementary. It thus becomes clear that, for Leibniz, the primacy of "light" over "virtue" does not mean the reduction of the one into the other, but rather a primacy in their order of succession.[78] This is the sense in which Leibniz places himself in opposition to mysticism and quietism.[79] Mysticism, in its various forms, and above all where it gives way to quietism, is based on a presumed originary act of perfect love, whereby mankind can accede to such a level of intellectual (contemplation) and sentimental (beatitude) participation in divine mystery as to become indifferent to actions in this world. Leibniz, on the contrary, considers the origin of true piety to lie in awareness of the truth of faith, which results in a virtuous life. True enlightenment should go hand in hand with true fervour, just as false enlightenment stems from a false fervour which results in a lack of authentic moral ardour. In this sense, we might oppose Leibniz's authentic religious "enlightenment" to the false states of "enlightened-ness" claimed by the mystics. Leibniz writes to Morell:

> I admire the zealous, whose zeal is manifest in their works of charity, but there are few who are truly zealous and even amongst these there are few who have warmth and light at the same time. The majority of men have neither the one nor the other and even the mystics are often more obstinate than enlightened. I am afraid that those who say they hear an "I don't know what," which they are unable to express, have been dazzled by false glares of the imagination, which they mistake for the rays of the Holy Spirit. It is practice which enables us to discriminate

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[73] *GP III* 221.

[74] *GRUA* 211.

[75] *GP V* 193/*AVI/6* 207; cf. *TS* 35 f.

[76] *T* 28/52; cf. *GP VII* 56.

[77] *T* 27/51; cf. *GRUA* 8: "they produce fervour without light".

[78] Cf. *TS* 33.

[79] D. Mahnke (*Leibnizens Synthese von Universalmathematik und Individualmetaphysik*, Friedrich Frommann Verlag [Günther Holzboog], Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1964), instead, sees no contradiction here and refers to Leibniz as an "active mystic" (p.118).

between spirits: *ex fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos*. I believe that a total lack of self-interest implies nothing more than placing the common good or (which is the same thing) the glory of God before one's own particular interests. All the rest consists in nothing more than word games. Self denial does not request repose, but rather activity in seeking to good to the greatest possible extent. *Odi homines ignava opera, philosopha sententia.*[80]

Finally, we should bear in mind that, as I have already noted, the relationship between knowledge and practice in faith is one of reciprocal influence. Just as knowledge is a condition of virtue, so practical conduct is a condition of knowledge, and this is to be understood above all in the negative sense. Self love and pleasure in our vices are the primary cause of error in our knowledge of God. False ideas about God and the immortality of the soul, even though they constitute theoretical standpoints, have a practical origin (as do all the arguments which theodicy opposes). Discussing the *Fatum Mahometanum*, which he presents as a theoretical approach, Leibniz observes:

> it is taking an unfair advantage of this alleged necessity of fate to employ it in excuse for our vices and our libertinism.[81]

It is important that we do not overlook this practical impulse which underpins errors in the theoretical study of faith since, as we shall see, herein, according to Leibniz, lies the practical dimension of atheism and the practical origin of the accusations levelled against God.

Having thus made clear the fundamental importance of virtue to true piety, we may now also underline the primacy of "light," without any fear of misrepresentation. As Leibniz writes in the *Preface* to the *Theodicy*:

> Good disposition, favourable upbringing, association with pious and virtuous persons may contribute much towards such a propitious condition for our souls; but most securely are they grounded therein by good principles. I have already said that insight must be joined to fervour, that the perfecting of our understanding must accomplish the perfecting of our will. The practices of virtue, as well as those of vice, may be the effect of a mere habit, one may acquire a taste for them; but when virtue is reasonable, when it is related to God, who is the supreme reason of things, it is founded on knowledge. One cannot love God without knowing his perfections, and this knowledge contains the *principles* of true piety.[82]

Only "light" can illuminate the path of true virtue for the individual, revealing, at the same time, the reasons for choosing it:

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[80] *GRUA* 137; cf. *GP II* 576 f.; *GRUA* 105, 114, 125, 128; *E* 446. Leibniz famously dedicated the nineteen chapter of the fourth book of his *Nouveaux Essais* to the theme of enthusiasm (cf. *GP V* 485 ff./*AVI/6* 503 ff.).

[81] *T* 32/56.

[82] *T* 28/52; cf. *GRUA* 580 f.; *FdCL* 142 f.

metaphysics relates to true moral philosophie (*la vraye Morale*) as theory to praxis. That is because of the dependence on the doctrine of substances in general of that knowledge about spirits – and especially about God and the soul – which gives to justice and to virtue their proper extent.[83]

Leibniz advises those wishing to meditate upon the truths of faith

> To put your reason in its paces first of all with regard to those matters where failure is less perilous and truth is easiest to ascertain,[84]

since the force of clear knowledge is such that

> he will see himself metamorphised (*metamorphosé*) in an instant [...]. His sentiments will cease to vacillate, his anxieties will be transformed into a true rest and the moment in which he begins to acquire a taste for unshakeable truths will be the moment of his conversion.[85]

Reason is the light which enlightens the mind. Leibniz develops the traditional Augustinian argument in a rationalist sense. As for Augustine, so for Leibniz there exists an internal *magister* who guides the individual, and this *magister* is God Himself. In Leibniz, this means that human reason is identifiable with divine reason, albeit in a limited form, which God has planted in mankind for guidance:

> Even if there were neither public revelation nor Scripture, by following their natural inner light (that is to say reason), which, when necessary, will never be forsaken by the light of the Holy Spirit, mankind would already stand in good stead to beatitude.[86]

To obey God thus signifies following reason. This maxim has two important implications. First of all, even if we do not understand the will of God, we believe that he is doing what is best rationally, that is to say what would be the best *from our own point of view* were it extended sufficiently. Moreover, we know, that is to say we are able to argue, that reason can never confute the will of God, not because the one is extraneous to the other but, on the contrary, because the will of God, despite being sometimes superior to human reason is nonetheless never opposed to it. This knowledge results in a contented resignation. Secondly, when we need, not to

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[83] *GP V* 413/*AVI/6* 432.

[84] *GP VII* 79.

[85] *Ibidem.*

[86] *GRUA* 138 f.

understand events, but to determine them, reason is our surest guide and counsellor, interpreting the will of God:

> Whether one succeeds therein [true benefits for men] or not, one is content with what comes to pass, being once resigned to the will of God and knowing that what he wills is best. But before he declares his will by the event one endeavours to find it out by doing that which appears most in accord with his commands.[87]

This maxim, oft-repeated by Leibniz,[88] is the formula for the *Fatum Christianum*, which I will discuss later.

The very reason which provides man with the "motives of credibility" for faith, and thus with the impulse towards virtue, must defend the "cause of God" and engage in apologetics against His detractors as soon as any voice is raised against Him. In short, the duty of and responsibility for theodicy falls to reason.

4.   *The Love of God*

Leibniz goes on to introduce a further perspective on "true piety" – a perspective which is essential to our understanding of the image:

> true piety and even true felicity consist in the love of God, but a love so enlightened that its fervour (*l'ardeur*) is attended by insight.[89]

The metaphor of 'fire' immediately suggests how this perspective is mutually complementary with the notions of "light" and virtue analysed above. Let us dwell first of all on this complementarity. Leibniz here in fact reaffirms the relationship between practice and theory which he had already outlined. True piety is principally a practical attitude. Love is a "mental state" (*affection*),[90] not an intellectual stance. The primacy of the intellect simply implies that the correct use of the intellect is an indispensable condition in order to direct love to a fitting object, to God, avoiding that it deviates to other illusory and false objects. Yet, if light is a necessary condition for its orientation, piety is nonetheless a fervour and its practical nature can by no means be reduced to an intellectual condition. Leibniz's usual definition of wisdom or sapience as "the science of felicity" gives clear expression to the distinction and complementarity between the practical and the intellectual. Felicity which, as we will see, is an intrinsic facet of love, must be sought out with the guidance of reason and is

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[87] *T* 28/52.

[88] In his *Confessio Philosophi*, Leibniz expresses this maxim with an incisive Latin formula: "*Boni consulere praeterita, optima reddere conari futura*" (*CF* 110).

[89] *T* 27/51.

[90] *Ibidem*.

nonetheless not identical with the science which leads us to it. In one of his many projects for ordering knowledge, always directed towards felicity as a final end, Leibniz situates the doctrine of wisdom and felicity as a "final" book and crowning glory of the whole scientific system which would, nonetheless, "be first of all in use." This book is presented by Leibniz as a true science for attaining to felicity, and thus as a guide to felicity, distinct, however, from felicity itself.[91] The same concept is also expressed elsewhere in Leibniz:

> Since felicity consists in contentedness and lasting contentedness depends on our security with regard to future events, based on our scientific knowledge of the nature of God and the soul, it follows that science is necessary for true felicity.[92]

The love of God is therefore a "consequence" of our knowledge of His perfections, "since it consists in the pleasure which this knowledge gives".[93] Whilst affirming the connection between these two trajectories, Leibniz nonetheless explicitly distances himself from those who wish to confound them in an intellectualist sense:

> The Stoics were wrong, perhaps, in defining the passions by general opinion as by their popular classification, but they were right in examining the opinions which contributed toward forming and maintaining these.[94]

In short, he thus reaffirms the relationship between "insight" and "fervour."

Yet we should now take a closer look at Leibniz's assertion that "true piety" is the love of God. To take our lead from the textual formulation of the *Preface,* we should explain the following:

> It is clear that Jesus Christ, completing what Moses had begun, wished that the Divinity should be the object not only of our fear and veneration but also of our love and devotion. Thus he made men happy by anticipation, and gave them here on earth a foretaste of future felicity.[95]

Leibniz's *oeuvre* abounds in references to love and felicity. This was a central concern for Leibniz, on which he wrote extensively, always interpreting religion with recourse to the Johnian index of *charity*. Leibniz also afforded a central position to charity with regard to matters of justice, defining justice as "the charity of the wise."

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[91] Cf. *COUT* 169.

[92] *COUT* 153.

[93] *GP VII* 391; Eng. trans. *L-C* 58.

[94] *GP III* 427; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 632.

[95] *T* 27/51.

Leibniz's interest in love did not derive from specific issues and fields (juridical, theological, psychological, moral, etc.). Its various applications rather derive from a more general and fundamental conception and sensibility. A tension deriving from the need to understand and reveal the mystery of the unity of justice and mercy in God pervades Leibniz's spirituality and thought. This fundamental truth of faith, which represents the whole arena and core meaning of the Christian understanding of the world and of life, is also the very spirit of any true theodicy. We can assume, then, that Leibniz's individual developments of this theme in the *Theodicy* are not so much the fruit of his research in individual fields as the broader field to which each of these belong and of which they each represent specific translations. We should not neglect, finally, to observe Leibniz's historical interest in the *querelle du pur amour*. Leibniz never participated actively in the debate, but he followed all its developments and expressed his own opinions in various occasions.[96]

Leibniz, as is well known, disapproved of the polemical and inquisitorial excesses of the debate and, in a spirit of conciliation, expressed a hope that all the parties would recognise the possible solution which lay in the perspective he himself was proposing. Leibniz was famously convinced that his own definition of love should have resolved every issue and overcome every conflict. I here cite the definition, which Leibniz reiterates on innumerable occasions, in the form given in the *Preface* to the *Codex juris gentium*, to which Leibniz himself repeatedly refers, because the analysis of this passage should help us to clear up various important issues for our own study:

> *Charity* is a universal benevolence and *benevolence* is the attitude of loving or wellwishing. *To love*, then, signifies to rejoice in the happiness of others or, which is the same thing, to convert their happiness into one's own. In this way, we resolve a difficult question, which is also of profound theological import: how can love be disinterested, independent of hope, of fear and of any regard for utility? In truth, the happiness of those whose advantage gives us pleasure is converted into our own happiness, since that which gives pleasure is sought out in itself. And, since the contemplation of beauty is in itself pleasant, and a painting by Raphael strikes the sensitive individual who contemplates it, even if he does not earn anything thereby, remaining delightfully impressed on his memory, as the image of something loved, so when the loved thing is also capable of happiness, affection mutates into true love. But *the love of God* outmeasures every other love, enabling us to love God with the happiest possible consequences, since no one is happier than Him and nothing is more beautiful and more worthy of delight. And since He is also absolutely powerful and wise, His happiness does not only become our own (when we are wise – that is to say, when we love him) but also creates our own.[97]

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[96] Cf. É NAERT's thorough and penetrating study of Leibniz and the debate on pure love: *Leibniz et la querelle du pur amour*, J. Vrin, Paris 1959. I have here drawn extensively from the findings of this study, and would refer any of my readers seeking a broader and deeper insight into this matter to consult it.

[97] *D IV/3* 295.

What we should first emphasise in this passage, which is also affirmed in all of Leibniz's other writings on the matter, is that love is a joy and therefore a pleasure: "It seems that pleasure is essential to the *notion of love*".[98] Any attempt to conceive of disinterested love as being detached from pleasure is, for Leibniz, impossible, because it implies a contradiction. It is true that, occasionally, Leibniz completes his definition of love by including pain:

> *To love* truly and in a disinterested manner is nothing else but to find pleasure in the perfections or in the happiness of the object and, consequently, to find pain in that which may be contrary to those perfections.[99]

However, this addendum is usually omitted. Leibniz explains this omission on one occasion with reference to the fact that the definition should also apply to God:

> *Love* is that form of affection whereby the good or evil of another affects us as our own. But since it would seem opportune to define love in such a way as to include the love of God, is it sufficient to state that *to love* is to take pleasure from the happiness of others.[100]

This explanation may sound unsatisfactory to a religious sensibility, which has been cultivated more in the contemplation in the mystery of the cross than in that of the *gloria*, as is often the case nowadays. However, without wishing to go into the issue, however interesting, of Leibniz's Christianity, we should bear in mind that, as we will see, for Leibniz "felicity" is closely linked to "perfection," to such an extent that, on several occasions when he is defining love the two terms are treated as if they were synonyms. It is therefore obvious that, where the absolutely perfect Being is either the subject or the object of love, the negative aspect cannot apply. In another instance, Leibniz explains that

> It is a facet of *charity* to strive for the common felicity [...]. Indeed, there is a notable pleasure even in helping those who are miserable.[101]

This argument explains the redundancy of the addendum to the definition of love cited above, emphasising the ethical character of the latter, whereby beyond being an affection it is an effective moral impulse resulting in an active commitment to eliminating suffering. This fits well with both the Johnian *charity* and the conception of religion as virtue, which characterise Leibniz's thought. Regardless of all this, the

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[98] *GRUA* 208.

[99] *GP II* 581; cf. *I* 73 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 150); *II* 577; *GRUA* 10; *FdCNL* 393; *A II/1* 173 f.

[100] *COUT* 516.

[101] *GRUA* 640.

fact remains that love for Leibniz is a pleasure and, even if we wish to consider that it may cause sorrow to the lover as a consequence of the unhappiness of the loved one, this does not contradict, but rather affirms its character as an affection and its tendency to pleasure.

At this point, we should specify the kind of pleasure with which we are dealing. Pleasure may, indeed, be said to represent the generic conceptual heading under which Leibniz places love as a species. Love, then, for Leibniz, is a type of aesthetic pleasure, that is to say a disinterested pleasure in the beauty of a loved object, as opposed to an instrumental pleasure in the utility of a desired object.[102] This clearly emerges from Leibniz's explicit comparison between love and pleasure in artistic beauty, in the *Theodicy* ("Order, proportions, harmony delight us; painting and music are samples of these"),[103] in the definition of love in the *Codex juris gentium*, quoted above, and on numerous other occasions.[104]

All of this opens up a very interesting area of study, since various aspects of the Leibnizian conception of beauty emerge, which would necessitate further analysis. Principally, it is noteworthy that, for Leibniz, beauty consists in order and harmony. Pleasure in beauty thus has harmony as its object, that is to say "similarity in variety or unity compensating for diversity",[105] or "*variety, but reduced to unity*".[106] For this reason the science of nature, too, has an aesthetic dimension, which connects it to love:

> True love is founded on the knowledge of the beauty of the loved object. Now, the beauty of God appears in the marvellous effects of this Supreme Cause. Thus, the more is known of nature and the concrete truths of the real sciences, which are so many rays of divine perfection, the more we are able to truly love God.[107]

This connection between knowledge and art spurs Leibniz to go so far as to depict knowledge in general (not only scientific knowledge) as a perspectival

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[102] L.E. Loemker *(Das ethische Anliegen des Leibnizschen Systems*, in AA.VV., *Akten des Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 14.-19. November 1966, vol.IV: *Theologie - Ethik - Pädagogik - Ästhetik - Geschichte - Politik - Recht*, in "Studia Leibnitiana", Supplementa vol. IV, Franz Steiner Wiesbaden 1969, p. 74) also underlines the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in the Leibnizian conception of love.

[103] *T* 27/51.

[104] Cf. *GP II* 581; *V* 149 f./*AVI/6* 163; *VI* 605 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 212); *VII* 86 f. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 425 f.), 546, 549; *GRUA* 142, 515, 580.

[105] *CF* 32.

[106] *FdCNL* 393. Cf., in this regard, C. BROWN, *Leibniz und die Ästhetik*, in AA.VV., *Akten des Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 14.-19. November 1966, vol. IV: *Theologie - Ethik - Pädagogik - Ästhetik - Geschichte - Politik - Recht*, cit., pp. 124 ff.

[107] *GRUA* 91.

contemplation of the object (which calls to mind, amongst other things, the conception of monads as perspectival points of view on the universe):

> Just as one would be unable to note the beauty of a view if the eye were not in the right position to see it, so it should not seem strange that the same applies in this life, so short in relation to the general order. Nonetheless, there is reason to believe that one day we will be closer to the true perspective on things, in such a way as to find them good, not only for faith, nor only as a consequence of the scientific knowledge to which we may eventually attain, but for our very experience of their detail and for our living sense of the beauty of the universe, also in relation to ourselves. And herein will lie a good part of the felicity which we promise ourselves.[108]

This aesthetic conception of knowledge as right perspective should be borne in mind when, later on, we come to consider the relationship between faith and "vision."

We should, however, here abandon this interesting line of enquiry, so as not to stray too far from our main argument. That which needed clarification above all was the connection between love and aesthetic pleasure, inasmuch as it is disinterested. This connection is so close that sometimes Leibniz provides a single definition for the two:

> *To love* means to be in a state of pleasure for the happiness of another, or, if we wish to concede that also irrational things are loved, for the perfection of another.[109]

Such a definition is not, however, fully satisfactory, because that which is linked by the conjunction "or", in reality indicates a distinction between love and simple aesthetic pleasure, which merits further clarification. Indeed, in his *Nouveaux Essais,* Leibniz specifies:

> The good is divided into the virtuous, the pleasing, and the useful; though I believe that fundamentally something good must either be pleasing in itself or conducive to something else which can give us a pleasant feeling. That is, the good is either pleasing or useful; and virtue itself consists in a pleasure of the mind [...] whatever is incapable of pleasure or of happiness is not strictly an object of love; our enjoyment of things of the nature is not love of them, unless by a kind of personifying, as though we fancied that they could themselves enjoy their perfection. When one says that one loves a fine painting, because of the pleasure one gets from taking in its perfections, that is not strictly love. But it is permissible to extend the sense of a term, and in our present case usage varies.[110]

In this sense the definition, which appears in the *Preface* to the *Theodicy*,[111] is incomplete, and the definition in the *Codex juris gentium* quoted above serves to

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[108] *GRUA* 380.

[109] *COUT* 492.

[110] *GP V* 149/*AVI/6* 162 f.

complete it: "since the contemplation of beauty is in itself pleasant [...]," we read, "so when the loved thing is also capable of happiness, affection mutates into true love." Only in this way can the definition of love, understood in the context of the general concept of pleasure, be brought to perfection. On the one hand, love is connected to disinterested aesthetic, as opposed to utilitarian pleasure, on the other it is distinct from disinterested aesthetic pleasure, inasmuch as its object are rational beings capable of happiness.

The love of God, then, is the most perfect love, not only because God is the most perfect being, but also because, as a rational being, He is perfectly good and wise and thus Himself capable of love and absolutely happy. The definition which appears in the *Preface* to the *Theodicy*, in itself incomplete, can nonetheless be considered satisfactory, inasmuch as just a few lines above Leibniz had already specified that God's perfections do not consist in "beauty" alone[112] – i.e. in the fact that "God is all order; he always keeps truth of proportions, he makes universal harmony; all beauty is an effusion of his rays"[113]– but also in His "greatness" and "goodness" and in the consequences of this, i.e. "that divine goodness and justice are shown forth to perfection in God's designs for the souls of men".[114]

This brings us back to the two fundamental dogmas of true piety – the existence of a provident God and the immortality of the soul as the foundations of the love of man for God and man's felicity in the love of God for man. God's goodness and the immortality of the soul, then, are the essential principles of the love of God, which is therefore identical with "true piety," not only because faith in these principles guarantee mankind's hope in their own eternal felicity, but above all inasmuch as they represent "a foretaste of future felicity".[115] This felicity consists in a rejoicing in the felicity of God, of converting God's felicity into one's own, inasmuch as God is recognised, not only as the Architect who gives order and harmony to the world, but also as the Monarch of the kingdom of the spirits, as the Father of His subjects:

> God governs minds as a prince governs his subjects, and even as a father cares for his children.[116]

This "taking care" of mankind is the fullest expression of God's goodness:

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[111] Cf. *T* 27/51.

[112] Cf. *TS* 5, 193.

[113] *T* 27/51.

[114] *T* 26/51.

[115] *T* 27/51.

[116] *GP IV* 479 f.; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 140.

It is also in relation to this divine city that God has goodness, properly speaking, whereas his wisdom and power are evident everywhere.[117]

God, as Monarch and Father of the spirits is the perfection of goodness and generosity, i.e. of love, and the example which all mankind should follow,[118] since He Himself "is" the good of all His creatures.[119] Leibniz returns continuously to the love of God for man, in all its forms: from axiomatic affirmation,[120] to rational demonstration,[121] to the heartfelt profession of philosophical and religious faith, such as that which we find in the concluding paragraphs of the *Discours de métaphysique*.[122]

The felicity of God, then, consists in His glory. Leibniz gives various definitions of glory. For example:

Glory is the opinion of many with regard to those things in us which are praiseworthy; more in general, with regard to our good.[123]

Elsewhere he writes that "*glory* is the renown of someone's excellence"[124] and other analogous definitions. Since, however, the love of God, the perfectly good being, is evidently the purest and most disinterested form of love and, at the same time, the praise of His creatures can do nothing to augment God's perfection, God's love and His felicity come to constitute a circle or a proper identity in themselves:

God loves to be loved. That is to say, He loves those who love Him.[125]

The individual who loves God finds himself involved as both subject and object in this circle, and his love for God expresses itself in love for other human beings since, as we have already stated, God's glory and felicity consist in the wellbeing of mankind:

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[117] *GP VI* 622; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 224.

[118] Cf. *GP VI* 498; *TS* 5.

[119] Cf. *FdCL* 171.

[120] Cf. *GP VII* 74.

[121] Cf. *CF* 36.

[122] Cf. *GP IV* 460 ff. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 66 ff.).

[123] *COUT* 493.

[124] *GP V* 321/*AVI/6* 340.

[125] *GP VII* 74.

One directs all one's intentions to the common good, which is no other than the glory of God.[126]

The love of God is thus explained by Leibniz not only from an aesthetical point of view, but also in its ethical sense. In this way it is traced back to virtue, centre and "touchstone" of "true piety." The love and the felicity of God and the love of man for God, with the felicity which this implies, meet and form "charity" together – i.e. "universal benevolence" and "justice" which is the "charity of the wise," according to Leibniz's oft-repeated definitions.

To complete the picture, we still need to clarify a few points with regard to the felicity, which accompanies love. If it is indeed true that felicity is a pleasure, we must point to certain characteristics by which it is distinguished from any other pleasure. First of all, as Leibniz often repeats, felicity is "a state of enduring joy".[127] This permanence of felicity when compared to mere joy or pleasure is not an irrelevant, merely quantitative consideration but is rather symptomatic of the different nature of the two sentiments. Felicity is, in fact, a rational sentiment, while joy is sensible and thus connected to instinct. In his *Nouveaux Essais* Leibniz clearly develops this distinction. First of all he clearly indicates the essential difference between joy and felicity:

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[126] *T* 27/52; cf. *GP I* 73 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 150); *VII* 74; *GRUA* 108, 111, 137, 581, 586, 609; *FdCL* 277; *TS* 47. As Leibniz writes to Wolff, on 21 February 1705: "Our good, the common good and the glory of God are not to be distinguished as means and ends, but as parts and the whole. It is the same thing to serve our own good, the common good and the good of God" (*Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Christian Wolff*, ed. C.I. Gerhardt, Halle 1860; reprinted Georg Olms, Hildesheim 1963 p.20). In a fine passage from *L'Action. Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique* (in M. BLONDEL, *Oeuvres complètes*, Tome I: *1893 Les deux thèses*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1995, p. 480), Maurice Blondel writes: "We hence obtain the positive expression of Leibniz that 'to love all men and to love God is the same thing,' since in everything and for everything He is the only thing to love, and because we cannot know other individuals without embracing them all with the same charity. In reality, mankind can only truly be united thanks to a flame which even the whole world would be unable to light. The following circle is thus justified: without the active love which human beings have for each other, there can be no God for mankind. He who does not love his brother has no life in himself. However, we would in this way seek in vain to group together the spirits into a family excluding the Father of the spirits. In vain we would seek to deceive our reason, to hide the great vacuum by exalting other sentiments. Ultimately, in the common practice of life, in the hidden logic of the individual consciousness, without God man does not exist for man. There is, therefore, an intrinsic contextuality between two sentiments and actions which are very different in themselves. The first consists in loving in the spirit and truth within an individual's one-to-one relationship with God. The second involves developing a cult dedicated to the whole body of humanity in each of its individual members, as if it were the body of the living God in each point of the universal organism." J. Baruzi (*op. cit.*, pp. 456 ff.) rightly acknowledges that this complementarity between the love of God and the love of one's neighbour, which is of Johnian inspiration, represents an important facet of authentic Christian faith for Leibniz.

[127] *GP I* 358; cf. *III* 425 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 630); *V* 82/*AVI/6* 90; *VII* 86 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 425), 112; *GRUA* 589.

happiness is nothing but lasting joy. However, what we incline to is not strictly speaking happiness, but rather joy, i.e. something in the present; it is reason which leads us to the future and to what lasts.[128]

Later on, Leibniz further specifies the significance of felicity as an enduring joy:

Perhaps this definition of joy comes nearer to the Latin *gaudium* than to *laetitia*; the latter is also translated as 'joy', but then joy appears to me to signify a state in which pleasure predominates in us; for during the deepest sorrow and amidst sharpest anguish one can have some pleasure, e.g. from drinking or from hearing music, although displeasure predominates; and similarly in the midst of the most acute agony the mind can be joyful, as used to happen with martyrs.[129]

Felicity, as a rational sentiment, is therefore distinct from pleasure and can in fact coexist with pain.[130] Its enduring character is a consequence of its non-sensible nature and thus distinguishes it from simple pleasure on grounds of quality, not just of quantity. Once again, in his *Nouveaux Essais* Leibniz notes:

True happiness ought always to be the object of our desires, but there is some reason to doubt that it is. For often we hardly think of it, and, as I have more than once pointed out here, unless appetite is directed by reason it endeavours after present pleasure rather than that lasting pleasure which is called happiness – although it does endeavour to make the pleasure last.[131]

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[128] *GP V* 82/*AVI/6* 90.

[129] *GP V* 153/*AVI/6* 172. Leibniz is somewhat undecided with regard to his use of terminology here. In *COUT* 492 Leibniz provides definitions similar to those already quoted from the *Nouveaux Essais:* "*Gaudium* is joy for an event. *Laetitia* is the predominant pleasure of the soul or, rather, the pleasure of the soul for a state which is general to it." We should nonetheless note the strange way in which *gaudium* is defined through *laetitia*, thus suggesting that there is a genus-species relation between the two which does not correspond with the passage from the *Nouveaux Essais*. In *GRUA* 11, *gaudium* is defined as a synonym of "pleasure": "Joy (*gaudium*) or *pleasure* (*delectatio*) are the feeling of perfection." In *GRUA* 579 ff., Leibniz returns to the definition of "felicity," "joy" and "pleasure." Leibniz's indecision is here made clear by his numerous cancellations (which I will indicate in square brackets). At the beginning, he writes: "*Felicity* is a lasting state of [contentment] pleasure [...]. *Pleasure* is a knowledge or [a] sentiment of perfection" (*GRUA* 579). Later he corrects this definition: "*Felicity* is a lasting state of [pleasure] [contentment] joy [...]. *Joy* is the total pleasure which results from the ensemble of all that which the soul feels [...] *Pleasure* is the sense of some perfection" (*GRUA* 582).

[130] In *GRUA* 574 Leibniz returns to this distinction, referring to non-rational pleasure as *felicitas* and to rational pleasure as *beatitudo*. Had this terminology been applied coherently, it would have contributed to clarifying and avoiding misunderstandings in Leibniz's writings, but unfortunately this was not the case.

[131] *GP V* 185/*AVI/6* 199 f.

Thus the meaning of the expression in the *Theodicy* – "he made men happy by anticipation, and gave them here on earth a foretaste of future felicity"[132] – is here made clearer. It has nothing to do with the search for present pleasure. It is indeed antithetical to this, inasmuch as it consists in the capacity to endure present sufferings and pains with a view to a greater and more abiding joy, the effect of which can already be felt in the present but which originates in a hope in full participation in divine felicity in the future.[133]

The rational quality of felicity also justifies the existence of a "science of felicity," which Leibniz describes sometimes in accordance with the ancient stoic and epicurean conception, as a calculation of pleasures,[134] but more often, and more characteristically, as a metaphorical application of the *de Formis Optimis* method to the optimal trajectory of a pleasure capable of infinite progress.[135]

We now have at our disposal all the elements necessary to understand Leibniz's objections to the doctrine of pure love and the grave consequences which it entailed. It is certainly true that Leibniz too maintained that only disinterested love is compatible with true piety. Yet for Leibniz, disinterested love is not the love which negates the pleasure of the lover – something which the co-essence of love and pleasure would render impossible - but rather that in which the loved object is desired in itself and not for its utility, in accordance with the distinction:

Useful is that which leads to a greater perfection but nonetheless does not imply it: in this sense it differs from that which is good in itself.

Pleasant in itself is that which implies a greater perfection of the individual who experiences it, i.e. it is what benefits the individual.[136]

Leibniz thus adopts the famous Augustinian distinction between *uti* and *frui*[137] and the corresponding distinction in traditional theology between "the love of concupiscence" and "the love of benevolence." This distinction is also recalled in Leibniz's use in the *Preface* to his *Theodicy* of the term "tenderness" (*tendresse*), united to "love":[138] here he must indeed specify that he is treating of "the love of benevolence" and not "the love of concupiscence." If, indeed, "benevolence" is defined by Leibniz as the "habit of loving," "devotion" is, for Leibniz, synonymous

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[132] *T* 27/51.

[133] This anticipation of future felicity is a result of true piety, but also of true philosophy (cf. *GRUA* 162): here, too, the two prove convergent.

[134] Cf. *GRUA* 582.

[135] Cf. *GP V* 179 f./*AVI/6* 194; *GRUA* 95, 487.

[136] *GP VII* 197.

[137] Cf. *E* 446.

[138] Cf. *T* 27/51.

with "benevolence," with which he underlines the disinterested character which is part and parcel of the "love of benevolence." As Leibniz explains in his *Nouveaux Essais*:

PHILALETHES – […] The 'power or ability in man, of doing any thing, when it has been acquired by frequent doing the same thing, is that idea, we name *habit*; when it is…ready upon every occasion, to break into action, we call it *disposition*'. Tenderness, for instance, is a disposition to be friendly or loving.

THEOPHILUS – By 'tenderness' I suppose you here mean soft-heartedness. But in other contexts, it seems to me, 'tenderness' is taken to be a quality which someone has while in love, making the lover sensitive to whatever good or harm comes to the beloved […] as charitable people love their neighbour with some measure or tenderness, they are sensitive to the good or harm of others. Furthermore, it is true on the whole that those who are soft-hearted will be somewhat disposed to be tender when in love.[139]

"Tenderness," then, is that absolutely disinterested love whose model is the love of God, as father, towards the prodigal son.[140]

Repeating continuously and obstinately his position, Leibniz is convinced that he is presenting the solution to the problem of the relationship between the disinterested love of God and human felicity, but he does nothing to conceal, from himself or from others, the fact that this solution is radically opposed to that proposed by quietism. In opposing himself, not so much to Fénelon, the accused in the debate on pure love, as to any effectively quietist position (Spinoza, Weigel, Angelus Silesius, Molinos, etc.), Leibniz is aware that the crux of the issue lies in the relationship between hope and charity. The "pur amour" of the quietists should be disinterested to the point of being indifferent not only to present happiness but also to eternal beatitude. As Leibniz explains to princess Sofia,[141] such an attitude is not only impossible and unjust to God,[142] but it is also false, because even if it is true that hope may not be the only motive for disinterested love, hope nonetheless stands in vital connection to charity. To love God in His perfection signifies, first of all, to love Him for his goodness, which manifests itself fully in His love for mankind, of which eternal beatitude is the greatest fruit:

Nothing stops these two virtues from being fully discharged.
In fact, each of these two virtues exercises a considerable influence over the other. Indeed when, not content with our present love, we request a deeper knowledge of God in order to attain to a greater love, we carry out an act of hope, inasmuch as we are motivated by our own good. But inasmuch as the pleasure which we feel in seeing that God is so perfect makes us desire that He be better known to His creatures, that they may better love Him and that His glory may be

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[139] *GP V* 199 f./*AVI/6* 215.

[140] Cf. *CF* 116.

[141] Cf. *GP VII* 546 ff.

[142] Cf. *GP VII* 547.

more manifest, without our own personal good acting as a predominant motive, we are carrying out an act of benevolence.

It is true that we cannot really convey any new good to God, but nonetheless our benevolence towards Him makes us act as if such a thing were possible. This is because, even though the Kingdom of God will come even without us, it is nonetheless our good intentions and fervent desire to do good which heighten our own participation therein. And without this, there is no benevolence in us.[143]

This is why all the aspects of "true piety" come back to the concept of the love of God: "light" and "virtue," awareness of God's goodness and the immortality of the soul, charity and hope, the joyful acceptance of the will of God and zeal in actively realising His will. All of this stands in opposition to quietism which, carried through to its logical conclusions, results in indolence and moral inactivity ("the idleness of certain lazy Quietists")[144] on the basis of a presumed transcendent enlightenment, in a negation of and disregard for God's goodness and eternal beatitude in the name of a charity so perfect that it is empty and impossible and, in certain cases in Gnostic antinomianism and moral libertinism on the basis of an indifference to all that which is earthly and is therefore seen to have nothing to do with Christian happiness. Leibniz has some cutting words to say in condemnation of any such outlook:

> Many speak of the love of God, but I can see from effects that few are truly imbued with it, including those who are most knowledgeable in the ways of mysticism. The touchstone for the love of God is that provided by St. John. And when I see a true ardour for furthering the common good, then the love of God is not far off.[145]

In quietism, as in every form of false devotion, the virtuous circle between theory and practice, between "light" and "virtue," discussed above, becomes vicious and, in the name of pure love for God, the way is opened to blind fatalism, to indifference towards salvation, which are sometimes no more than an alibi for practical libertinism, as Leibniz notes in the *Preface* to his *Theodicy*.[146]

5. *Fatum Christianum*

Having thus traced the principal characteristics of "true piety," Leibniz holds it up against those opposing positions, with their mistaken or, rather, false attitudes, which present themselves as true and thereby challenge the validity of the authentically Christian conception. The *Preface* to the *Theodicy* could not have omitted to include

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[143] *GP VII* 548; cf. *TS* 39.

[144] *GP V* 436/*AVI/6* 454.

[145] *GRUA* 107.

[146] Cf. *T* 32/56.

such a discussion, since we should not forget that theodicy is not a philosophical discipline which develops its arguments in abstract terms, but rather a philosophical apology for the works of God, a militant discourse. It arises from genuine accusations levelled against God and its content consists in the discussion of these accusations and objections. Its aim is to successfully confute them by justifying and reinforcing "true piety."

Leibniz, therefore, chooses to introduce this work of divine apologetics, which will represent the task of the *Theodicy* as a whole, with a comparison of *Fatum Mahometanum*, *Fatum Stoicum* and *Fatum Christianum*. The expression *Fatum Christianum* should come as no surprise to us, when we correctly understand its valency. Leibniz is certainly no champion of "fatalism," which he cnonsiders an error.[147] When he found himself accused of "fatalism," for varying reasons, by Arnauld[148] and Clarke,[149] for example, Leibniz as is well known, fiercely rebutted and dismissed any such accusations.[150] Indeed "fatalism" in the strictest sense of the word can only be attributed to the position which Leibniz refers to as *Fatum Mahometanum* ("the term of fatal necessity [...] which is usually only used for an absolute necessity").[151] In his appraisal of the philosophy of Cudworth, he wrote: "I agree with him in opposing fatalism".[152]

If Leibniz chooses to compare these diverse positions by grouping them under the common heading of "fatum," he does not do so in order to bring them closer together. Rather, he intends to distinguish between them. There was certainly a historical motive behind Leibniz's choice of terms,[153] since *De fato* is one of the titles most commonly adopted with reference to the problem in question (cf. for example, the homonymous work by Cicero, which is often cited by Leibniz in the *Theodicy*). Leibniz, too, then, uses this expression to refer to "the labyrinth of predestination".[154] However, it seems to me that Leibniz's choice was also motivated by a methodological concern. By using the common term "fate" to refer to divergent positions, he is able to compare them methodically on the same level. Yet this comparison is not aimed at associating them. It rather seeks to demonstrate their difference and their irreconcilable nature. This explains why Leibniz chose to use the term "fatum," also with regard to "true piety," and makes it clear that, in this case, the

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[147] Cf. *GRUA* 37.

[148] Cf. *GP II* 27 (Engl. trans. *L-A* 26).

[149] Cf. *GP VII* 381(Eng. trans. *L-C* 45).

[150] Cf. *GP II* 37 f. (Engl. trans. *L-A* 39 f.); *VII* 389 (Eng. trans. *L-C* 55.

[151] *GP II* 37 (Engl. trans. *L-A* 39).

[152] *GP III* 368.

[153] Cf. *GRUA* 376.

[154] Cf. *GRUA*, 457, 458 f., 464.

term should only be understood "in its right sense" of its etymology – i.e. as "the decree of providence".[155]

Fatalism, in its proper sense, in thus what Leibniz refers to as

Fatum Mahometanum, fate after the Turkish fashion, because it is said of the Turks that they do not shun danger or even abandon places infected with plague, owing to their use of such reasoning as that just recorded [the sophism of the Lazy Reason].[156]

This fatalism is the theoretical and practical reiteration of the sophism of the "Lazy Reason" or "Lazy Sophism,"[157] according to which, since everything is absolutely necessary, no choice, virtue or action is meaningful, but everything is indifferent (and therefore we might just as well follow our inclinations). Leibniz, as we have already seen, observes that this stance often masks a hedonistic or libertine practice.[158] When Leibniz considers this position, he also attributes it, explicitly or implicitly, to various contemporary philosophers, most prominently to Spinoza and Hobbes.

Even though the *Fatum Stoicum* (which might also be termed "epicurean," since in the *Theodicy* itself[159] and on various other occasions Leibniz associates the

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[155] *GP VII* 391; Eng. trans. *L-C* 59; cf. *GP IV* 139 f. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 122).

[156] *T* 30/54. The fact that Leibniz attributes the error of fatalism to the Muslims ("Finally the Mohammetans, who flooded the world with violence and ignorance, fuelled their barbarous courage with their opinion that the future was inevitable:" *GRUA* 457) does not seem to contradict, but surely does not fit well with his earlier appreciation of Islam, as the religion which spread the dogmas of true piety "even among the most remote races of Asia and of Africa, whither Christianity had not been carried; and they abolished in many countries heathen superstitions which were contrary to the true doctrine of the unity of God and the immortality of souls" (*T* 27/51). This positive evaluation of Islam in fact stands in isolation in Leibniz's writings, where, beyond his interest in Islamic texts (cf. *GP II* 545, 557, 563) and appreciation for various Arabic philosophers (cf. *GP II* 563), there emerges overall a negative judgement of the barbarity of the Turks (cf. *GP III* 213; *VII* 142) and the errors of Islam (cf. *GP I* 71; *III* 324; *V* 176 f./*AVI/6* 190 f.; *VII* 70; *GRUA* 156, 370; *TS* 73). Even the *Consilium Aegyptiacum*, for all that it is evidently conditioned by contingent political interests, is significantly harsh in its judgements of the Turks and of Islam. F. Olgiati (*Il significato storico di Leibniz*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1929, p. 49) writes of this project: "We need not believe that religious interests alone spurred Leibniz to promote a holy war against the Turk. The human and profane aims of such a war were not underestimated – indeed, they were precisely illustrated. Nonetheless, he conceived of them as inseparably linked to the religious ideal, which formed their ideal inspiration." On this point cf. also J. BARUZI, *op. cit.*, pp. 5 ff.

[157] This form of sophism, which is probably of Megarian origin, is cited by Plato, who attributes it to the sophists, by Chryssipus, and by Cicero (*De fato*, XII, 28).

[158] Cf. *T* 32/108.

[159] Cf. *T* 268/282.

stoic and epicurean approaches on this point)[160] also maintains the necessity of events, which are attributed, however, to divine providence, it does not thus dissuade the individual from action, as does the *Fatum Mahometanum*. It rather simply invites the individual to tolerate events with tranquillity, since to oppose them is futile.[161] Also in this regard Leibniz has in mind the positions of certain contemporary thinkers and above all those of Descartes.[162]

Finally, the *Fatum Christianum* also recognises the action of divine providence on nature and history, but holds providence to represent the expression of the goodness and wisdom of God. It does not, therefore, limit itself to tolerating events but rather accepts them joyfully and makes an active commitment to the order and harmony of the divine plan.[163] The *Fatum Christianum*, then, coincides with "true piety," being a form of active virtue founded on "light," i.e. on the knowledge of divine perfections. This *Fatum Christianum*, too, recognises an element of necessity in providence. However this is not an absolute necessity but only a sure determination. This does not cancel out the freedom of God and man but rather represents their very foundation. What we are dealing with here is the distinction between absolute necessity, on the one hand, and hypothetical and moral necessity, on the other and this, as we shall see, is one of the key metaphysical arguments of the *Theodicy*.

Without anticipating the analysis of the central theme of necessity and freedom, which is only briefly announced in the *Preface*, I will here limit myself to voicing several preliminary considerations on the three conceptions of "fate," which, it seems to me, should prove useful in helping us to place Leibnizian discourse.

First of all, the distinguishing feature of the *Fatum Mahometanum*, beyond the tendency to renounce action and virtue –indeed, in justification of such a practical conduct – is a peculiar conception of necessary fatalism. Fatalism, indeed, is considered as an absolute necessity. Whether this form of absolute necessity is conceived of in impersonal terms or identified with God ceases to be particularly relevant since, as Spinoza's teachings demonstrate, even when necessity is identified with God, God becomes depersonalised and comes to coincide with blind necessity.[164] The absolute freedom of God coincides with absolute necessity, and no final aim and, consequently, no meaning is acknowledged. Leibniz's most direct criticism of the sophism of the lazy reason refers to its confusion of the presumed

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[160] Leibniz's attribution of the *fatum stoicum* to the epicureans is also noted by G. Carlotti (*Il sistema di Leibniz*, Principato, Messina 1923, p.70), who, therefore, attributes "an arid stoicism; or, more coherently, an epicureanism (in the exact sense of the word)" to Descartes (p. 29).

[161] Cf. *T* 30/54.

[162] In the already quoted letter to the Elector Johann Friedrich of Hannover, Leibniz explicitly groups epicureans, stoics and Cartesians (cf. *A II*/1 111).

[163] Cf. *T* 30 f./54 f.

[164] Cf. *T* 217/234, 336/349; *GP IV* 285; *GRUA* 38.

absolute necessity of events and the hypothetical necessity of the causal relationship – that is between absolute necessity and the determination of the contingent:

> It is untrue that the event happens whatever one may do: it will happen because one does what leads thereto; and if the event is written beforehand, the cause that will make it happen is written also. Thus the connexion of effects and causes, so far from establishing the doctrine of a necessity detrimental to conduct, serves to overthrow it.[165]

Moreover, this theoretical error does not only impinge on practical behaviour but has practical implications of its own:

> Thus your laziness perchance will bring it about that you will obtain naught of what you desire, and that you will fall into those misfortunes which you would by acting with care have avoided.[166]

With this argument, Leibniz demonstrates how the crucial difference between his own stance and that of Spinoza, or of absolute fatalism, refers no less to the conception of the contingent than to the concept of the necessary. Now, as is well-known, the twenty-ninth proposition of "Part I" of the *Ethics*, wherein Spinoza denies contingency, is explained on the basis of "Proposition Fifteen:" "Whatsoever is, is in God" (from which also follows "Proposition Seventeen," and the related famous *scholium* saying, everything that is possible exists). It is thus based on the Spinozian conception of God as the sole substance and the conception of reality as a modality or affectation of that substance.[167] Moral necessity, which Leibniz opposes to absolute necessity, is linked to hypothetical necessity, that is to say with the recognition of the causal determination of phenomena and thus with the contingency of the possibles. Indeed, only if we recognise this connection is it possible to realise certain possibilities through the agency of free will (which is what Leibniz means when he uses the term "moral necessity"). The issue of whether all that is possible exists thus proves crucial. This is because thereon depend both theories of immanent causality, such as that maintained by Spinoza, which denies contingency, acknowledging only absolute necessity, and conceptions of transitive causality, such as that upheld by Leibniz, which not only acknowledges but also defines the contingent and recognises hypothetical and moral necessity. As we will now see, it is necessary to clear up this point to understand the relation which exists, for Leibniz, between the *Fatum Mahometanum* and the *Fatum Stoicum*.

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[165] *T* 33/57.

[166] *T* 133/153.

[167] Cf. B. SPINOZA, *Ethica Ordine Geometrico demonstrata*, in IDEM, *Opera*, im Auftrag der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften hg. von C. Gebhardt, Carl Winters-Universitaetsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg 1925, vol. II, p. 56, 61 ff., 70.

Let us now move on to consider, then, the *Fatum Stoicum*. This, writes Leibniz, "was not so black as it is painted",[168] and is far closer to Christianity than the *Fatum Mahometanum*.[169] The *Fatum Stoicum*, indeed, conceives of the necessity of events as pertaining to divine providence and therefore upholds patient submission to these as a sign of man's obedience and wisdom. In reality, however, if we look beyond this initially benevolent evaluation, we will find a judgement of the *Fatum Stoicum* no less severe than that of the *Fatum Mahometanum* and, more significantly, an evaluation of the two errors as being substantially equivalent. Even though the *Fatum Stoicum* starts from a set of presuppositions which are, in some ways, diametrically opposed to those of the *Fatum Mahometanum*, Leibniz argues that the two end up sharing the same theoretical conclusions and therefore differing only to a limit extent in their practical outcomes. The *Fatum Stoicum* recognises the omnipotence of the divine will (in contrast to the *Fatum Mahometanum*, which denies it). Indeed, it asserts the absolute arbitrariness of the divine will. For this reason, in practice, it preaches patience and a passive non-resistance of the superior volition. However, from the theoretical point of view, divine omnipotence coincides simply with the absolute arbitrariness of the divine will and therefore, from the human point of view, with randomness. Indeed, according to the *Fatum Stoicum*, we not only can not know God's plans, but no such plans exist, if God does not make choices in accordance with objective criteria but rather out of pure arbitrariness. For this reason we can and must attribute every event to God, even if an event appears evil from our point of view. With regard to this latter consideration, we should bear in mind the fact that, for Leibniz, the theory of divine arbitrarism is also linked to the Manichean heresy, which Bayle had already singled out for criticism and which Leibniz cites in the *Preface* to the *Theodicy*,[170] because, as we will see, it represents a significant antagonist. As Leibniz clearly perceives, the Manichean thesis of the duality of the divine principles, good and evil, if coherently applied to Christian monotheism cannot but develop into a simple accusation of evil against the unique God or into a belief in the absolute arbitrariness of divine will:

> One must not say either that what we call *justice* is nothing in relation to God, that he is the absolute Master of all things even to the point of being able to condemn the innocent without violating his justice, or finally that justice is something arbitrary where he is concerned. Those are rash and dangerous expressions, whereunto some have been led astray to the discredit of the attributes of God. For if such were the case there would be no reason for praising his goodness and his justice: rather would it be as if the most wicked spirit, the Prince of evil genii, the evil principle of the Manichaeans, were the sole master of the universe [...]. What means would there be of distinguishing the true God from the false God of Zoroaster if all things depended upon the caprice of an arbitrary power and there were neither rule nor consideration for anything whatever?[171]

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[168] *T* 30/54.

[169] Cf. *ibidem*.
[170] Cf. *T* 33 f./58.

Yet for the time being it is better to put off the question of manicheianism, not rushing prematurely into the discussion of themes which we will be better equipped to consider later on: it is enough for now to take note of the fact that Leibniz introduces the issue in his *Preface*. Let us now return to the consideration of the absolute prerogative of the divine will in the conception of the *Fatum Stoicum*. Stoic patience, as a consequence, consists in placing oneself in the hands of a tyrannous proprietor God,[172] not only inasmuch as He permits evil, but also because he rules arbitrarily and not with justice.[173] The final ends of divine choices are therefore completely removed from our comprehension, which makes the ends of human action unattainable, or rather senseless. It thus becomes clear that this omnipotent and arbitrary will of God ends up, from the human point of view, looking very similar to absolute necessity.[174]

Leibniz's judgement of Hobbes proves significant from this point of view. In the course of the *Theodicy*,[175] as elsewhere,[176] Leibniz frequently groups Hobbes and Spinoza as exponents of the *Fatum Mahometanum*. On several occasions, nonetheless, he clarifies and corrects this estimation.[177] Above all in the *Appendix* to the *Theodicy* which is specifically dedicated to Hobbes' position, Leibniz notes that Hobbes has always recognised a personal and omnipotent God. The fact, however, that he attributes predestination solely to the arbitrary will of God, which is not submitted to any criteria of justice, means that this position becomes confused with mere fatalism: "He [Hobbes]," writes Leibniz, "maintains that all that which God does is just, because there is none above him with power to punish and constrain him".[178] Yet on this basis, adds Leibniz, certain attributes of God, such as justice, are devoid of any significance, beyond that of

> expressions by which we aspire to honour God [...]. It may be that with Mr. Hobbes, as with Spinoza, wisdom, goodness, justice are only fictions in relation to God and the universe, since the prime cause, according to them, acts through the necessity of its power, and not by the choice of its wisdom.[179]

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[171] *T* 71 f./95.

[172] Cf. *GP IV* 258 f.; *GRUA* 496.

[173] Cf. *T* 34 f./58.

[174] Cf. *GP VII* 334 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 282). Cf., on this point, J. IWANICKI, *Leibniz et les démonstrations mathématiques de l'existence de Dieu*, Librairie Universitaire d'Alsace, Strasbourg 1933, pp. 48 ff.

[175] Cf. *T* 43/67, 139/160, 336/348, 412/417, 413/418.

[176] Cf., for example, *GPII* 563; *IV* 283 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 273); *VI* 3; *GRUA* 38, 478, 486.

[177] Cf. *T* 141/161, 216 f./234.

[178] *T* 389/394.

As a consequence, Leibniz concludes that the absolute fatalism of the *Fatum Mahometanum* and the absolute prerogative of Hobbes have the same consequences:

> if God does not intend the good of intelligent creatures, if he has no other principles of justice than his power alone, which makes him produce either arbitrarily that which chance presents to him, or by necessity all that which is possible, without the intervention of choice founded on good, how can he make himself worthy of love? It is therefore the doctrine either of blind power or of arbitrary power, which destroys piety: for the one destroys the intelligent principle or the providence of God, the other attributes to him actions which are appropriate to the evil principle.[180]

However, the contemporary philosopher who Leibniz has most in mind when he considers the *Fatum Stoicum* is surely Descartes:[181] "Descartes' morality is, without a doubt, that of the stoics".[182] Descartes, too, is consequently also subject to Leibniz's main accusation against the *Fatum Stoicum*, namely, that its difference from the *Fatum Mahometanum* is only apparent and that, in reality, the arbitrary will of God coincides with blind necessity:

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[179] *T* 393 f./398 f.

[180] *T* 398/403.

[181] The issue of Leibniz's relationship with Descartes has been long discussed, above all by French scholars, amongst whom there initially prevailed a tendency to emphasise Leibniz's dependence on Descartes. As Foucher de Careil notes: "I am well aware that there existed an energetic and fervent propensity amongst the French school, which sees its culmination in Cousin, to seek to establish the closest possible connection between Leibniz and Descartes and to merge their two philosophies into one, and it is undeniable that there was a certain skill in the way in which they were thus able to bundle up together the strengths of two great systems" (*FdCNL* CXL). At the same time, he dissociates himself from this tendency: "There is, without a doubt, a point at which all great spirits meet, and we can only applaud this tendency of eclecticism, which seeks to reconcile doctrines and pacify spirits. Yet we must also recognise that if Descartes and Leibniz had the same end, their means were very different" (*FdCNL* CXLI). E. Boutroux (*La Philosophie allemande au XVII' siècle. Les prédécesseurs de Leibniz: Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Locke et la philosophie de Leibniz*, J. Vrin, Paris 1948, pp. 3 ff.) considers the reasons why some accentuate the continuity between the two philosophies while others emphasise their difference, ultimately opting for this latter approach. J. Baruzi (*op. cit.*, pp. 57 ff.) also rigorously espouses the diversity of Descartes and Leibniz: "There is the habit in France of associating Leibniz with the Cartesians. Without doubt, many aspects of his systems can only be explained in terms of Cartesian influence. Nonetheless, Leibniz was not a direct descendent of Descartes. To make a Cartesian of Leibniz would be do accept a unilinear conception of history; it would mean to continue to uphold the Cousinian theory of modern philosophy as deriving entirely from Descartes" (p. 60). It seems to me that Y. Bélaval's accurate study, *Leibniz critique de Descartes*, Gallimard, Paris 1960, has provided the definitive demonstration of the radical difference and, on various points, the absolute opposition, between Leibniz's philosophy and Descartes' (which, indeed, is revealed in Leibniz's reading of his own ideas).

[182] *GP IV* 305; cf. 311, 343, 345.

Indeed, if truth itself depends solely on the will of God and not on the nature of things and if intellect is necessarily *prior* to the will (I am here referring *de prioritate naturae non temporis),* the intellect of God will be prior to the truth of things and will not, as a consequence, have truth as its object. Such an intellect would doubtless be nothing more than a chimera and consequently we should conceive of God after the manner of Spinoza, as a being with neither intellect nor will, who produces good and bad things indifferently, being indifferent to the things themselves and therefore having no rational inclination one way or the other. In this way, He would do nothing or everything. But to say that such a God made everything or to say that they were produced by a blind necessity would seem to me the same thing. I was vexed to find these ideas in the works of Descartes, but have found no way to excuse him.[183]

In a letter to Malebranche,[184] Leibniz describes and provides a thorough critique of Descartes' approach to this issue. After having likened Descartes to the stoics and epicureans, Leibniz, who is critical above all of their "patience without hope" ("a patience without hope neither lasts long nor affords much consolation"), goes on to criticise the Cartesian God in tones that recall Pascal's accusations against an over-philosophical God, who cannot be an object of faith:

> Descartes' God or perfect being is not such a God as one would imagine or desire, that is to say a just and wise God, who does all that is possible for the good of His creatures. He has, instead, much in common with Spinoza's God, the principle of things, a supreme power or primitive nature which brings everything in motion and does all that can be done.[185]

He points out the causes of these Cartesian errors, which lie in his metaphysical theses: divine arbitrarism, the negation of final causes and the present existence of all possibilities.

This final point, in particular, represents Leibniz's the source of Leibniz's most continuous criticism of Descartes and is, on a metaphysical level, Leibniz's main argument for identifying Cartesian arbitrarism with Spinozan necessity and, in a in a broader sense, the *Fatum Stoicum* with the *Fatum Mahometanum.* Leibniz refers to a single passage in Descartes' *Principia philosophiae*, in which he writes: "since, in fact, […] material assumes all the forms of which it is capable in succession"[186] According to Leibniz, this thesis, carried through to its logical conclusion, brings us directly to the position of Spinoza:

> Having diverted philosophers from the quest for final causes or, which is the same thing, from the consideration of divine wisdom in the order of things, which should, to my mind, constitute the greatest end of philosophy, he [Descartes] offers us a glimpse of a reason at one point in his

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[183] *GP IV* 285.

[184] Cf. *GP IV* 298 ff.; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 241 ff.

[185] Cf., in this regard, Y. BÉLAVAL, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

[186] R. DESCARTES, *Principia Philosophiae* III 47, in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Ch. Adam e P. Tannery, vol. VIII/1, J. Vrin, Paris 1964, p. 103.

Principles, in which, seeking to excuse himself for the fact that he seems to have attributed certain figures and movements to matter, he claims to have been right in doing so because material successively assumes all possible forms and would therefore have necessarily attained to that which he had supposed. But if what he says is true, if every possibility must realise itself, and if there is no possible fantasy (however absurd and unworthy) which will not realise itself, at some moment and somewhere in the universe, it follows that there is neither choice nor providence, that those things which are not realised are impossible and those which are realised are necessary, just as Hobbes and Spinoza state in clearer terms. In this way, we might assert that Spinoza did nothing more than cultivate certain seeds which he found in the philosophy of Descartes.[187]

Fatum Mahometanum and *Fatum Stoicum*, despite their apparent and historical difference, thus prove equivalent in their ultimate meanings and implications. The only real alternative is the *Fatum Christianum*. From a practical point of view, this is distinct from the *Fatum Stoicum* because it does not just teach "a forced patience",[188] but rather to "do your duty and be content with that which shall come of it":[189] the one is inseparable from the other because "that [trusting in providence] in reality occurs only when one has done one's duty".[190] This approach attains to a faith in the primacy of the goodness and wisdom of God over his power. The Christian faith, according to Leibniz, cannot uphold divine arbitrarism but should rather uphold divine justice, since only in this way can we be content of all that happens:

> by assuring us that since God, being altogether good and wise, has care for everything [...],our confidence in him ought to be entire. And thus we should see, if we were capable of understanding him, that it is not even possible to wish for anything better (as much in general as for ourselves) than what he does.[191]

The discriminant element of the *Fatum Christianum*, the primacy, in God, of goodness, wisdom and justice over power, which place it in opposition to arbitrarism, goes hand in hand with the primacy in the religious man of knowledge over will. This brings us back to the definition of "true piety" as the union of "light" and "virtue."

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[187] *GP II* 562 f.; cf. *IV* 283 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 273), 288 f., 299 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 242), 340 f.; *VII* 334 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 282).

[188] *T* 30/54.

[189] *T* 31/55.

[190] *T* 31/55. P. Burgelin (*Commentaire du Discours de métaphysique de Leibniz*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1959, p. 110): explains thus "To be truly satisfied implies something entirely other than simple resignation. We are completely involved, however difficult that may be. We love God only if we find our joy in the course of events in the world, whatever they may be [...]. In this way, we can be certain that all that is at present, all that has been and all that will be conforms to the will of God and therefore to the best in itself and for us. This is the basis for our moral and spiritual life."

[191] *T* 30 f./55.

The former aspires to the latter, but true virtue cannot but base itself on knowledge. Otherwise it would be nothing more than stoical patience, not accompanied by joy and therefore by true love for God. As Leibniz writes in a letter to Thomas Burnett:

> God has placed us in the world that we might act in accordance with his will, not to harangue Him and pay Him compliments. I believe that the truly pious are those who are truly content with divine governance and, as a consequence, hold its wisdom in high esteem and display a fervour for doing good, thus conforming themselves to God's will to the best of their ability. Nothing serves firm devotion so well as true philosophy, which allows us to know and admire the wonders of God and makes His glory sufficiently manifest. Because how can we love God and glorify Him if we have no knowledge of His beauty? But the aim of everything is the practice of moral virtues for the public good or (which is the same thing) for the glory of God. In this way, any devotion which does not bring us to some considerable truth with regard to the perfections and the works of God, or which does not tend to produce some form of good, is a simple ceremony. This should only serve to stimulate mankind towards what is effectively consistent and real in piety.[192]

These few lines recapitulate all the main arguments which we have come across in the *Preface* to the *Theodicy* and clearly demonstrate that, for Leibniz, theodicy is an inherent and essential endeavour to "true piety." This also means that to refuse to engage in theodicy cannot, for Leibniz, be compatible with "true piety." This places Leibniz's conception in opposition to those of fideism or mysticism, for example, whereby the true faith is incompatible with the God of the philosophers. For Leibniz, quite the contrary is true, not in the sense that philosophy can do without the contents of revelation, but rather that it must justify them rationally, understand and demonstrate that which, amongst the truths, is rationally comprehensible and rationally uphold the credibility of that in faith which, instead, is mysterious. Leibniz counters the fideistic *credo quia absurdum* by essentially asserting: *I believe because it is reasonable to do so*. To scepticism and fatalism, which deny any meaning to reality as a consequence of the presence of evil; to the stoic, who preaches a tolerance devoid of hope; to any rebels who accuse God of evil (it does not seem that Leibniz, in his time, had to answer to the tragicist argument, which involves God's own fate with the failure of the world): to all of these positions, Leibniz opposes the *Fatum*

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[192] *GP III* 218. E. Cione (*Leibniz*, Libreria Scientifica Editrice, Napoli 1964, p. 217) concludes from his study of Leibniz's monadology that "Not only does Leibniz neglect to emphasise the deliberative momentum of the will [...], but he also ignores the pragmatic, with the result that intention is transformed into action tending to mute the objective conditions of the world in order to realise one's own ends." However, the study of the *Theodicy* leads us to the opposite conclusions. Cione himself in fact acknowledges later on that for Leibniz "the cosmos is not a brutal reality, but rather the result of a divine choice and it thus implies that there should be an Ought to Be which imposes on all of us the necessity to participate freely but consciously in the impetus which marks God's imprint on the world and which should carry us in the direction of an ever greater realisation of the Good" (p. 298).

Christianum, which is not an empty and superficial optimism nor much less a form of quietism, but which consists rather in the optimism of hope and faith in God.[193]

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[193] For this reason I disagree with E. Cione (*op. cit.*) who criticises Leibniz on this point. His criticisms are grounded in a conception of Christianity, which he considers as the only legitimate vision but which is instead only the expression of one particular sensibility and spirituality which is of a pessimistic nature, which may certainly influence one particular approach to Christianity but can certainly not be identified with the Christian faith as a whole. Cione accuses Leibniz of not participating in the "healthy anthropological pessimism which Christianity has brought to the world" (p. 478); and repeats: "If he can be truly defined as an optimist, it is not because he is fatuous like Pangloss who imagines that everything speeds ahead in full sail, but rather because he ignores the anguish of the fall, the torture of remorse, the self loathing which invades and overwhelms the sinner [...]. This is the point at which he comes up against not only Pascal, not only Luther and Calvin, not only Augustine and Paul, but healthy Christian pessimism as a whole, which has always been founded on the concept of sin. Without this, Christianity would lose the essential characteristic which distinguishes it from other religions" (p. 507). Again, Cione insists: "His [Leibniz's] Christianity does not only walk unscrupulously hand in hand with reason; not only is it immune to the gnawing of sin; it does not reverberate with the trembling of mystery, which represents at once the shuddering terror and anguish of sin and the trembling exaltation of sublime mystery. It emerges entirely unruffled and somewhat overly luminous, clear and optimistic" (p. 523). I repeat that Cione's identification of Christianity with "healthy[!] pessimism" is unacceptable, as is his pretence that Christianity must necessarily neglect only the "anguish of the fall," the "torture of remorse" and "self-loathing." I maintain that if Leibniz "cannot even imagine the anxiety of a Kierkegaard or the passionate faith of a Dostojewski" (*ibidem*), but, whilst not denying the reality of sin, places his primary emphasis on Christian joy, on consolation and devotion, this does not mean that he did not understand or authentically uphold the Christian faith. On the contrary, Leibniz's discourse sheds light on and effectively calls our attention to fundamental dimensions of the Christian faith, which the univocal emphasis on the aspects indicated by Cione sometimes risks eclipsing, even nowadays, doing serious damage to Christian hope and placing an unjust, excessive affliction on the shoulders of mankind, which may lead to despair (which is certainly not Christian!). F. Olgiati's appraisal therefore seems to me more objective and balanced (*op. cit.*, p. 46): "To that pessimism which dries up the founts of action and sows hate, inspiring blasphemy, Leibniz opposes his religious optimism. The general knowledge of the great truth, that God always acts in the most perfect and desirable way possible, was his basis for *the love which we owe to God* above everything and of our duty to live following the divine will, thus ascending from the 'kingdom of nature' to the 'kingdom of grace'."

CHAPTER TWO

FAITH AND REASON

The *Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason* is a section of fundamental importance to the *Theodicy*. If the work's agenda is sketched out in the *Preface,* in the *Preliminary Dissertation* Leibniz defines the terms in question, clarifies the assumed meaning of the main concepts and outlines the methodological approach with which he intends to proceed. All of these preliminary precautions serve to avoid the study developing, not through the strength of its arguments, but rather through recourse to rhetorical tricks and dialectical ambiguities –a particular concern when approaching matters, such as that of the *Theodicy*, which entail a certain degree of polemics. It is for this reason that this disconnected section of the work is situated, not at the end, as an *Appendix* (as is the case with the sections on Hobbes and King), but rather at the beginning, as a *Preliminary Dissertation*. The importance of this section can never be emphasised enough. An underestimation of its importance, a lack of attention to the arguments which it develops, have had a decisive influence on misreadings of Leibniz's *Theodicy* and on the hostility which it has encountered, which emerges, in many cases, from its reception history. It is in this section that the nature of reason and its role in the defence of faith are defined, as is the significance of mystery, and the objectives and limitations of the apologetics. In a word, it is here that we find outlined the foundations of *theodicy a priori*, which is what Leibniz effectively formulates and is the only form of philosophical theodicy which can be legitimately upheld.

A comparative reading of the *Theodicy* and another, much earlier work by Leibniz on the same topic, the *Confessio Philosophi*, presumably datable to 1673, serves to provide us with an immediate impression of the fundamental importance of this section. The early work by Leibniz has been called the "first theodicy"[1] due to the analogy of its contents with the 1710 work. The apologetic theses put forward in the two works are, effectively, very similar, yet the vast superiority of the latter work in terms of philosophical substance and depth is immediately apparent. This is a direct consequence of the presence, in the *Theodicy,* of the *Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason*. The arguments developed in the *Preliminary Dissertation* have no analogue in the *Confessio Philosophi*. The *Preliminary Dissertation* serves to situate the apologetic arguments to be presented within a frame of reference which, by indicating the premises and aims of the method, imbues them with a significance and legitimacy very distinct from those which they would,

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[1] Cf. *Leibnitiana inedita*. *Confessio Philosophi*, ed. I. Jagodinsky, Kazan 1915, p. 4; *Confessio Philosophi*, ed. Y. Bélaval, J. Vrin, Paris 1961, p. 20; *Confessio Philosophi*, ed. O. Saame, cit., p. 9. F. Piro (*Varietas identitate compensata*. *Studio sulla formazione della metafisica di Leibniz,* Bibliopolis, Napoli 1990, pp. 97, 121) also refers to this work as a "proto-*Theodicy*."

debatably, hold in a simple reasoned exposition, such as that presented in the *Confessio Philosophi*.[2]

1.   *The General Terms of the Controversy*

The question which Leibniz poses in these pages – the relationship between reason and faith – is one of the most classic problems of philosophy, above all since the advent of Christianity in the West. Yet the way in which the question – "on the conformity of faith with reason" – is posed not only situates it within a precise theoretical framework, but also locates it historically. Leibniz poses the question in the terms of the contemporary debate and thus identifies the *Theodicy* as not only a philosophical text but also a work of militant apologetics.[3]

The antagonist of faith *par excellence* and the typical addressee of seventeenth century apologetics is the libertine who, in the name of reason, refuses to believe and behaves with scepticism and hedonism. Yet in the *Theodicy* Leibniz seems to look in another direction, addressing a very different kind of antagonist, since his polemics refer above all to the fideism of Bayle. In reality, Leibniz's arguments are instead aimed at a radical questioning of the categories under discussion, destabilising all of the fixed alternatives and revisiting them from a new and original perspective.

The fideism of Bayle would seem to represent the very antithesis of the libertine stance. Bayle himself had repeatedly declared his intention that his own ideas should stand in opposition to Libertine scepticism. Nonetheless, more than one of Bayle's contemporaries, including Leibniz himself,[4] had observed that his position in fact masked a kind of libertinism. Leibniz clearly perceived that fideism and libertine scepticism have a lot more in common than first meets the eye. It is true that, if the question is posed in the most immediate, simplistic terms of acceptance or refutation of faith, scepticism and fideism obviously emerge, at least explicitly, as direct opposites. However, if we look closer, neither of these positions respond to the issue of the relationship between reason and faith. They both derive from the relinquishment of one in favour of the other. If, however, we discuss the meaning of

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[2] Cassirer, too (*op. cit.*), albeit in the broader context of a famously reductive appraisal of the *Theodicy's* importance, highlights and places a positive emphasis on this matter: "The *Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason* points to the key theme of the work as a whole" (p. 425); "Theodicy therefore becomes a logodicy: the justification of reason as the final, unique necessity which cannot be contradicted on the basis of any assumed knowledge resulting from supernatural intervention or revelation" (p. 426); "The central tasks of the *Théodicée* consist in the defence of reason against pessimistic scepticism and in elucidating the true implications of free will as a problem" (p. 431).

[3] In 1705 Isaac Jaquelot had already published a polemic against Bayle with this very title : *Conformité de la foi avec la raison ou défense de la religion contre les principales difficultés répandues dans le Dictionnaire historique et critique de Mr. Bayle*, Amsterdam.

[4] Cf. *GP III* 310.

the terms in question in more depth, effectively defining their relation as something more complex than mere mutual exclusion, a somewhat different situation emerges. As Leibniz notes, Bayle seeks to display

> the power of faith by showing that the truths it teaches cannot withstand the attacks of reason and that it nevertheless holds its own in the heart of the faithful. M. Nicole seems to refer to this as 'the triumph of God's authority over human reason' [...]. But since reason is a gift of God, even as faith is, contention between them would cause God to contend against God; and if the objections of reason against any article of faith are insoluble, then it must be said that this alleged article will be false and not revealed: this will be a chimera of the human mind, and the triumph of this faith will be capable of comparison with bonfires lighted after a defeat.[5]

This championing of faith over reason was certainly not new to the 1600s. It is an idea at least as ancient as its counterpart, which declares the triumph of reason over faith. Yet Leibniz accepts neither the one nor the other. Indeed, he finds fault with both on the same grounds. This does not mean, however, that Leibniz tends to simply reduce faith to reason:

> Therefore censure will fall upon those who shall wish to account for this Mystery and make it comprehensible.[6]

Neither were the other possible approaches, such as that of the double truth, also rejected by Leibniz, anything new.[7] Leibniz states the terms of the question very clearly at the beginning of the *Preliminary Dissertation*. The problem of the relationship between reason and faith can be traced to that of the relationship between reason and experience. Indeed,

> one may compare faith with experience, since faith (in respect of the motives that give it justification) depends upon the experience of those who have seen the miracles whereon revelation is founded, and upon the trustworthy tradition which has handed them down to us, whether through the Scriptures or by the account of those who have preserved them.[8]

This immediately clarifies one point: faith is historical experience, based on the historical data of revelation and of tradition. It is historical experience, then, and not mystical experience. Leibniz does not exclude this latter altogether, but he does approach it with extreme care. It may serve as a specific vehicle with which divine grace can sustain faith in the simple, who are unable to explore the reasonable motives of credibility. However, it is only acceptable if it confirms the findings of rational enquiry:

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[5] *T* 73/96 f.

[6] *T* 83/106.

[7] Cf. *T* 56 f./80 f.; *GRUA* 23.

[8] *T* 49 f./74.

God, it is true, never bestows this faith unless what he is making one believe is grounded in reason – otherwise he would subvert our capacity to recognize truth, and open the door to enthusiasm.[9]

For this reason, Leibniz makes a fleeting and dismissive reference to mystical experience in the *Preliminary Dissertation*:

> Yet I would also take into account (*sauf à parler ailleurs*) the inward motion of the Holy Spirit, who takes possession of souls and persuades them and prompts them to good, that is, to faith and to charity, without always having need of motives.[10]

Leibniz's proposed solution to the problem of the relationship between reason and faith consists, not in the triumph of the one or the other, but rather in the sovereign authority of faith, which is exercised in the practical domain, originating in the divine mandate and drawing its legitimacy from its recognition by reason:

> Also it is a matter of no difficulty among theologians who are expert in their profession, that the motives of credibility justify, once for all, the authority of Holy Scripture before the tribunal of reason, so that reason in consequence gives way before it, as before a new light, and sacrifices thereto all its probabilities. It is more or less as if a new president sent by the prince must show his letters patent in the assembly where he is afterwards to preside. [...] divine faith itself, when it is kindled in the soul, is something more than an opinion, and depends not upon the occasions or the motives that have given it birth; it advances beyond the intellect, and takes possession of the will and of the heart, to make us act with zeal and joyfully as the law of God commands. Then we have no further need to think of reasons or to pause over the difficulties of argument which the mind may anticipate.[11]

Incidentally, it is worth noting that the point of view expressed in this passage goes against the hypothesis of those, such as Adrian Peperzak,[12] who read the *Theodicy,* not so much as an apology for God against the attacks of unbelievers, but rather more as Leibniz's attempt to reassure believers and, above all, himself, in the face of their own doubts and internal conflicts (an interpretation which seems to spring, even if this is not explicitly acknowledged, from the unacceptable but persistent temptation to see Leibniz as a pessimist). Doubtless, since Leibniz's discourse is philosophical, not theological (in the sense of dogmatic theology) in nature, objections are considered for their value as arguments and thus for their capacity to involve each and every individual, including the believer or the apologist himself, inasmuch as they are rational beings. On the other hand, however, Leibniz here also clearly asserts that believers, that is to say individuals who have already

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[9] GP V 480/A VI/6 497.

[10] *T* 50/74.

[11] *T* 67 f./91; cf. *TS* 11f.

[12] Cf. A. PEPERZAK, *op. cit.*, pp. 52 f., 67.

discovered the reasonable motives of credibility on which faith is founded, no longer need to present reasonable justifications for their own faith to themselves. This is not due to a dogmatic refutation of doubt, but rather because faith *is essentially a form of practical conduct:* reason can provide "occasions" and "motives" for faith, but faith subsequently "advances beyond the intellect," "takes possession of the will and of the heart," and comes to be sustained and driven, no longer by theoretical motives, but rather with "zeal and joyfully." The *Theodicy,* then, is designed above all to respond to external attacks to faith, to the objections of unbelievers. It is a work of apologetics.[13]

I have already foregrounded the practical quality of faith for Leibniz in the previous chapter, so at this point we need only note the re-emergence of this notion in the above-quoted passage. The recurrent terminology in these lines –"... light... kindled... zeal ... joyfully...," clearly links this text to Leibniz's exposition of the "true piety" in his *Preface*. At the same time, this passage also affirms that the first act of faith, from which faith is born and by which it is justified, is an act of the intellect, not of the will. To believe, for Leibniz, is an intellectual act. On the absence of sufficient motives of credibility, belief cannot be voluntarily imposed on oneself nor forced on another. This thesis (which was later shared by Kant) is often reiterated by Leibniz, to various interlocutors and in various contexts:

> *It is not in our power to determine whether we believe or disbelieve something* (*Credere aliquid aut non credere non est in potestate*).
>
> *Demonstration.* To believe in fact signifies to be aware of the reasons which persuade us of that which is to be believed [...], the extent of our awareness is not under our control (*non est in potestate*) [...]. Therefore it is not in our power to determine whether we believe or disbelieve something.[14]

Leibniz confirms this point in his arguments against Descartes, as witness, for example his *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum*:

> I do not admit that errors are more dependent upon the will that upon the intellect. To give credence to what is true or to what is false – the former being to know, the latter to err – is nothing but the consciousness or memory of certain perceptions or reasons and so does not depend upon will except insofar as we may be brought by some oblique device to the point where we seem to see what we wish to see, even when we are actually ignorant […]. Hence we make judgments not because we will but because something appears.[15]

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[13] For the believer, Leibniz stresses in the strongest possible terms the inutility of "written summaries, in the form of memoranda, of the reasons which have led them to some important view which they will often have to justify later on, to themselves or others" (*GP V* 442/*A VI/6* 460).

[14] *GRUA* 181.

[15] *GP IV* 361; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 387; cfr. *GP IV* 356 f. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 384 f.).

Leibniz makes the same point in his *Confessio Philosophi*,[16] in the *Nouveaux Essais*[17] and in letters to various correspondents.[18]

In the *Preliminary Dissertation*, then, Leibniz reasserts the relationship between "light" and "fervour" which defined "true piety" in the *Preface*, underlining the fact that, just as the light of the intellect should not transform into its opposite, becoming the kind of sceptical doubt which stifles the fervour of faith, so the fervour of faith must not turn into enthusiasm or dogmatism, deaf to the voice of reason. Indeed, although, as we have seen, faith does not need to constantly question and reassert its own motives, it should not, for this reason, turn a deaf ear to objections. Leibniz specifies that

> such proofs of the truth of religion as can give only a *moral certainty* would be balanced and even outweighed by such objections as would give an *absolute certainty*, provided they were convincing and altogether conclusive.[19]

To this we should add the awareness of the possibility, already discussed in the previous chapter, that the attention of our intellect might be distracted by practical prejudices and passions, so that, as Leibniz writes in the passage from the *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum* quoted above, "we seem to see what we wish to see".[20] At the same time, faith cannot and must not allow itself to become paralysed by intellectual doubt but, as long as the "occasions" and "motives" for credibility provided by the intellect are not absolutely disproved, we can rest assured of the security of faith, since it is moved by "fervour" and "pleasure." In the chapter *Des degrès d'Assentiment* in his *Nouveaux Essais* Leibniz constructs a legal analogy to this situation:

> Let me add that although it is not usually permitted in the courts to rescind a judgment after it has been delivered, or to do a revision after having 'cast up the account' (otherwise we would have to be in perpetual disquiet, which would be all the more intolerable because we cannot always keep records of past events), nevertheless we are sometimes allowed to appeal to the courts on new evidence, and even to obtain what is called 'restitution *in integrum*' against a previous ruling. It is like that also in our personal affairs and especially in the most important matters, in cases where it is still open to us to plunge in or to draw back, and is not harmful to postpone action or to edge cautiously ahead: the pronouncements that our minds make on the grounds of probabilities should never be taken *in rem judicatam*, as the jurists say – i.e. as settled – to such an extent that we shall be unwilling to revise our reasoning in the light of substantial

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[16] Cf. *CF* 80.

[17] Cf. *GP V* 340, 438, 477, 498 f., 502/*A VI/6* 359, 456, 494, 516 f.

[18] Cf. *A I/6* 117; *II/1* 441; *GRUA* 214, 216; *S* 69.

[19] *T* 52/76.

[20] GP *IV* 361; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 387.

new reasons to the contrary. But when there is no time left for deliberation, we must abide by the judgment we have made as resolutely as if it were infallible, although not always as inflexibly.[21]

Émilienne Naert[22] sees in these closing lines an affinity with the second maxim of Descartes' provisional moral code. It seems to me, however, that any affinity lies in appearance alone. For Descartes, such perseverance is associated with voluntarism, behind which there lies nothing but doubt (in this case it makes no difference whether doubt is considered as methodical or sceptical). For Leibniz, instead, practical certainty has a rational foundation which overcomes doubt, even in the absence of theoretical certainty. As Leibniz writes in the *Theodicy*:

> It is another question whether we are always obliged to examine the objections we may have to face, and to retain some doubt in respect of our own opinion, or what is called *formido oppositi*, until this examination has been made. I would venture to say no, for otherwise one would never attain to certainty and our conclusion would be always provisional.[23]

Leibniz's criticism of Descartes' use of doubt in the rational method was central to his critique of Descartes as a whole. I will here limit myself to these few points. It has already clearly emerged, however, that Descartes and Leibniz's different approaches to doubt stem from their profoundly different conceptions of reason. With regard to the matter which we are here considering, the relationship between reason and faith, it is clear that, for Leibniz, the fervour of virtue pre-supposes the light of the intellect and this latter, even when it is not at its fullest, is nonetheless able to stoke up virtuous ardour. To sustain the contrary, for Leibniz, is scepticism, whether it comes from Cartesians, libertines, fideists or enthusiasts.

2.   *Reason*

In § 2 of the *Preliminary Dissertation*, where he makes brief mention in just a few lines of many complex and important intertwining themes, Leibniz first puts forward his famous distinction between "eternal" and "positive" truths. The former are truths which "one cannot deny without being led into absurdities",[24] while the latter must be discovered and experienced, which can come about in two different ways:

> We learn them either by experience, that is, *a posteriori*, or by reason and *a priori*, that is, by considerations of the fitness of things which have caused their choice.[25]

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[21] *GP V* 442/*A VI/6* 460 f.

[22] Cf. É. NAERT, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

[23] *T* 65 f./89.

[24] *T* 50/74.

[25] *Ibidem.*

A clear connection immediately emerges between these considerations and those expressed in § 1, in which, as we saw above, Leibniz, introducing the issue of the relationship between faith and reason, argued that faith

> depends upon the experience of those who have seen the miracles whereon revelation is founded, and upon the trustworthy tradition which has handed them down to us[26]

and thus situated the aforementioned issue within the broader question of the relationship between reason and experience. In § 2, as we have seen, Leibniz puts forward two methods – one *a priori*, the other *a posteriori* – for discovering positive truths. The *a posteriori* approach is that of experience and therefore also that of faith, but because the truths of faith are *mysteries* (in other words, as I will explain in more depth later on, they are contrary to appearance), such truths are founded on experience which has been testified to and handed down to us, but which is contrary to experience as it appears to us and can therefore only be accepted and upheld on the basis of "motives of credibility," that is to say, via the *a priori* approach, "by reason." This is closely connected to the issue, already identified in the *Preface*, of the relationship between truth and appearance, which is, in turn, of pivotal importance for the issue of the relationship between faith and reason. Indeed, as we have already seen, truth is *a priori* to appearance, i.e. is independent of it. Truth is *beyond* appearance, inasmuch as the former is never reducible to the latter. Moreover, finally, truth is *the basis for discrimination* between true and false appearance. The issue of the relationship between truth and appearance emerges for positive truths, since at the level of pure being, of eternal truths, there is not yet any existence and, consequently, there is not yet any appearance. In the relationship between eternal and absolutely necessary Being and existence lies the issue of the relationship between truth and appearance. When and how is an appearance true and false? When and how can a truth appear or be hidden? This is for reason to judge.

Both eternal and positive truths, then, are objects of reason. In the *Theodicy*, as in the *Nouveaux Essais* and elsewhere, Leibniz defines reason as "the linking together of truths".[27] Leibniz staunchly adheres to this definition, even though he is aware that it is not commonly shared,[28] as it forms the basis for a correct assessment of the relations between religion and faith and thus for a legitimate philosophical theodicy. Indeed, if reason is not first understood as "the inviolable linking together of truths",[29] but is rather considered to represent merely "the opinions and discourses of men", "the habit they have formed of judging things according to the usual course of

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[26] *T* 49/74.

[27] *T* 49/73 *passim;* cf. *GP V* 185, 457/*A VI/6* 199, 476; *GRUA* 68.

[28] Cf. *T* 49/73.

[29] *T* 64/88.

Nature"[30]– in sum, as "the faculty of reasoning whether well or ill"[31]– then, Leibniz writes:

> I confess that it might deceive us, and does indeed deceive us, and the appearances of our understanding are often as deceptive as those of the senses.

Yet if it is conceived of as the "linking together of truths and of objections in due form", it is then "impossible for reason to deceive us".[32] This specification is of crucial importance, because it is the more superficial conception of reason as a mere "faculty of reasoning whether well or ill" (which Leibniz does not share), which was and is still criticised by fideism for opposing and representing an obstacle to faith and, still more, for being in itself a source of error and leading to the sin of *superbia*:

> all that is said against reason has no force save against a kind of counterfeit reason, corrupted and deluded by false appearances.[33]

To define reason as "the inviolable linking together of truths," far from entailing any denial of reason's role in judging appearances, rather provides the basis for and legitimises that role as an *a priori* procedure which takes pure knowledge of eternal truths as its starting point. In accordance with tradition, Leibniz distinguishes "strict and true reason"[34] from "corrupt reason"[35]. However, in Leibniz this distinction does not have the same implications as it does for reason's detractors.[36] These distinguish between a good reason (i.e. divine reason and, at most, human reason before original sin) and a bad reason, source and principle of all error and guilt (i.e. human reason after original sin). This second form of reason is totally distinct from – is indeed opposed to and rebellious against – divine reason and believers cannot but seek to crush and humiliate it through faith. For Leibniz, on the contrary, there is only one reason (divine and human)[37] and it is unswervingly good. Evil may instead lie in the use of reason in judging on appearances – or rather the "abuse" of reason,[38] resulting

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[30] *Ibidem*.

[31] *T* 87/110.

[32] *Ibidem*.

[33] *T* 51/75; cf. *Preliminary Dissertation*, §§ 46-49.

[34] *T* 49/73; cf. 84/107.

[35] Cf. *T* 84/107.

[36] Cf. *ibidem*.

[37] On the continuity of divine reason with the human and the analogical relationship between divine creation and human knowledge, cf. M. SERRES, *op. cit.*, pp. 51 f.

[38] *T* 72/96.

in a "seeming"[39] reason which, according to the common conception limits itself to judging things "according to the usual course of Nature",[40] without considering the "convenience" which inspired the choice of such an order – that is to say, without any *a priori* basis.[41] We should recall that, although Leibniz sometimes uses the term "corrupt reason" in his *Theodicy*,[42] the context in which this expression is used, together with Leibniz's own recurrent and explicit affirmations to the effect[43] make it clear that, for Leibniz, human reason has not been corrupted by original sin, but merely "clouded over" (*obnubilata*)[44] by the corruption of the sensible soul. Reason, therefore, should not be reduced to the mere faculty of judging between true and false at a theoretical level and between good and evil at a practical one. It is above all "pure reason" – that is to say, the pure knowledge of the true and the good as ideas. Both reason's faculty to judge phenomena and its justification for doing so spring from this pure connection to truth. Also with regard to this issue, then, Leibniz squarely situates himself in the tradition of critical idealism. Reason is, first and foremost "reason pure and simple" (*pure et nue*). As such it is "distinct from experience" and "only has to do with truths independent of the senses".[45] It not only represents the human faculty to recognise the connection between truths, but actually and in itself constitutes this very connection,[46] as Leibniz clearly explains in his *Nouveaux Essais*:

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[39] *T* 98/119.

[40] Cf. *T* 64/88.

[41] Cf. *T* 50/74.

[42] Cf. *T* 84/107.

[43] Cf. *GP III* 35 f.; *VI* 451 ff.; *GRUA* 69, 242 f.; *TS* 93 f. Here and elsewhere it appears that Leibniz holds human reason to be unscarred by original sin, since reason constitutes a gift from God given to man subsequent to the Fall. On this point, cf. also P. BURGELIN, *op. cit*, pp. 273, 307. It would certainly be interesting to examine this issue in more depth, as part of a more general overview of Leibniz's thoughts on original sin. However, I am unable to address this matter at this time (cf. in this regard, my essay on this topic in AA.VV., *Il peccato originale nel pensiero moderno*, ed. G. Riconda, M. Ravera, C. Ciancio, G. L. Cuozzo, Morcelliana, Brescia 2009, pp. 377-394).

[44] *TS* 95.

[45] *T* 49/73 f.

[46] The definition and its discussion given by Leibniz in *T* 49/73 f. implies these two facets, as does the passage from *T* 89/112. The passage in *T* 86/108 is, instead, ambiguous, since the pronoun "that [*que*]" may refer to either "linking" or "truths." However, the Latin translation by Des Bosses, which was authorised by Leibniz, resolves this ambiguity: "Respondeo [...] *Rationem* hic esse catenam veritatum, nobis naturae lumine notarum." The definition is thus given a gnoseological significance. On this point, Y. Bélaval (*op.cit*., p. 51) writes: "With Leibniz a given reason is not only a principle of intelligibility but also and always a principle of reality, a reason behind things, as Leibniz's use of the term 'sufficient reason' testifies."

A reason [la Raison] is a known truth whose connection with some less well-known truth leads us to give our assent to the latter. But it is called a 'reason' [on l'appelle Raison], especially and *par excellence*, if it is the cause not only of our judgment but also of the truth itself – which makes it what is known as an '*a priori* reason'. A *cause* in the realm of things corresponds to a *reason* in the realm of truths, which is why causes themselves – and especially final ones – are often called 'reasons'. And, lastly, the faculty which is aware of this connection amongst truths, i.e. the faculty for reasoning, is also called 'reason'.[47]

We can here observe a relationship very similar to that established by Plato between the "sameness of genera" and "dialectics,"[48] although we should bear in mind that, for Leibniz, the eternal truths are not separate entities, but ideas of the divine intellect, and therefore *are* to the extent to which they *are thought of* by God:

While that which is true would remain true even if no man knew of it and that which is good would retain its goodness, even if no man enjoyed it, on the contrary, if there were no God, not only would nothing really exist, but nothing would even be possible, and therefore the good and the true would both be cancelled out. We can, therefore, say that the *true* is that which coincides with the intellect of God, as the originary Being, and the *good* is that which coincides with His will.[49]

Since, therefore, eternal truths exist in the divine intellect, reason represents, first and foremost, the divine intellect itself. Only as a consequence of this does it also constitute the human knowledge of the connection between truths.[50]

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[47] *GP V* 457/*A VI/6* 475. It is worth noting the difference from the parallel passage in Locke (cfr. J. LOCKE, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. with an introduction, critical apparatus and glossary by P. H. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, p. 668), which Leibniz has Philalethes faithfully paraphrase.

[48] Cf. PLATO, *The Sophist*, 253 b-e.

[49] *GP VII* 111. That this last affirmation is not to be interpreted as implying divine arbitrarism, to which Leibniz was famously apposed, becomes clear when, in Chapter Six, I come to explain the relationship between will and intellect in God.

[50] W. Schmidt-Biggemann (*Von der Apologie zur Kritik. Der Rezeptionsrahmen der Theodizee*, in AA.VV., *Beiträge zur Wirkungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. A. Heinekamp, in "Studia Leibnitiana", Supplementa vol. XXVI, Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden 1986 [the article has been republished in W. SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Theodizee und Tatsachen. Das philosophische Profil der deutschen Aufklärung*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1988], p.171) underlines this important characteristic of the Leibnizian conception of "reason." He notes that the Leibnizian conception of reason "desubjectivised the conditions of knowledge inasmuch as, as a pre-established harmony it presented the concept of God, with its *a priori* predicates as a pre-condition of every form of being and every consciousness. This, on the one hand, constitutes an attack on Descartes but, on the other, offers the possibility to conceive of creation and knowledge as constituting two fundamentally identical motions. Knowledge (as it was conceived of *a priori*) could always be considered the natural subsequent fulfilment of divine creation." On this point cf. also the fifth section of my Chapter Six. There are interesting relations, which nonetheless I cannot explore here, between Leibniz's conviction of the continuity between divine and human reason and

Pure reason is, for Leibniz, the supreme good. It

is such a great and beautiful thing that the creation of the world would hardly have seemed worthwhile without it, and if it could not have been granted to the creatures without sin it was, to my mind, better that the first sin was committed.[51]

Every attack against reason as understood in this sense cannot be considered as a legitimate and due criticism of a fallible human faculty. It is, instead, a serious and absurd act of aggression against the truth itself, "a new kind of absurdity, unknown in past centuries":

to speak against *reason* is to speak against the truth, for reason is a chain of truths.[52]

Pure reason stands at no risk from illusion or falsehood, although it can fall into formal error which is, however, a simple procedural defect. This is due to the fact that, since pure reason is uniquely occupied in connecting ideas, it has nothing to do with appearance. This clearly emerges from § 64 of the *Preliminary Dissertation,* where Leibniz, in response to an objection from Bayle whereby reason would be exposed to the illusion of appearance and therefore fallible, like the senses, answers:

Therefore my answer to this objection is that the representation of the senses, even when they do all that in them lies, is often contrary to the truth; but it is not the same with the faculty of reasoning, when it does its duty, since a strictly reasoned argument is nothing but a linking together of truths».[53]

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his metaphysics of substances, as witness the emergence of the former in connection to the latter when Leibniz expresses his partial and conditional assent to Malebranche's doctrine of vision in God: "Hence it is good to remember that, not only in Father Malebranche's system, but also in mine, God alone is the immediate external object of souls, exerting a real influence on them. Although the ordinary scholastics seem to accept other influences, by species of some kind, which they believe to be sent by the objects into the soul, they do not cease to recognise that all our perfections are a continual gift of God and a finite participation in His infinite perfection. This suffices to conclude that even what is true and good in our knowledge is an emanation of the light of God, and that in this sense we can say that we see things in God" (*GP III* 660; Eng. trans *DM* 116).

[51] *FdCL* 182; cf. *GP III* 278.

[52] *GP V* 185/*A VI/6*. The full passage is as follows: "THEOPHILUS – Some people these days believe that it is cleaver to decry reason and to treat it as intolerable pedantry. I see little pamphlets whose self-congratulating authors have nothing to say, and sometimes I even see verses so fine that they should not be used to express such false thoughts. In fact, if those who make fun of reason were speaking in earnest this would be a new kind of absurdity, unknown in past centuries. To speak against *reason* is to speak against the truth, for reason is a chain of truths. This is to speak against oneself, and against one's own good, since the principal use of reason consists in knowing the good and pursuing it" (*GP V* 184 f. /*A VI/6* 199).

[53] *T* 86/109. Cf., on this matter, Y. BÉLAVAL, *op. cit.*, pp. 103 f.

This conception dissolves the notion that reason is of a destructive character, which underlies every objection to theodicy, be it sceptical or fideist. Bayle justified his Fideism, for example in the entries of the "Manicheans" and the "Paulicians" in his *Dictionnaire*, with the necessity to release faith from a rational criticism which cannot but seek to destroy it. Stressing this prejudice on Bayle's part,[54] Leibniz at once forcibly refutes it and opposes it with his own conception of reason which is, instead, of an innately edifying character:

> When it overthrows some thesis, it builds up the opposing thesis. And when it seems to be overthrowing the two opposing theses at the same time, it is then that it promises us something profound, provided that we follow it *as far as it can go*, not in a disputatious spirit but with an ardent desire to search out and discover the truth, which will always be recompensed with a great measure of success.[55]

Leibniz here sets up a dichotomy between critical reason as "true" reason and sceptical reason as "seeming" reason.[56] If the second can do nothing but destroy, the first is nonetheless able to edify, even when it is applied in order to overcome objections. Herein emerges, not a dogmatic quality of reason, but, quite the contrary, its very critical character, since the constitutive relationship of reason to truth lies not in the dependence on a datum drawn from intuition, but rather in the homogeneity of its operations with the objective connections of the truths themselves – with the divine intellect. Reason, as Leibniz presents it, does not perceive truths to discuss them, but discovers them discussing them. As it destroys and edifies, it discovers the very dialectic which exists between the truths in the mind of God. In this conception of reason, Leibniz differs not only from the sceptics but also from Descartes. On the one hand, as we have seen, Leibniz is opposed to Cartesian doubt, which he considers an excessive and crippling *formido oppositi*. On the other hand, without any contradiction, he also displays a more critical conception of reason than that held by Descartes, declaring himself unsatisfied with the Cartesian evidence and asserting that every piece of knowledge and every principle be further screened, demonstrated, deducted and justified. Faith in the truth and the requirement for an ever-deepening degree of verification are not two contradictory positions, but are rather complementary aspects of critical reason.[57]

The direct relationship between pure reason and truth does not impede them from also having a function in relation to appearance. On the contrary, it represents

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[54] Cf. *T* 76/99, 97/119.

[55] *T* 97/119.

[56] Cf. *T* 98/120.

[57] On the anti-cartesian meaning of the Leibnizian concept of reason as a "linking of truths" and on the consequent difference between the Cartesian and Leibnizian conceptions of the nature and function of "doubt," cf. Y. BÉLAVAL, *op. cit.*, pp. 59 ff., 62 ff.

the very foundation of this relation. This is true, above all, in the sense that divine reason, as the concatenation of the eternal truths in the divine intellect, determines the truths "which may be called *positive*, because they are the laws which it has pleased God to give to Nature, or because they depend upon those".[58] As a consequence, human reason can and must judge the apparent, the existent, in the light of the truths that it knows. This is the *a priori* procedure of reason[59] which, according to Leibniz, distinguishes the souls of man – i.e. of spirits – from those of beasts.[60] Leibniz describes this procedure and its advantages with particular clarity and incisiveness in the *Preface* to his *Nouveaux Essais*:

> only reason is capable of establishing reliable rules, of making up the deficiencies of those which have proved unreliable by allowing exceptions to them, and lastly of finding unbreakable links in the cogency of necessary inferences. This last often provides a way of foreseeing events without having to experience sensible links between images, as beasts must. Thus what shows the existence of inner sources of necessary truths is also what distinguishes man from beast.[61]

Since, as we have seen, "one may compare faith with experience",[62] faith, like experience, must be screened by reason, in order to discern between the true faith and false religions. This does not imply a de-mythicisation of faith or a rationalistic reductionism, but rather the dual necessity, on the one hand, to distinguish the true religion from the false and, on the other, to provide the "motives of credibility" for faith. There is, then, in Leibniz, no hint of "religious rationalism," if with this expression we mean the reduction of faith into reason, immanentism or the denial of transcendence. Doubtless, Leibniz often insists, throughout his oeuvre, on the continuity of human reason with the divine. Our reason, he writes, is a part

> in accordance with the whole, and it differs from that which is in God only as a drop of water differs from the ocean or rather as the finite from the infinite.[63]

We should not, however, allow ourselves to be drawn into over-simplified misreadings of this theory of the unity of human and divine reason. It does not imply that the two are identical, nor does it imply any negation of divine transcendence.

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[58] *T* 50/74.

[59] Cf. *ibidem*.

[60] Cf. *T* 87/109 f.; cf. also *GP V* 44, 130, 457/*A VI/6* 50, 143, 475; *VI* 600 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 209), 611 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 217); *VII* 330 ff.

[61] *GP V* 44/*A VI/6* 51.

[62] *T* 49/74.

[63] *T* 84/107.

Human reason, for Leibniz, is the "natural light",[64] which God has placed in us – the enlightenment whose role in the "true piety" has already been extensively discussed. The difference, which preserves divine transcendence, does not lie so much in the insurmountable distance between the infinity of divine reason and the finiteness of human reason, even though Leibniz does acknowledge that this is always an "infinite difference".[65] It rather consists in the fact that human reason constitutes a "gift" from God[66] to His creatures. Coming from Leibniz, this expression is not to be taken in a generic or vague sense. Reason is not simply a gift of God in the same way that everything else can be said to be a gift of God. With reason, God makes a gift of Himself to mankind: He "communicates himself to us".[67] This, incidentally, establishes the conceptual background for Leibniz's innatism, which is coherent with his general conception of reason, as distinct from that of Descartes. God does not invest us with innate ideas, but rather with His own reason, which is the faculty of innate ideas:

> In our mind there is not only a faculty, but also a disposition to knowledge, from which innate knowledge can be derived. For all necessary truths derive their proof from this internal light.[68]

It is as a consequence of this gift that man is the "image" of God, also in the active sense of imitating His architectonic and inventive works.[69] However, great, then the value of the participation of man in divine reason, the character of human reason as a "gift" nonetheless preserves God's transcendence, the creatural nature of the relation of man to God, and the free and sovereign gratuity of divine munificence. Leibniz is always aware of the danger of "averroism" and careful to avoid it:

> Thus we have no idea of anything in our soul, if not thanks to God's continuous action upon us. In other words, since the effect expresses its own cause, the essence of our soul is a certain expression, or imitation, or image of the divine essence, thought and will and all the ideas which are therein encompassed [...]. God is the sun and the light of souls, *lumen illuminans omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum*. And this opinion is far from newfangled. After the Sacred Scripture and the Church Fathers, who always sided with Plato over Aristotle, I recall having observed that in scholastic times many considered God as the light of the soul and, according to their way of expressing themselves, *intellectus agens animae rationalis*. The Averroists have

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[64] *Ibidem*; cf. *GP III* 291 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 285), 353, 660 (Eng. trans. *DM* 116); *IV* 453 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 60; *VI* 453; *VII* 111).

[65] *E* 445.

[66] *T* 73/96 *passim*.

[67] *GP IV* 453; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 59. I will have more to say on the importance of God's "communicating Himself to us" later on in Chapter Six, § 5.

[68] *GP III* 291; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 285.

[69] Cf. *GP V* 370/*A VI/6* 389; *VI* 604 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 211 f.).

invested this notion with an evil meaning [...] but others [...] have taken it in a sense worthy of God, and have lifted up our soul to the knowledge of His goodness.[70]

For Leibniz, to submit faith to the criticism of reason does not, then, mean to deny the transcendence of the truths of faith. It rather implies that we should also affirm the transcendent origin of reason, to which belong the faculty and the task of choosing the true faith and supplying the motives for converting and freely adhering thereto:

> For this reason it is necessary, − writes Leibniz in his *Systema theologicum*, − that the right reason, *inasmuch as it is the natural interpreter of God*, can judge of the authority of the other interpreters of God before they come to be admitted. After, however, these authorities have, so to say, demonstrated their own worthiness, reason must subject itself to faith.[71]

Reason, understood in this sense, is not the opposite of obedience to faith but, on the contrary, the faculty of free choice responsible for this obedience, in accordance with the formula for the relationship between reason and faith already cited.[72] Reason is justified by itself in overcoming itself. It attains to a rational recognition (a "re-cognition" which does not amount to a cognitive understanding) of mystery:

> To say with St. Paul, *O altitudo divitiarum et sapientiae,* is not renouncing reason, it is rather employing the reasons that we know, for they teach us that immensity of God whereof the Apostle speaks. But therein we confess our ignorance of the facts, and we acknowledge, moreover, before we see it, that God does all the best possible, in accordance with the infinite wisdom which guides his actions.[73]

3.   *Truth over and against Reason: Mystery*

In the passage quoted above, Leibniz defines reason's response to faith in terms of a problematic interlacing of knowledge and ignorance. We know of God's immensity and are able to attest to divine providence *a priori* ("before we see it"), despite our ignorance of the facts. This enigmatic attitude of reason cannot be explicated unless we bear in mind the "mysterious" quality of many of the articles of faith.

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[70] *GP I* 453.

[71] *TS* 13; *italics mine*.

[72] Cf. *T* 67 f./91.

[73] *T* 188/206 f. W.G. Jacobs (*Die Theodizeeproblematik in der Sicht Schellings*, in AA.VV., *Beiträge zur Wirkungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, cit., p. 230) writes: "The problem of theodicy emerges as a problem of knowledge, i.e. as the recognition of the limits of knowledge [...]. Leibniz traces his critical limits in a manner distinct from that of Kant, but, like Kant, does so in order to rebut sceptical objections."

We already observed above that appearance can reveal or hide truth, but mystery represents a different and more extreme relationship between truth and appearance. Mystery is a truth which is, by its very nature, contrary to appearance: "it is agreed," writes Leibniz, "that the Mysteries of religion are contrary to appearances".[74] This is the very definition of mystery that Leibniz presents.[75] Its contrast to appearance, then, represents not a merely accidental or fleeting characteristic of mystery, but rather its essential, defining characteristic.[76] Mystery is located within these precise limits: it is a truth and it stands in contrast to appearance. If these boundaries are shifted one way or another, we fall irremediably into the error of denying mystery or believing it to be omnipresent (which implies a denial of truth):

> In general one can say that the Socinians are too quick to reject everything that fails to conform to the order of nature, even when they cannot conclusively prove its impossibility. But sometimes their adversaries also go too far and push mistery to the verge of contradiction, thereby wronging the truth they seek to defend.[77]

In view of attempts to accuse Leibniz of a rationalistic reductionism which expects to resolve every mystery through rational comprehension, it is worth underlining with some force the importance which he attaches to the recognition of mystery in religion. As we have already stated, nothing is further from Leibniz's philosophy than the idea of a "Christianity not mysterious." He in no way aims to eliminate mystery from religion. Rather, he explicitly condemns any attempts to do

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[74] *T* 51/75 *passim;* cf. *GRUA* 68.

[75] In *COUT* 508 Leibniz provides a more generic but less significant definition of mystery: "*Mystery* is that which is occult and divine. Just as the ancients had their arcane rituals, so we have our dogmas which transcend our created knowledge." Nonetheless, this does not contradict Leibniz's more habitual definition.

[76] Leibniz sometimes introduces an interesting hermeneutic dimension into his definition of mystery, whereby the truth of mystery, in itself ineffable, can nonetheless be the subject of analogical interpretation: "We agreed that Mysteries should receive an explanation, but this explanation is imperfect. It suffices for us to have some analogical understanding of a Mystery such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, to the end that in accepting them we pronounce not words altogether devoid of meaning" (*T* 80/103). "This is as it is with respect to the *Mysteries*. There we also attempt to *elevate* what we conceive in the ordinary course of creatures to something more sublime, something that can correspond to those mysteries with regard both to nature and to divine power, without being able to conceive anything in them distinct enough and sufficiently characteristic of them to form an intelligible definition of the whole.
    This is also why we cannot perfectly account for the Mysteries, nor completely understand them here below. There is something more to them than simple words; however, we do not have anything by which we can arrive at an exact explanation of the terms" (*GP VI* 596; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess*. 197).

[77] *GP V* 481/*A VI/6* 498. For an incisive reading of Leibniz's conception of "mystery," cf. J. BARUZI, *op. cit.*, pp. 462 ff.

so.[78] For Leibniz, on the contrary, *the recognition of mystery is the prerequisite for theodicy*. Were it not for mystery, as a *permanent* element of faith, theodicy would be unnecessary. Theodicy is linked to the permanence of mystery. Mystery is not a simple initial enigma, which reason resolves and eliminates, thus completing its task. Were this the case, theodicy would resolve itself into a "natural theology," in accordance with the erroneous opinion of Victor Cousin and the French eclectic school. Leibniz's theodicy, on the contrary, does not aim to *rationally comprehend* mystery, but rather to rationally accept it, which is quite another matter. It is impossible to understand Leibniz's theodicy without clearly perceiving that, for Leibniz, the mystery of faith and the theodicy of reason are two permanent and correlative aspects thereof, since in faith there will always be mystery until the point at which, beyond the light of reason and grace, we are not given, at the end of days, the light of glory.[79] Until then, theodicy will constitute a permanent, ongoing task for the reason – that is to say, *it will always be necessary and never complete*.

This definition of the mysteries of faith as truths in contrast to appearances, which correlates with the other central thesis of the *Preliminary Dissertation,* that mysteries are truths "*above* reason",[80] should nonetheless be discussed and elucidated, that it may be understood in terms of its legitimate role in the context of reason's responses to appearance. In the *Preliminary Dissertation,* Leibniz refers to the Pauline preoccupation with the relationship between "seeing" and "being":

> I call 'seeing' here what one knows *a priori* by the causes; and 'believing' what one only judges by the effects, even though the one be as certainly known as the other. And one can apply here too the saying of St. Paul (2 Cor 5:7), that we walk by *faith* and not by *sight*.[81]

Fully knowing ("seeing") a truth means possessing "'adequate notions' [thereof], involving nothing that is not explained".[82] This is the principle of the logic of truth, which had already been espoused and followed since antiquity, when its foundations were laid by Aristotle. As far as the eternal truths, endowed with geometrical necessity, are concerned, we can say that we possess an adequate knowledge – a veritable "sight" – thereof. We can, moreover, say that we possess a secure method which permits us, not only to contemplate them distinctly, but also to "link" them according to the absolute necessity of their relations. It is well known that Leibniz openly defended the aristotelian method of syllogism and, for certain

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[78] Cf. *T* 83/106; *GP III* 143, 144, 480; *IV* 455 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 61).

[79] Cf. *T* 98/120.

[80] *T* 64/88 *passim*.

[81] *T* 75/99. Elsewhere Leibniz gives the following definition: "*to believe* means to be aware of the reasons which persuade us" (*GRUA* 181).

[82] *T* 80/103.

analogous features, the geometrical method of Euclid.[83] In the *Preliminary Dissertation*, too, we find acknowledgement of the value of aristotelian logic.[84]

The issue of the knowledge of contingent truths is another matter. It is, indeed, well-known that for Leibniz contingent truths are not resolvable into their simple elements – that is to say, are not demonstrable – if not by means of an infinite series of reasons, and, for this reason:

> God alone knows contingent truths *a priori* and sees their infallibility in a way other then through experience.[85]

Human reason, instead, cannot fully know contingent truths *a priori* and must trust to the experimental method, based on the acquisition of empirical data and on their *a priori* connection through reason:

> I believe that where objects of the senses are concerned the true criterion is the linking together of phenomena, i.e. the connectedness of what happens at different times and places and in the experience of different men – with men themselves being phenomena to one another, and very important ones so far as this present matter is concerned. And the linking of phenomena which warrants the *truths of fact* about sensible things outside us is itself verified by means of *truths of reason*, just as optical appearances are explained by geometry. It must be aknowledged, though, as you have clearly recognized, that none of this certainty is of the highest degree;[86] the truth about contingent singular things is grounded in the outcome that sensory phenomena are linked together in just the way required by truths of the intellect.[87]

This requires a logic of plausibility wherewith the evaluate appearances.[88] In the *Preliminary Dissertation*, too, Leibniz refers his readers back to these notes of the knowledge of contingent truths and expresses his hopes that the still young logic of plausibility will be developed both as an *ars judicandi* and as an *ars inveniendi*.[89] The ever imperfect and incomplete character and exclusively moral certainty of this knowledge (which, as we know, stands not at an inferior level but rather differs in its basic elements from the absolute certainty of necessary knowledge) link the mysteries

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[83] Cf., for example, *GP IV* 366 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 391); *V* 460/*A VI/6* 478; *VII* 519 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 465).

[84] Cf. *T* 66 f./91.

[85] *FdCNL* 181; Eng. trans *Phil*. *Ess*. 95.

[86] *GP V* 355/*A VI/6* 374 f.

[87] *GP V* 373/*A VI/6* 392.

[88] Cf. *GP V* 353/*A VI/6* 372 f.

[89] Cf. *T* 67/90 f., 68/92.

of faith to our knowledge of the contingent truths of physics, as Leibniz underlines on several occasions in his *Preliminary Dissertation*.[90]

At this point, however, we should also bring to light the differences between the positive truths, which are the object of science, and the mysteries of faith. These differences make it impossible to attain to a knowledge of mysteries similar to scientific knowledge of phenomena and therefore determine the specific role of reason with regard to faith. Our knowledge of contingent truths, indeed, though imperfect, is nonetheless perfectible, to the extent that the ideal of reaching a degree of determinacy equal to that of the necessary truths comes to stand as a normative idea. On the one hand, empirical data can always be expanded upon and enriched, while, on the other, rational analysis can always be refined and perfected:

> I do believe that we shall never advance as far as one might wish; yet it seems to me that considerable progress will eventually be made in explaining various phenomena. That is because the great number of experiments which are within our reach can supply us with more than sufficient data, so that all we lack is the art of employing them; and I am not without hope that the small beginnings of that will be extended, now that the infinitesimal calculus has given us the means for allying geometry with natural science and now that dynamics has supplied us with general laws of nature.[91]

It is well-known that, spurred on by his success in applying infinitesimal analysis to attain to a mathematical determination of mechanical curves of an equal degree of certainty to that of geometrical curves, Leibniz hoped to attain to similar results in the field of physics and, even, to make progress in metaphysics and theodicy through the, surely purely analogical use of his new analysis. This is the hope which suggests the famous image of the two labyrinths to Leibniz in the *Preface* to the *Theodicy*.[92]

Yet for the mysteries of faith, which include the "labyrinth" of predestination, knowledge cannot progress to the extent that we have a full "sight" of them and, for this reason, there can be nothing but analogy with the field of analysis. This is due to the nature of mysteries, which "are contrary to appearances"[93] and therefore "transcend our reason".[94] Reason, indeed, inasmuch as it is pure is also able to judge appearances, saving phenomena and connecting them *a priori* through laws. It is not, however, possible to proceed in this manner in the case of mystery, where

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[90] Cf. *T* 52/76, 72/96, 74/97, 80/103, 92/114 f.

[91] *GP V* 369 f./*A VI/6* 389.

[92] Cf. *T* 29/53 f. Cf., on this point, Appendix One: *The Metaphor of the "Two Labyrinths" and its Implications in Leibniz's Thought*. An extensive supplement dealing with the topic of the "two labyrinths" has been published in "Studia Leibnitiana" (Supplementa, vol. XXXIV, 1999).

[93] *T* 51/75.

[94] *T* 86/108.

phenomena stand and remain in contrast to the truth; it is impossible to save phenomena by means of a truth which is opposed to them. As Leibniz explains:

> 'reason' here is the linking together of the truths that we know by the light of nature [...]. The Mysteries transcend our reason, since they contain truths that are not comprised in this sequence.[95]

Mysteries, indeed, comprise contingent truths, since they regard the order which God has given to the world and stand in contrast to appearances which cannot be linked through these truths. Leibniz makes this point even more clearly in his *Nouveaux Essais*. To Philalethes' proposal to define as lying "*above* reason" "every view whose truth or probability we do not see to be derivable by reason from sensation or from reflexion," Theophilus objects that, on the basis of this definition, "everything we do not know and lack the capacity to know in our present state would be above reason." Often such cases result from a simple lack of empirical data or defectiveness of rational method:

> Thus all these things could become known or achievable with the help of reason if we had fuller information as to the facts, more perfect organs and more exalted minds.

Philalethes then corrects his definition:

> If I take my definition to include not only our sensation and reflection but also that of any other possible created mind, then that objection fails.

To this specification, Theophilus responds:

> If you take it in that way, you are right. But then there will be the other difficulty, namely that by your definition nothing will be 'above reason', because God can always bestow the means of finding out any truth whatever through sensation or reflexion. Indeed, the greatest mysteries are made known to us by God's testimony, which we recognize through those rational grounds for belief on which our religion rests – grounds which unquestionably depend on sensation and reflection. The question, then, seems to be not whether the existence of a fact or the truth of a proposition can be deduced from the sources which reason employs (from sensation and reflection, that is, or rather from the outer and inner senses), but whether a created mind is capable of knowing the wherefore of this fact or the *a priori* 'reason' for this truth. Thus we can say that what is 'above reason' can indeed be *learned* but cannot be *understood* by the methods and powers of created reason, of however great and exalted a kind. It is God's unique privilege to understand it, as it is his sole prerogative to proclaim it (*de le mettre en fait*).[96]

The relationship between reason and faith thus opens up a new and peculiar use of reason, which consists neither in the pure linking of necessary truths nor in the *a priori* linking of contingent phenomena, but rather in the foundation of belief in

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[95] *Ibidem.*

[96] *GP V* 475 f. /*A VI/6* 492 f.

mysteries, notwithstanding the opposition of appearances, on the basis of *a priori* motives of credibility. Reason can do no more than this:

> Hitherto we have been illumined by the *light of Nature* and by that of *grace*, but not yet by that of *glory*. Here on earth we see apparent injustice, and we believe and even know the truth of the hidden justice of God; but we shall see that justice when at last the Sun of Justice shall show himself as he is.[97]

What reason can do, however, is far from negligible. It is indispensable for faith because, thanks to the agency of reason, the justice and munificence of God "will show themselves through the *clouds* of *a seeming* reason that is deceived by outward appearances, in proportion as the mind is elevated by *true* reason to that which to us is *invisible*, but none the less *sure*".[98]

All of the above discussion should be borne in mind, from now on, when reflecting on the scholarly commonplace that Leibniz represses the existence of evil in his *Theodicy*. The truth of faith with which the *Theodicy* is concerned, God's justice, is a mystery precisely because it is "contrary to appearances." Evil lies in this very "appearance," which stands in opposition to any human vision of God's justice. This does not mean that evil is mere appearance, that it does not exist. On the contrary, for Leibniz, evil is the inevitable and irreducible *datum* of appearance. Referring to the mystery of God's justice in the presence of evil, Leibniz refers to "the appearances of harshness that may repel us" and recalls Luther's observation that

> it is love in the highest degree to love him who to flesh and blood appears (*paroit*) so unlovable, so harsh toward the unfortunate and so ready to condemn, and to condemn for evils in which he appears to be the cause or accessory, at least in the eyes of those who allow themselves to be dazzled by false reasons.[99]

The appearance of evil is its presence, which reason cannot and must not remove. Far from failing to acknowledge the existence of evil, Leibniz makes it his central problem: it is as a consequence of evil that God's justice is a mystery. Evil is therefore an undeniable appearance. What reason can and must deny is, instead, the truth of evil. Contrary to Bayle, according to whom reason must necessarily infer the truth of evil (and therefore the evil God of the Manicheans) from its existence, Leibniz's *Theodicy* maintains that God's justice is a mystery – that truth is contrary to appearance. Herein lies the very task of any theodicy.

Of the many biblical passages quoted by Leibniz, surely none is so recurrent (not only in the *Theodicy* but throughout his *oeuvre* as a whole) and so profoundly

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[97] *T* 98/120; cf. *FdCL* 251.

[98] *T* 98/119 f.; *italics mine*.

[99] *T* 75 f./99; cf. 98/120.

loved as *Rom* 11: 33: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!".[100] This passage does not, for Leibniz, imply any condemnation of philosophical theodicy. On the contrary, herein lies the very motto for theodicy, when the passage is understood as being an exclamation on the part of reason itself, as Leibniz explains in the passage already cited above:

> To say with St. Paul, *O altitudo divitiarum et sapientiae,* is not renouncing reason, it is rather employing the reasons that we know, for they teach us that immensity of God whereof the Apostle speaks. But therein we confess our ignorance of the facts, and we acknowledge, moreover, before we see it, that God does all the best possible, in accordance with the infinite wisdom which guides his actions.[101]

The recognition of mystery by no means represents a triumph of faith over reason, as Bayle's fideism would have it, but it can constitute the triumph of faith with the assistance of reason, if reason is able, not to accept mystery however absurd (which is impossible and illusory), not to understand it (which is impossible), but to *acknowledge* it – i.e. to reasonably accept it – and, above all, to make its significance felt in practical life.

Leibniz and Bayle's conflict as to whether a distinction should be made between truth against reason and truth above reason is a consequence of a more fundamental conflict regarding the concept of reason.[102] If human reason is nothing

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[100] Direct quotations or references to this passage in Saint Paul occur in *T* 36/60, 38/62, 188/206, 221/239, 361/369; and elsewhere in Leibniz's writings in *GP III* 37; *IV* 455, 457 [Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 61, 63]; *VI* 457, 459, 460; *VII* 464; *GRUA* 293, 299, 343, 366 [Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 115], 376, 378, 406, 408, 432, 440, 442, 461, 502; *S* 84, 95.

[101] *T* 188/206 f. It is not unuseful, at this point, to recall the remainder of the relevant passage from Saint Paul: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (*Rom* 11:34-36). It is also worth recalling Psalm 139, to which St. Paul refers: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; / it is high, I cannot attain unto it.. / [...]. My substance was not hid from thee,/ when I was made in secret,/ and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth./ Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect;/ and in thy book all my members were written,/ which in continuance were fashioned,/ when as yet there was none of them. / How precious also are thy thoughts unto me,/ O God! how great is the sum of them! / If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand:/ when I awake, I am still with thee. / Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God" (vv. 6:15-19 a). All of which leads us to believe that Leibniz was a convicted exponent of the Pauline emphasis on mystery. In *GRUA* 440 you can find the full quotation of the Pauline passage. Indeed there is no evidence to support any assertions to the contrary.

[102] It seems to me that G.E. Barié's argument (in *La spiritualità dell'essere e Leibniz,* CEDAM, Padova 1933, pp. 369 f.), according to which Leibniz recognises neither mystery nor those truths which lie beyond the grasp of reason, inasmuch as, in his opinion, these must both be subject to the principle of non-contradiction, does not pay sufficient heed to the Leibnizian conception of mystery, which is not a truth contrary to reason (and therefore to the principle of non-contradiction),

but just or errant judgement on the basis of appearance, it cannot but be an obstacle to the acknowledgement of mysteries, which are contrary to appearance. That which lies above and beyond reason is thus also against reason. We are consequently left with no option but to abandon reason, indeed, to revile it, embracing faith instead. Leibniz believes that human reason is, above all, "pure reason," "the linking together of truths." It resembles divine reason and, *to this extent*, also comes to represent a faculty for judging appearances. Human reason, that is to say, is critical reason, which does not base itself on appearances in order to judge of truth, but, on the contrary, bases itself on *a priori* truth in order to judge of appearances. It is not then an obstacle, but rather a necessary aid, not only for understanding the contents of mysteries, but also for providing the motives of credibility for the mysteries themselves, for justifying our faith in them, rationally upholding those truths which lie beyond human reason but do not go counter to it. The correct position is not, then, the humiliation of reason before mystery, but rather the placing of reason at the service of mystery, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Reason thus emerges in an ancilliary relation to faith, but, in a certain sense, it also represents an integral part of faith and the love of God.

Bayle's position is radical: that which lies above and beyond reason also goes against reason. On the one hand, this means that reason is able to confute that which it does not understand, on the other, that the mysteries of faith should not have to measure themselves against reason nor put forward any defence against its objections. This approach, presented by Bayle, for example, in his "clarifications" to the entry on "Manicheanism" in his *Dictionnaire*, is cited by Leibniz on numerous occasions. Leibniz and Bayle stand in sharp contrast. Leibniz is, at once, more radical and more conciliatory than Bayle. On the one hand, states Leibniz, if the mysterious truths of faith were upheld as necessary truths, any conclusive objections that reason could raise against them would not only be incontrovertible, but would also be definitive, and faith could not but seek refuge in a *credo quia absurdum*: in such a case, indeed, if objections proved themselves true, then the mysteries of faith could not but be false. If, as Bayle believes, reason is a mere judgement of appearances, we can always conceive of a higher faculty, i.e. faith, which, instead, takes in the truth; but if, as Leibniz believes, reason is rather "the linking together of truths", then "a truth can never be contrary to reason, and once a dogma has been disputed and refuted by reason, instead of its being incomprehensible, one may say that nothing is easier to understand, nor more obvious, than its absurdity".[103] In this case, were we to oppose faith to reason, we should maintain that "two contradictories might be true at the same time",[104] i.e., in other words, that "there would be contradiction between the

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but a truth contrary to appearances. It is on these grounds that reason cannot comprehend mystery, even if it can acknowledge its non-contradiction.

[103] *T* 64/88.

[104] *T* 51/75.

truths"[105] and "since reason is a gift of God, even as faith is, contention between them would cause God to contend against God".[106] Yet the mysteries of faith, which include the truths which form the subject of theodicy, refer to the order of contingency and God's control over that order. We are concerned, then, with contingent truths, which cannot be refuted through recourse to absolutely necessary demonstrations. These regard the harmonious determination of the contingent on the part of God and, to be understood, would require "the clear knowledge of an infinity of things at once".[107] This distinct and sufficient knowledge of the infinite series of reasons for universal harmony lies beyond the finite capacities of human reason, but we cannot, on this basis, argue that this harmonious order is contrary to reason: it is rather actively thought up by reason – by divine reason. In discussion with Bayle, Leibniz, therefore, concedes the "*incomprehensibility*" and "*the lack of probability*" of the mysteries of faith, but nonetheless does not accept the thesis that they cannot therefore be logically upheld:[108] reason, on the basis of *a priori* motives of credibility, is able to uphold the truth of the mysteries against appearances and against the objections based thereon.

4.   Faith and Apologetics:Comprehending and Upholding

We cannot, therefore, *understand* the mysteries of faith, yet nonetheless we can rationally *uphold* them.[109] In § 5 of the *Preliminary Dissertation*, Leibniz Leibniz clearly defines the terms at stake:

> It seems, according to what I have just said, that there is often some confusion in the expressions of those who set at variance philosophy and theology, or faith and reason: they confuse the terms 'explain', 'comprehend', 'prove', 'uphold' [...]. Mysteries may be *explained* sufficiently to justify belief in them; but one cannot *comprehend* them, nor give understanding of how they come to pass [...]. Nor is it possible for us, either, to prove Mysteries by reason; for all that which can be proved *a priori*, or by pure reason, can be comprehended. All that remains for us then, after having believed in the Mysteries by reason of the proofs of the truth of religion (which are called 'motives of credibility') is to be able to *uphold* them against objections.[110]

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[105] *T* 89/112.

[106] *T* 73/96.

[107] *T* 64/148.

[108] Cf. *T* 74/97.

[109] With regard to the essence of God, P. Burgelin (*op. cit.*, p. 77) writes: "Leibnizian rationalism here has a negative outcome. We can reasonably defend mystery, not demonstrate it. Otherwise, the case for God is not unique […]."

[110] *T* 52/76.

The impossibility of understanding mysteries is the reason why it is sufficient merely to uphold them: if they could, indeed, be comprehended, before upholding them we should first demonstrate them. Leibniz, as we have seen, is categorical on this point and rejects any rhetorical loophole outright. For example, with regard to the strategy of trying "to weaken opponents' proofs, under the pretext that they are only objections," he points out that

> the opponent can play the same game and can reverse the denominations, exalting his arguments by naming them 'proofs' and sinking ours under the blighting title of 'objections'.[111]

This situation does not, however, emerge if the upholder of faith is conscious of the incomprehensibility of mysteries and does not therefore assume to demonstrate their veracity. Given that mysteries, as we have seen, do not regard eternal, but positive truths, we can then also affirm another fundamental point: that neither can objections to mysteries be demonstrative in an absolute sense. Faith in mysteries, then, and objections thereto, both occupy the ground of the plausible. On the basis of the concept of critical reason, illustrated above, Leibniz can therefore affirm that reason can neither comprehend nor prove mysteries, but it does not even need to do so: it is sufficient and necessary, for the purposes of the defence of faith, that reason can explain and uphold mysteries. To "comprehend" and "prove" would imply to possess "'adequate notions', involving nothing that is not explained",[112] to render the matter reasonable "through the efficient cause",[113] having "all the ideas of everything that goes to make it up" with such ideas all being "clear, distinct, *adequate*".[114] Such a comprehension is neither possible nor necessary in order to uphold the truth of mysteries, "since the principal thesis concerning the Mystery itself is not evident".[115] It is, instead, sufficient to "explain" and "uphold" mysteries – to have "some analogical under standing",[116] "some ideas thereof,",[117] to comprehend the "*what*," even if the "*how*" escapes to us.[118] On the basis of this "explanation" and on the basis of that which, instead, we know *a priori*, we can reasonably "uphold" mysteries against any objections which may arise thereto.

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[111] *T* 65/89; cf. *FdCNL* 158.

[112] *T* 80/103.

[113] *T* *83*/106.

[114] *T* 92/114.

[115] *T* 96/118.

[116] *T* 80/103.

[117] *T* 92/114; cf. 95/117.

[118] Cf. *T* 81/104.

Theodicy, as a rational discourse on the mysteries of faith, thus falls within the genre of the *apology*:[119] that is to say, its task is not to "prove" but rather to "uphold." We should, nonetheless, make sure we understand this in the correct sense. Whilst, for Leibniz, too, apologetics surely draw from rhetoric, inasmuch as they seek to persuade,[120] this connection should not be understood in an over-simplistic sense. Indeed, if we think of rhetoric in the negative sense of a discourse which seeks to persuade through recourse to plausible argument alone, but not to truth (whether this be due to a conviction that truth does not exist or due to a belief that it is inscrutable), the philosophical apologetics of Leibniz should be understood as standing in direct opposition to rhetoric. For a philosopher who, first and foremost, defines reason as "the linking together of truths," such a rhetoric would epitomise the irrational. It would represent a fundamentally sceptical discipline, scorning truth. Rational apologetics, instead, is philosophy – i.e. the love of truth – and is a critical discipline:

> Nothing would be so easy to terminate as these disputes on the rights of faith and of reason if men would make use of the commonest rules of logic and reason with even a modicum of attention. Instead of that, they become involved in oblique and ambiguous phrases, which give them a fine field for declamation, to make the most of their wit and their learning. It would seem, indeed, that they have no wish to see the naked truth, peradventure because they fear that it may be more disagreeable than error: for they know not the beauty of the Author of all things, who is the source of truth.[121]

In Leibnizian apologetics, therefore, the dialectical arguments which aim to persuade, for all their extensiveness, are nonetheless secondary. They can never in themselves justify faith. On the contrary, they must themselves be justified by an *a priori* certainty. As we have already stated, we cannot prove mysteries, because we cannot comprehend them. We can, instead, explain and uphold them. In what sense can mysteries be explained? "Mysteries," writes Leibniz, "may be *explained* sufficiently to justify belief in them." That is to say, we can put our faith in mysteries "by reason of the proofs of the truth of religion (which are called 'motives of

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[119] It is significant that Des Bosses proposed to Leibniz that the Latin title of the *Theodicy* might be: *Causa Dei asserta Apologia* etc., arguing that "thus the aim of the book might, in fact, be understood by all" (*GP II* 431 f.). Leibniz objected in his reply that "I would say that we can keep the title *Essais de Théodicée,* if you agree. Theodicy is, in fact, a kind of scientific genre and refers precisely to the theory of the justice (that is to say, of the contemporaneous wisdom and goodness) of God" (*GP II* 437). At the head of a draft of the *Preface* to the *Theodicy,* we find two titles "Theodicy or Apology for our Notions of the Attributes of God, in Response to Bayle's Latest Writings" and "Theodicy or Apology for the Justice of God by Means of the Notions which He Himself has Given Us" (*GRUA* 495). Leibniz, moreover, begins his essay *Causa Dei asserta per Justitiam ejus* with the words: *"The apologetic treatment of God's cause […]"*(*GP VI* 439). Cf. also Leibniz's project for an encyclopedia of apologetics (cf. *GRUA* 35 ff.).

[120] Rhetoric, inasmuch as it represents a simple means of persuasion "can be used for good ends or evil" (*A 1/3* 513).

[121] *T* 68/91 f.; cf. *GRUA* 103. On the evils of rhetoric, cf. *GP III* 192; *V* 398 f., 464 /*A VI/6* 419, 482.

credibility')." These cannot provide us with an *"absolute certainty,"* but they can offer us a *"moral certainty,"* which is distinct from the absolute but ultimately no less certain.[122] Our motives of credibility stem from that which we "know" of faith,[123] i.e. from that which we are able to "comprehend" and to "prove." In faith, indeed, as is already underlined above, there are mysteries, but not everything is mysterious. The fundamental principles of faith – the existence of a creating and provident God and the immortality of the soul – can be reasonably comprehended and proven, as Leibniz also recalls in the *Preliminary Dissertation*, at least with reference to the existence of God.[124] On the basis of these principles, *and only on this basis,* can we explain the mysteries of faith, not in the sense of rendering them comprehensible – of understanding the "how" – but rather in the sense of being able to surely uphold them for "what" they are. With reference to the central theme of the theodicy: because we *know* that a just God exists, then we can and must *uphold* his justice against any appearance and any objection (which cannot but be grounded in appearances) .[125] If objections contest the truth of God's justice on the basis of appearances, theodicy's task is not, first and foremost, to transform the meaning and interpretation of appearances, but rather to contrast appearances with the force of truth. And it is only on the basis of this fundamental task that theodicy can also take on another role, which is nonetheless secondary and non-crucial – which can, indeed, never be realised in a definitive and satisfactory manner, for all its legitimate worth – i.e., that of seeking to provide a different interpretation of appearances in the light of truth. To "seeming reason" is opposed "true reason," not another reason based on appearances.[126]

This is a crucial point of the philosophical and critical apologetics of Leibniz, since it differentiates Leibniz's arguments from mere rhetoric. An *apologia* should not be a mere *a posteriori* argument on the basis of plausibility. It should, rather, represent an *a posteriori* argument on appearance on the basis and in the light of a *a*

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[122] Cf. *T* 52/76.

[123] Cf. *T* 98/120.

[124] Cf. *T* 75/98.

[125] Cf. *T* 98/120.

[126] Cf. *ibidem*. P. Burgelin (*op. cit.*, p. 99) writes: "We are here concerned with an *a priori* certainty, based on the notion that, for theological reasons, this world cannot but be the best of all possible worlds. From an experiential point of view, this 'best' is pre-supposed and it is sufficient to demonstrate the reason why this does not appear to be that which it is *in se*. We are dealing, then, with hypotheses which are infinitely plausible. We do not, then, know either in what ways nor why our world is the best." Only one point needs to be made regarding this way of putting the key terms of the matter at hand, namely the expression "hypotheses which are infinitely plausible." On the basis of what we have already said with reference to the relationship between truth and appearance, the very *a priori* foundation of these certainties and the mysterious character of that which is to be demonstrated means that the matters in question are not "infinitely plausible hypotheses" but rather *a priori* truths, even if they are implausible.

priori rational certainty of truth, which permits us to uphold truth against appearance and therefore to judge appearances on the basis of *a priori* principles. For this reason Leibniz accepts doubt and objection, but never as tools for scepticism. They simply represent, instead, an occasion for apologetics.[127] Leibniz refers to this as an *a posteriori* procedure, but he thereby only means to say that it does not involve a demonstration, which would be *a priori*. That our world, in which evil exists, is the best of all possible worlds – that it is the world determined by divine justice - cannot be demonstrated. It can, instead, be upheld as a truth justifying that which we experience (*a posteriori*) on the basis of that which we know (*a priori*):

> It should even be concluded that there must have been great or rather invincible reasons which prompted the divine Wisdom to the permission of the evil that surprises us, from the mere fact that this permission has occurred: for nothing can come from God that is not altogether consistent with goodness, justice and holiness. Thus we can judge by the event (or *a posteriori*) that the permission was indispensable, although it be not possible for us to show this (*a priori*) by the detailed reasons that God can have had therefore; as it is not necessary either that we show this to justify him.[128]

Leibniz's *Theodicy,* then, is not an apology for the world, but an apology for God.[129] It does not present an *a posteriori* justification for the existence of evil, what I will here refer to as an *a posteriori* theodicy. Neither can it provide an *a priori* demonstration of God's justice in permitting evil. It can only link our *a posteriori* consideration of the existence of evil back to our *a priori* knowledge of the existence of a just and provident God, and therefore uphold the latter truth over the former appearance. For this reason, I will here adopt a non-Leibnizian set of terms which I feel make his real conception and intention clearer, referring to his approach as an "*a priori* theodicy," as opposed to an "*a posteriori* theodicy" which would seek to justify the existence of evil in the world, providing demonstrative evidence of divine justice.[130]

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[127] Cf. *T* 66/90.

[128] *T* 70/94; cf. *CF* 120 f.

[129] An "apology" for God is also, naturally, an apology for the Christian faith. Grouping Leibniz with Malebranche on this point, A. Robinet (*Malebranche et Leibniz. Relations personnelles présentées avec les textes complets des auteurs et de leurs correspondants revus, corrigés et inédits*, J. Vrin, Paris 1955, p. 16) writes: "Christian apologetics, in its rational universality, is their shared mission [...]. The history of philosophy owes to their tacit understanding and profound friendship in defence of the values under attack, the construction of two monumental bastions, which constitute the final attempt on the part of the classical and systematic spirit of Christianity to safeguard itself."

[130] In effect, Leibniz is already thinking along the same lines as Kant who, over eighty years later, in his essay "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy" would make an explicit distinction between "authentic theodicy" and "doctrinal theodicy." I have nonetheless avoided forcing this connection in choosing my terminology here, in order to avoid exposing the present study to irrelevant and digressive objections. The importance of the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* theodicy is noted by K. Wolff (*Schillers Theodizee bis zum Beginn der Kantischen Studien. Mit einer Einleitung über das Theodizee-Problem in der Philosophie und Literatur des 18.*

In the course of his *Theodicy*, Leibniz indiscriminately masses together a fair quantity of traditional apologetic arguments regarding the existence of evil. The large number of these arguments, which occupy a good part of the text, in itself suggests that we are here dealing with the dialectical part of the apologetic discourse, not with its founding premises. Were this not enough, Leibniz himself clearly makes this very point at the conclusion of the first part of the *Theodicy*:

> But, in fine, all these attempts to find reasons, where there is no need to adhere altogether to certain hypotheses, serve only to make clear to us that there are a thousand ways of justifying the conduct of God. All the disadvantages we see, all the obstacles we meet with, all the difficulties one may raise for oneself, are no hindrance to a belief founded on reason, even when it cannot stand on conclusive proof, as has been shown and will later become more apparent, that there is nothing so exalted as the wisdom of God, nothing so just as his judgements, nothing so pure as his holiness, and nothing more vast than his goodness.[131]

The true meaning and force of Leibnizian apologetics lie far beyond the reaches of traditional apologetic argument (and therefore the refutations of these arguments which have and can be put forward do not strike to the core of Leibniz's *Theodicy*). These arguments, as Leibniz explicitly declares, are non-necessary and non-essential, even though they are not without their utility: "it is sometimes well *to show oneself ready to examine certain objections* (*il est bon quelquefois d'avoir la complaisance d'examiner certaines objections*)",[132] to answer to objections with such arguments.[133] Leibniz counters Bayle's metaphor for the discussion of the truth of faith as a conflict between two armies on an open battle field with the alternative image of a fortress under siege. Apologetic arguments are comparable to "some *sortie* beyond [the defender's] need":

> I will say that the defender is not vanquished so long as he remains protected by his entrenchments; and if he risks some sortie *beyond his need*, it is permitted to him to withdraw within his fort, without being open to blame for that.[134]

Jahrhunderts, Haupt & Hammon, Leipzig 1909, p. 2), who also affirms that "only in the former case are we dealing with theodicy in a rigorous sense," whilst the second consists in an "attempt at a theological and moral demonstration of God."

[131] *T* 161/181. To avoid misunderstanding, it is worth specifying here that the term "inconveniences (*inconveniens*)," here used by Leibniz to indicate evil is not a distasteful euphemism but a technical term of particular resonance, which indicates that which may detach one from or, indeed, directly oppose universal harmony, which Leibniz refers to as "convenience (*convenance*)." The term is therefore very similar to "*zweckwidrig*," which Kant frequently uses, and which occurs at the beginning of his essay "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy" (cf. I. KANT, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie Ausgabe, vol. VIII, p. 255; Eng. trans. cit., p. 17).

[132] *T* 66/90 f.; *italics mine*.

[133] Cf. *T* 93/115, 93/116.

[134] *T* 95/117; *italics mine*.

Leibniz ultimately terms this kind of argumentation "supererogation".[135] Such arguments are not and never will be definitive, conclusive, beyond discussion. Their truth does not lie within them and they do not endow the thesis being argued with any truth, but simply uphold it in the face of any objections.[136] They thus only acquire any meaning and any value as truths to the extent to which they serve to "uphold" the ends of apology, which are guaranteed by the *a priori* certainty of the principles of faith (and, naturally, this means just as well that any validity deriving from these arguments would crumble were Leibniz unable to "prove," *a priori*, the principles on which faith is founded, and, for that matter, that any essential objections to Leibniz's *Theodicy* should refer to these *a priori* demonstrations alone).

On the basis of all this, I would propose the following thesis: *Leibniz's* Theodicy *shares many arguments with* a posteriori *theodicy, but these are not held in any value in their own right, but only inasmuch as they are legitimised by* a priori *theodicy.*[137]

Let us now follow Leibniz's own discourse, which takes us from that which is founded towards that which is foundational, thus tracing us back retrospectively towards the justification for the discourse itself.

5. *The Antagonist of the Theodicy: Sceptcism*

Before moving on to examine Leibniz's apologetic arguments, it is worth briefly reflecting, in the light of the elements which have emerged in the course of this chapter, on the real identity of the antagonist being addressed in the *Theodicy*. This is far from being a secondary concern for our understanding of the text in question since, as we have seen, the discourse in the *Theodicy* is of an essentially polemical character.

In seeking to respond to this query, many individual names might crop up, with whom Leibniz himself explicitly takes issue: first of all Bayle, then Descartes, the Cartesians, Spinoza, Hobbes, and others yet. But which *type* of antagonist is Leibniz addressing? This question is important, because it is synonymous with another: what does the *Theodicy* aim to do? The most immediate answer is, without a doubt that the antagonist is the fideism of Bayle. Yet since, as we have seen, Leibniz calls into question the very foundations of the problem of faith-reason relation and therefore

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[135] *T* 97/119.

[136] Cf. *T* 82/105.

[137] Cf. D. ALLEN, *The Theological Relevance of Leibniz' Theodicy*, in AA.VV., *Akten des II Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 17.-22. Juli 1972, vol. III: *Metaphysik -Ethik - Ästhetik - Monadenlehre*, in "Studia Leibnitiana", Supplementa vol. XIV, Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden 1975, pp. 87 f. S. Landucci (*op. cit.*, pp. 282 f.) also notes the *a priori* character of Leibniz's theodicy, but does not attribute to it the importance which it acquires in the present study.

goes beyond the superficial dichotomy between fideism and scepticism, such a preliminary, knee-jerk response proves unsatisfactory.

The biographies of Leibniz[138] recount Leibniz's encounter with the theologian Christoph Matthäus Pfaff, who, eager to unmask the occult enemies of faith, and perhaps also to show off is own astuteness, asserted that in the *Theodicy* Leibniz's apparent defence of faith concealed his overall agreement with the irreligious Bayle. We have all[139] had a good chuckle at this over-shrewd assertion and Leibniz's ironic response.[140] Yet the sneaking suspicion of the theologian Pfaff has proven far more widespread and deep-rooted than one might think. Is it not, indeed, continuously revived by those who accuse Leibniz of referring exclusively to the God of the philosophers without believing in the God of faith? Since it is indisputable that Leibniz, both in the *Theodicy* and on many other occasions throughout his oeuvre, openly declares his intention of writing for the glory of God and in defence of faith, do not also these individuals resemble the theologian who, seeking to be somewhat too smart for his own good, attempted to unveil the "real" Leibniz but in reality only over-reaches his own intentions? As much can certainly be said of those who over-hastily cast off Leibniz's own discourse, founding their readings on the double presupposition that Leibniz is concerned with the God of the philosophers and that this God cannot be identified with the God of faith. Leibniz's study of the relationship between reason and faith is geared towards calling into question the very bases of these presuppositions. He ultimately comes to the conclusion that reason is necessary to faith and in no way opposed to it. In sum, for Leibniz, the God of the philosophers and the God of faith are one and the same. Indeed, anyone who opposes the one to the other (i.e. any proponent of fideism) is falling away from the true faith. One may legitimately object to and argue against Leibniz's position on this matter. But it is not legitimate to refute Leibniz outright on the basis of mere dogmatic presuppositions of the opposing arguments.

It is certainly true, then, that Bayle's fideism can be identified as the antagonist being addressed in the *Theodicy*, but this is essentially a result of Bayle's scorn for human reason, his conviction that reason cannot attain to any transcendent truth – that it indeed represents an obstacle to our perception of such truths.[141] In this sense,

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[138] Cf. *D I* VII ff.; G. E. GUHRAUER, *Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibniz. Eine Biographie*, Hirt, Breslau 1842, 1846²; reprint Georg Olms, Hildesheim 1966, vol. II, pp 256 f.

[139] With the exception of E. Cione (*op. cit.*, p. 40), who shares Pfaff's suspicions.

[140] V. Mathieu (*Saggio introduttivo. La conciliazione di ragione e fede punto culminante della riflessione leibniziana*, in in G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Saggi di teodicea sulla bontà di Dio, sulla libertà dell'uomo, sull'origine del male*, Nuova edizione italiana a cura di V. Mathieu, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1994, p. 13 writes: "How could Pfaff not understand that Leibniz was making fun of him? This was the symptom of an alarming ingenuity in a man who had set about discussing such a subtle and intelligent, although often superficial author as Bayle."

[141] In his *Confessio Philosophi* Leibniz already identifies and criticises this unilateralism of fideism: "I have said nothing of Christ's merit, nor of the aid of the Holy Spirit or the extraordinary succour of divine grace, because these matters depend on divine revelation and we had agreed that

Bayle's fideism is truly nothing more than another manifestation of libertine scepticism.[142] Although the former accepts the mysteries of faith unconditionally and the latter denies them, they both rest on the same basic assumption that human reason is incapable of attaining to transcendent truth.[143] If we accept, as we should, and as Kant clearly observed,[144] that philosophical theodicy is always also a logodicy, and that, therefore, the defence of God's justice can never be detached from the defence of the validity of reason, then fideism and scepticism merely represent two sides of the same coin – that, in a broader sense, fideism is essentially a form of scepticism. The real antagonist being addressed by Leibniz, then, is scepticism, whether it rejects faith in the name of reason or reason in the name of faith. It is to scepticism, then, that Leibniz opposes his rational criticism.

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first I, the philosophical catechumen, should expound to you the theology of the philosopher and that then you should, in turn, initiate me in the revealed mysteries of Christian wisdom. This was to save you, oh Theophilus, from the effort of proving to me that which I already profess and recognise, at the same time as making more clear the harmony between faith and reason and more manifest the foolishness both of those who, bloated with doctrine, scorn religion and of those who, proud of the revelations granted, detest the philosophy which demonstrates their ignorance" (*CF* 130 f.).

[142] Both F.A. Lange (*Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, besorgt und mit biographischem Vorwort versehen von Hermann Cohen, J. Baedeker, Iserlohn und Leipzig 1887, pp. 242-244) and F.-T. Perrens (*Les libertins en France au XVIIe siècle*, Calmann Lévy, Paris 1899, pp. 403 ff.) consider that Bayle was doubtless a libertine. P. Hazard (*La crise de la conscience européenne (1680-1715)*, 3 vol., Boivin & C., Paris 1935, vol. I, p. 144) is, more prudently of the idea that Bayle "slips towards Pyrrhonism," even if he does not unconditionally cede thereto (cf. vol. I, pp. 150 ff.). J.S. Spink, too, (*French Free-Thought from Gassendi to Voltaire*, University of London-The Athlone Press, London 1960, p. 285) tends towards caution, distinguishing between Bayle's convictions ("Bayle remained a Christian writer, and his criticisms, though pushed as far as any non-Christian writer could have pushed it, did not take him outside the Christian orbit, because his point of view and base of operations were placed within the Reformed Church and he always looked upon the unbelievers as 'them,' not as 'us'") and the effects produced by his writings ("But the readers of his Dictionary were not to know the niceties of Bayle's attitudes of mind"). On the libertine implications of Bayle's thesis, cf. S. LANDUCCI, *op. cit.*, pp. 89 f.

[143] In his analysis of Malebranche's response to Arnauld's book on *Les Vraies et les Fausses Idées* Leibniz reiterates and, implicitly endorses, Malebranche's attribution of the fideist thesis to libertines: "He argues that, the libertine can proudly and brutally state that God's wisdom or reason are so different from our own; that, whereas to us it seems right to reward so-called good works, but that which seems good to us is anything but good in the eyes of God, who is the absolute master of all His creatures; that, finally, His wisdom and His justice, if we wish to attribute such a quality to Him, have nothing to do with our own feeble reasonings. In view of this, Father Malebranche tells us that he has wished to prove that God is always wise, just and good, and to conceive of something referring to these terms of wisdom, justice and goodness" (*Handschriften* from the Landesbibliothek zu Hannover, Philosophie, IV, VI, 5, f. 3, 4, quoted in A. ROBINET, *op. cit.*, p. 202). We are then dealing with a direct opposition between Fideism, on the one hand, which comes tainted with the mark of libertinism, and theodicy, on the other.

[144] Cf. above, *Introduction*, note 6.

Leibniz's attitude emerges most clearly and concisely in a brief dialogue, which Grua dates to approximately 1677-1679. Significantly, Leibniz initially entitled this dialogue *Dialogus inter theologum et scepticum*, but then replaced the latter term with *misosophum*. The stance of the second interlocutor is, indeed, identical with that of a fideist, as the following quotation from the opening exchanges of the dialogue should make clear:

M. Will you theologians never give up ranting madly on the basis of reason, when you should instead be wise in the light of faith?

T. We will stop using reason when God ceases to be wise or man ceases to be a rational being.

M. Man's wisdom is foolishness before God, and his wisdom, in the face of divine matters, is more conducive to error than of wisdom.

T. Proud wisdom is foolishness in the face of God and it is, indeed, God who humiliates the proud, who confounds them. Those who wish to peer into mysteries with reason are crushed by God's glory and blinded by His excessive splendour. Yet those who seek out God with a sincere heart are illuminated by God with reason, so that they are able to perceive his wonders. And, as we look on the sun, not directly, but in the water or through a coloured glass, just so those who, out of affection or necessity to defend faith, is called to a deeper contemplation of divine matters, will not tear out the eyes of reason, so as to blind themselves entirely, but will rather stare into the holiest of the holies through Scripture (the intercession of which adapts the excessive power of celestial rays to our weakness) as through a veil. This veil will only be lifted when we see God, not through a veil and darkly, but face to face.[145]

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[145] *GRUA* 18.

CHAPTER THREE

APOLOGETIC ARGUMENTS IN THE *THEODICY*

The very term *apologia* has legal origins. Despite the broader applications, which it had since acquired, Leibniz, an author so profoundly interested in and committed to legal studies, conserves this original legal sense of apology and affords to it an important role in his *Theodicy*. This nuance already emerges in the titles which Leibniz used for his various other published works or drafts pertaining to theodicy. The title of his magnum opus does not, in reality, have explicitly legal implications. Moreover, even in Leibniz, we sometimes come across definitions of theodicy which make no reference – at least no explicit reference – to law (cf., for example, the letter to von Greiffencranz of 2 May 1715: "The term *theodicy* signifies the doctrine of the justice of God").[1] Notwithstanding this, more often than not, the juridical dimension emerges clearly. For example, the "methodical summary"[2] in Latin of the *Theodicy,* published by Leibniz in the same year as the *Theodicy* itself is entitled *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus.*[3] The same is true of the titles of the earlier drafts: "*Guillelmi Pacidii. THEODICAEA seu pro divina justitia Demonstrationes catholicae ad Mathematicam certitudinem formamque ex naturali Theologia Iurisprudentiaque exactae* [...]";[4] "*Vindicatio iustitiae divinae et libertatis humanae* [...]";[5] "*Theodicée ou apologie de nos notions des attributs de Dieu* [...]. *Theodicée ou apologie de la justice de Dieu* [...]".[6] It is worth, therefore, taking the time to examine this legal aspect of Leibnizian apologetics.

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[1] *GP VI* 12 note.

[2] Cf. *GP III* 321.

[3] Cf. *GP VI* 437.

[4] *GRUA* 370.

[5] *GRUA* 371.

[6] *GRUA* 495. J. Brunschwig (*Introduction,* in G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Essais de Théodicée…,* Garnier-Flammarion, Paris 1969) notes that "theodicy" may be understood "in a prudent sense (as the doctrine of God's justice) but also more audaciously (as justification for God and as the trial whereby God is justified)" (quoted by G. DELEUZE, *Le pli. Leibniz et le Baroque,* Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1988, p. 92, note 21). R J. Mulvaney (*Divine Justice in Leibniz's "Discourse on Metaphysics",* in AA.VV., *Akten des II. Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses,* 17.-22. Juli 1972, vol. III: *Metaphysik - Ethik - Ästhetik - Monadenlehre,* cit., p. 63) also identifies these two meanings for Leibniz's *Theodicy.*

1.   The Brief

As we have seen, Leibniz holds that apologetic arguments are not demonstrative *per se,* inasmuch as they refer to a mystery, which cannot be "comprehended," but only "explained" and "upheld." Moreover, for Leibniz, such arguments are not necessary, but "supererogatory" – constituting a concession to the requirements of an edifying dialogue with the antagonist. There is a legal dimension to Leibniz's justification for this stance.

We have already discussed[7] the dual significance of "theodicy" as a doctrine of the justice of God and as the defence of God against the accusations levelled against Him. We have also already noted the complementary relationship between these two meanings. In its legal sense, as is evident, theodicy is the defence of God – not only of His justice, but also of His goodness, which, in God, is indistinguishable from justice.[8] The title of Leibniz's *Theodicy,* in fact, refers explicitly to God's goodness, not to his justice, and in the already quoted[9] letter to Des Bosses of 5 Febrauary 1712 Leibniz specifies that

> theodicy is, in fact, a kind of scientific genre and refers precisely to the theory of the justice (that is to say, of the contemporaneous wisdom and goodness) of God.[10]

Elsewhere, Leibniz presents theodicy as a response to the necessity that we "save the honour of God and justify His conduct regarding these disorders [i.e. evil]".[11] In the *Theodicy,* too, Leibniz declares that he wishes to speak up in favour of the "cause of God".[12] His objective is to clear God of the charge of sin.[13]

In theodicy, then, we are presented with a legal brief in the truest sense of the term, with a defendant, prosecutors and a counsel for the defence. The identity of the judge is a question which we will come back to later on. The defendant is God, and the counsel for the defence Leibniz himself. The identity of the prosecution has already been, to some extent, discussed, but still merits further clarification. Leibniz refers explicitly to Bayle and other more or less famous philosophers of his time. More generally, the prosecution team is made up of sceptics, as we have already

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[7] Cf. above, *Introduction.*

[8] For this reason I would disagree with S. Landucci (*op. cit.,* pp. 275ff.), who argues that Leibniz, although he refers to God's goodness, in fact only defends His justice.

[9] Cf. above, Chapter Two, note 28.

[10] *GP II* 437.

[11] GP *IV* 583.

[12] Cf. *T* 38/62.

[13] Cf. *T* 189/207.

mentioned and also, as we will see now, gnostics. What moves these individuals to level accusations against God? Leibniz maintains that such accusations are fuelled

> by the presumptuous ignorance of men, who would wish to exculpate themselves wholly or in part at the expense of God[14]

Elsewhere, he explains:

> The truth is that people love to lose themselves, and this is a kind of ramble of the mind, which is unwilling to subject itself to attention, to order, to rules. It seems as though we are so accustomed to games and jesting that we play the fool even in the most serious occupations, and when we least think to do so.[15]

We have already mentioned the influence of the passions, of habits, of vices on or divergence from truth. Likewise, according to Leibniz, God's accusers are moved, not by the love of truth, but rather by negative practical concerns.

Those who accuse God, do so at their own peril. Like every accuser who loses his or her case, they will have to pay a penalty to compensate for the wrong done to the accused. In this life, we cannot fully know the order and the beauty of the City of God, nonetheless, we have sufficient signs at our disposal to make it the object "of our faith, of our hope and of our trust in God." However, Leibniz adds:

> If there are any who think otherwise, *so much the worse for them* [since, in so doing, they bring the evil of which they complain upon themselves], they are malcontents [similar to blind rebels before their own fault] in the State of the greatest and the best of all monarchs; and they are wrong not to take advantage [preferring to feast their minds on the prospect of evil] of the examples he has given them of his wisdom and his infinite goodness, whereby he reveals himself as being not only wonderful, but also worthy of love beyond all things.[16]

Leibniz thus directly connects the contestation of God (not the intellectual research connected thereto per se, but rather the accusatory intentions behind it) to the absence of love for God. The love of God, however, is the true faith, and this means that the accusers of God are individuals without faith. They will suffer the consequences of this not only in the after-life (on which Leibniz refrains from commenting in their regard), but also in the here and now, where they will be obsessed with their visions of evil, adopting a position which is sterile and without hope. Impiety goes hand in hand with despair. For this reason, writes Leibniz, to complain

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[14] *T* 103/124.

[15] *T* 133/154.

[16] *T* 188/207; *italics mine*. The phrases in square brackets are added in Des Bosses' Latin translation.

is in effect murmuring against the orders of providence. One must not readily be among the malcontents in the State where one is, and one must not be so at all in the city of God, wherein one can only wrongfully be of their number.[17]

It is not impossible that Leibniz, in considering the rebellion of God's accusers, had in mind the letter of St. Jude with its bitter invective against those

murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words.[18]

The accuser of God is, for Leibniz, a rebel who receives a rebel's punishment, which is in fact innate in the very act of rebellion – namely, despair. In his *Confessio Philosophi* Leibniz presents two figures of the rebel *par excellence*. The first is Beelzebub:

Should I, the wronged party, bow down before that tyrant [...] The poison penetrates down into my very membranes, the fury burns me/ In my every limb: one crime deserves another./ In this way we placate ourselves. One, sacred sacrificial lamb for our burning fury/ Our enemy slaughtered. We would scatter him to the wind/ ribbons of flesh, torn to thousands of tiny fragments,/ a fitting symbol for my pain./ And of the trumpet which calls on the resurrected/ I will strip away the flesh once more![19]

The second is Jude:

THEOLOGIAN: And why did [Jude] believe that God wished him ill?
PHILOSOPHER: Because he knew himself to be a rebel and believed that God was a tyrant. He saw himself as fallen and God as disinclined to pardon him. He saw himself as guilty and God as cruel, himself as unhappy and God as unjust.[20]

We should now consider the identity of the judge. The immediate answer is: reason. The counsel for the prosecution, the sceptic, indeed presents his accusations against God to reason. The fideist, too, even if he explicitly rejects reason as a judge, proposes no alternative. In fact, he effectively denies the legitimacy of the case itself, therefore implicitly affirming that, *if* there were a legitimate cause to be brought against God, this could not but be presented to reason. Finally, the counsel for the defense – i.e. Leibniz himself, in his *Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason* – openly submits his petitions to the "tribunal of reason".[21] This is the obvious answer, but it is not really satisfactory. Who, then, should present him / herself as embodying "reason" when the case comes under discussion? The counsel

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[17] *T* 110/131.

[18] *Jd* 1:16.

[19] *CF* 118.

[20] *CF* 44.

[21] *T* 67/91.

for the prosecution presents himself as speaking in the name of reason, and therefore as being entitled, at the same time, to pronounce the final verdict. The counsel for the defence, however, whilst not denying the decisive authority of reason, does not acknowledge that this authority lies with the prosecution, since the prosecution does not represent "true reason," but only "seeming reason." What is most interesting of all from this point of view is that the counsel for the defence, unlike the prosecution, *makes no claims upon the judge's seat*. He seeks only to uphold the justice of God and the credibility of faith, without putting forward any verdict of his own. This is because in reality his fundamental conviction, which also forms the basis of his case against the prosecution, is that *human* reason cannot *comprehend*, but only *uphold* divine justice, and that, therefore to level any accusation against God is not, first and foremost *unjust*, so much as *illegitimate*. Thus, ultimately, God alone, who also appears in the dock, acts as judge.[22] Due to the very illegitimacy of the accusations faced, he punishes the prosecution with despair and awards the defence with the felicity which accompanies true piety. We thus come across yet another affirmation of the fundamental character of *a priori* theodicy in Leibniz. With *a priori* theodicy, human reason does not assume to express any judgement regarding, nor even to demonstrate the mystery of divine justice, since it recognises itself as being incapable of doing so. Its role consists solely in upholding *faith* in God's justice, providing the motives of credibility.[23]

It might, on this basis, be observed that philosophical theodicy does not, in this way, achieve very different results from the Bible, wherein God only intervenes as

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[22] T. Enge (*Die Einheit von Theorie und Praxis als Leibnizens doppelte Bestimmung der Freiheit. Eine philosophische Untersuchung zur Theodizee*, in AA.VV., *Theoria cum Praxi. Zum Verhältnis von Theorie und Praxis im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Akten des III. Internationalen Leibnizkongresses*, Hannover 12. bis 17. November 1977, vol. I: *Theorie und Praxis, Politik, Rechts- und Staatsphilosophie*, in "Studia Leibnitiana", Supplementa vol. XIX, Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden 1980, p.116) writes that: "Before the tribunal of reason, God judges *Himself*."

[23] It seems to me that, in this regard, we should bear in mind the distinction between "true reason" and "seeming reason" if, whilst acknowledging the reflexive nature of reason in theodicy (cf. M.M. OLIVETTI, *Avant-propos* e *Théodicée aujourd'hui?*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 11 and 16), we do not wish to transform the various roles in the trial considered by Leibniz into an indistinct solipsism of reason, as, to my mind, does S. Semplici (*Dalla teodicea al male radicale*, CEDAM, Padova 1990, p.46): "Reason is thus sometimes the counsel for the prosecution who formulates the accusation […] sometimes the counsel for the defense and ultimately the judge." Semplici, however, does clearly reveal the *a priori* character of the defence and the justification of God: "There is a fundamental difference between the two tribunals – between that of 'evidence', 'plausibility' and 'presumption', on which human judgement is often forced to base itself, and that of the 'mysteries', of which God can be the only true judge. The good, from this point of view, abides as a presupposition not as the final end of the demonstration, and the reasons why God permits evil remain at once inscrutable and insuperable" (*ibidem*). This difference is also overlooked by M.M. Olivetti (*Avant-propos* e *Théodicée aujourd'hui?*, cit., pp. 11 e 16), W. Oelmüller (*Statt Theodizee: Philosophisches Orientierungswissen angesichts des Leidens*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 636, 638), J. Greisch (*Faut-il déconstruire la théodicée?*, cit., p. 653).

legitimate judge in answer to accusations levelled against Him, since only He can justify Himself. Such an observation is absolutely just and we should surely not be surprised if philosophical theodicy, which constitutes an apology for faith, concurs with Holy Scripture! It would, nonetheless, be very wrong to conclude on this basis that philosophical theodicy is not substantially different from fideist dogmatism. Theodicy certainly does acknowledge that the definitive verdict on any case brought against divine justice, the final response to God's accusers, must come from God Himself. In other words, *philosophical theodicy acknowledges its own impossibility*. However, *at the same time it recognises its own necessity,* and herein lies its difference from fideism. To acknowledge that human reason, even though it cannot dissolve mystery, can nonetheless find motives for upholding it means that the dramatic problem of divine justice and the existence of evil is not met with a solely eschatological solution, whereby history comes to represent a conflict, which is not only irresolvable but also unquestionable, between the faithful and the unbelievers. It means, rather, that some apology for divine justice, formulated in the common tongue which is shared with God's accusers (thus representing a missionary dialogue between believers and non-believers), is nonetheless possible within the framework of human history, even if we must nonetheless await the definitive eschatological solution. Moreover, at the same time, it means that we can also undertake a reading of the meaning of history in the light of faith which will anticipate eschatological vision. These possibilities revolve around the acknowledgement of reason's efficacy in this regard. When reason is denied, they fall away to nothing. It is for this reason that philosophical theodicy, which is also, inevitably a "logodicy," asserts itself against fideism:

> If God is not bound to account to the wicked for their wickedness, it seems as if he owes to himself, and to those who honour him and love him, justification for his course of action with regard to the permission of vice and crime. But God has already given that satisfaction, as far as it is needed here on earth: by granting us the light of reason he has bestowed upon us the means whereby we may meet all difficulties.[24]

2.   *The Legal Arguments*

Leibniz presents three main legal arguments in the *Theodicy*: a) God's presumed innocence; b) that the onus of proof lies with the prosecution; c) that it is illegimate to do evil in the interests of good. The first two of these arguments are also deployed by Leibniz elsewhere to demonstrate the existence of God.[25] However, we are here solely concerned with their apologetic role in upholding divine justice. In Leibniz's *De rerum originatone radicali*, a fourth legal argument also emerges, which is also put forward in the *Theodicy*, but in such a way as to divest it of its legal connotations (although a veiled allusion to the legal form f this argument does appear in sections

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[24] *T* 274/289

[25] Cf. *GP I* 213; *III* 444, 454; *IV* 294 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 238), 404, 405; *V* 419/*A VI/6* 438.

33 and 38 of the *Preliminary Dissertation*,[26] if we bear in mind the general context of the discourse, which is, indeed, juridical). To those who, on the basis of their own experience of the presence of evil in the world, assert that ours is not the best of all possible worlds, Leibniz objects that any conjecture based on a sole, partial experience of things is invalid, adding that:

> indeed, it is unjust to make a judgment unless one has examined the entire law, as lawyers say.[27]

Let us now examine the three arguments which feature in the *Theodicy*.

a) *The Presumed Innocence of God*. This is, without a doubt, the most important and most interesting legal argument raised by Leibniz in the *Theodicy*. It is the most important, because it establishes, from a legal perspective, the very terms of Leibniz's *Theodicy,* which I have called a theodicy *a priori*. It is the most interesting as a consequence of the singular manner in which it is approached by Leibniz, in his attempt to apply this argument, which is, *per se,* of an empirical character, to divine justice. Leibniz treats of this matter in *Preliminary Dissertation*, 32-38 (with another reference, *passim*, at 42).

"Presumption," in a legal sense, is not a simple "conjecture," which has no value until it is proven. It is, instead, to be considered valid until proof is presented to the contrary. This definition of the legal concept of "presumption" is often repeated by Leibniz,[28] who provides the clearest exposition thereof in his *Nouveaux Essais,* where he writes:

> As for 'presumption', which is a jurists' term, good usage in legal circles distinguishes it from 'conjecture'. It is something more than that, and should be accepted provisionally as true until there is proof to the contrary; whereas an indication, a conjecture, often has to be weighed against another conjecture. For instance, someone who admits having borrowed money from someone else is *presumed* to be obliged to repay it unless he shows that he has already done so, or that the debt has been cancelled for some other reason. In this sense, therefore, to *presume* something is not to accept it *before* it has been proved, which is never permissible, but to accept it *provisionally* but not groundlessly, while waiting for a proof to the contrary.[29]

Soon after, still in the *Nouveaux Essais*, Leibniz grades "proofs, presumptions, conjectures, and evidence" from a legal point of view, locating "presumption" among the "proofs," and not among the "conjectures." Significantly, "presumption" does not even amongst the lowest echelons of the "proofs." Leibniz distinguishes, in descending order of certainty, between "*common knowledge*" (*notorieté*), "*complete*

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[26] Cf. *T* 69/93 and 72/96.

[27] *GP VII* 306; Eng. trans *Phil*. *Ess*. 153.

[28] Cf., in addition to *T* 69/93, *GP I* 213; *III* 444, 454; *IV* 161(Eng. trans. *PhPL* 129), 294 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 238), 405; *V* 419, 500/*A VI/6* 438, 517; *VII* 45; *GRUA* 598.

[29] GP *V* 439/*A VI/6* 457.

proofs," which can, in turn, be divided up into "*more-than-full* proofs" and "ordinary *full*" proofs, "*presumptions*," "*more than half full*" proofs and those which are "*less than half full*," after which there are the various levels of "*conjecture*" and "*evidence*".[30] Presumption, we can see, is a proof which affords a good level of certainty, on the basis of which any tribunal may legitimately pass judgement.[31]

It is also interesting to note that Leibniz begins his discussion of this matter in the *Theodicy* by considering Bayle's argument in terms of a presumed guilt of God and then turning this argument on its head in favour of God's presumed innocence. Leibniz gives several examples to this effect. First of all he refers us[32] to the case of a guardian, father or friend who, although able to prevent a young person from doing wrong, nonetheless permits it. Any judge would consider such an individual as an accomplice to the sin committed, and no argument could clear him / her of the assumption of complicity which arises from his / her position of responsibility. On this basis, one would conclude, one should also hold God as an accomplice to Eve's sin, which He foresaw but did nothing to avoid. Leibniz moves from the presumption of guilt to the presumption of innocence, arguing that appearances can sometimes be deceptive where individual culpability is concerned[33] and that sometimes presumptions should be founded upon more general considerations. He presents two examples to this effect, in which the good reputation of the accused, in general, renders the accusations levelled against him incredible and therefore legitimises the judge's dismissal of them. The first case treats of a famously virtuous and saintly man accused of theft and murder,[34] the second of a charitable alchemist in possession of

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[30] Cf. GP *V* 446 f./*A VI/6* 464.

[31] F. Piro's assertion (*op. cit.*, p. 65) that, for Leibniz "*praesumptio*" constitutes a "feeble degree of probability" is therefore incorrect. Piro bases this statement on the fifth fragment of the *Elementa Juris Naturalis* (cf. *A VI/1* 472), which, however, he interprets incorrectly. Piro in fact attributes to "presumption" that which Leibniz attributes to "*facilitas*" ("that which is more intelligible *per se* is easier, i.e. requires less"). *Facilitas* is effectively inferior to "probability" (since "that which is *probable* is that which has the greatest possible level of intelligibility, i.e., which is the same thing, of possibility. For this reason, possibility demands, not only the facility of existing, but also the facility of coexisting with other things, given the circumstances"). Presumption is only implicated in this discussion to the extent to which Leibniz declares the judge's obligation to presume that which is more probable (the just act as opposed to the unjust, the undeserved act, rather than the deserved), but this can not be identified with facility. Rather Leibniz explicitly explains that "*to be easier* and *to be presumed* differ like the less and the part [..] All that which is to be presumed is therefore easier, not viceversa." On the importance of the logic of probability for sciences of the contingent, and in particular for law in Leibniz, cf. B. LEONI, *Probabilità e diritto nel pensiero di Leibniz*, in "Rivista di Filosofia", XXXVIII (1947), 1-2, pp. 65-95.

[32] Cf. *T* 69/93.

[33] Cf. *T* 69 f./93.

[34] Cf. *T* 70 f./94 f.

the philosopher's stone accused of theft.[35] The conclusion reached is that God's renowned goodness and justice render more incredible and vain than ever the accusations of complicity in evil which are levelled against him. This elegant reversal of the argument regarding "presumption," which shifts from the presumption of guilt to the presumption of innocence, would be beyond discussion, were we not treating of the highly peculiar case of the mystery of divine justice. Leibniz is aware that this represents a problem, and the unexpected turns that his discourse takes as a result of this awareness are what makes his argument so interesting.

The legal notion of "presumption," used in both its senses – that is to say, with reference to guilt or to innocence – refers to the exhibition of empirical proof. In brief, that which the prosecution or defence presents as plausible, by means of evidence and testimonies, is stripped of its credibility on the basis of contrary appearances, which are noted previously. One might term this an *a priori* procedure, since the elements in which we choose to trust are noted prior to the facts expounded upon in the debate. However, we should nonetheless bear in mind that we are here treating of the kind of *a priori* discussed by Kant in the *Introduction* to his *Critique of Pure Reason*,[36] consisting in the independence of an individual piece of knowledge from current empirical data, even though it represents the fruit of previous experiences. Yet in this case the argument regarding presumption, as it is, is not applicable, since divine justice is a mystery and "mysteries are not probable".[37] Therefore, writes Leibniz, "the case in question is quite different from those which are common among men".[38] We cannot present stronger anterior appearances in opposition to God's apparent complicity in evil, thus making a case for His presumed innocence, as in the examples cited. It is true that in God's case, like in that of the saintly and virtuous man in the example, we can assert the force of "his word," in which "one should place more faith [...] than in that of many others".[39] It is true, in other words, that faith transmitted to us through revelation and tradition is also an experience and can be upheld as evidence in favour of the presumed innocence of God. Leibniz cites this argument,[40] but does not insist thereon, because, on its own, it is insufficient. Indeed, either the credibility of revelation should be upheld as absolute – but this is the position of fideism – or it needs the reassurance of grounding in evidence, if it is then itself to serve as evidence in turn. Thus, at the final analysis, the presumed innocence of God can only stand on "reasons" which, although they are absolutely of an *a priori* character, are not, for this reason, empirical:

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[35] Cf. *T* 71/95.

[36] Cf. I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 2. Auflage, Akademie Ausgabe, vol. 3, pp. 27 f.

[37] *T* 69/92.

[38] *T* 70/94.

[39] *T* 71/95.

[40] Cf. *ibidem*.

in reference to God there is no need to *suppose* or to *establish* particular reasons such as may have induced him to permit the evil; general reasons suffice. One knows that he takes care of the whole universe, whereof all the parts are connected; and one must thence infer that he has had innumerable considerations whose result made him deem it inadvisable to prevent certain evils.[41]

God's justice may be defended in the face of the appearance of evil, not through reference to other appearances, but rather through recourse to *a priori* reasons:

> I have already observed that all one can oppose to the goodness and the justice of God is nothing but appearances, which would be strong against a man, but which are nullified when they are applied to God and when they are weighed against the proofs that assure us of the infinite perfection of his attributes.[42]

From the point of view of *a priori* theodicy, the discussion is hereby resolved.[43] Yet Leibniz has surely far overstepped the grounds of the habitual legal application of the notion of presumption of innocence. No judge would be prepared to absolve an individual apparently guilty on the basis of an *a priori* demonstration of its honesty! Leibniz's argument only holds if we consider the case of God to be diverse from that of any human,[44] which means that the legal argument on the basis of presumption has a solely analogical validity. Yet it conserves its importance, nonetheless, as it permits us to preserve the analogy and continuity between divine and human justice and thus to avoid falling into the doctrine of divine arbitrarism:

> It is not, then, that we have no notion of justice in general fit to be applied also to God's justice; nor is it that God's justice has other rules than the justice known of men [...]. Universal right is the same for God and for men; but the question of fact is quite different in their case and his.[45]

On the other hand, however, the purely analogical character of the argument affirms that the true argument of the counsel for the defence of God is that the prosecution has no right to present any case against God and that his accusations are therefore null. Reason cannot prove God's innocence, but it can demonstrate the illegitimacy of accusations. *A priori* reasons assure us that the case for the presumed guilt of God, on the basis of appearances alone,

> would be destroyed by an exact consideration of the facts, supposing we were capable of that in relation to God.[46]

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[41] *T* 70/93; *italics mine*.

[42] *T* 74/98.

[43] Cf. *T* 70/94.

[44] Cf. *ibidem*.

[45] *Ibidem*.

Yet the defender of God, due to his finite capacities of reason, is incapable of such an "exact consideration of the facts." He can nonetheless demonstrate that, for the same reasons, the prosecution is likewise incapable and that his accusations, being based on appearances alone, are void.

b) *That the onus of proof lies with the prosecution.* This argument is first formulated in § 58 of the *Preliminary Dissertation,* and is then developed in §§ 72-78 of the same section. It appears in connection with the principle that it is not necessary to prove, but only to uphold mystery, and, indeed, does nothing more than reformulate the same principle in legal terms. We are dealing, then, we the legal formulation of the conception of theodicy as *apologia*. The defender of God has no obligation to demonstrate the innocence of the accused. In legal terms, the counsel for the defence (*respondens*)

> is not bound (as a general rule) to prove his right or to produce his title to possession,[47]

since, the burden of proof lies with the prosecution. Leibniz writes:

> It is the part of the objection to open up the subject, and it is enough for him who answers to say Yes or No.[48]

Later on, Leibniz quotes Bayle:

> The aim in disputes of this kind is to throw light upon obscurities and to arrive at self-evidence.

Reiterating, once again, the true concept of "mystery," he counters that this

> is the aim of the opposer, for he wishes to demonstrate that the Mystery is false; but this cannot here be the aim of the defender, for in admitting Mystery he agrees that one cannot demonstrate it.

He goes on to quote the next part of the Baylean passage:

> This leads to the opinion that during the course of the proceedings victory sides more or less with the defender or with the opposer, according to whether there is more or less clarity in the propositions of the one than in the propositions of the other.

Here, again, Leibniz corrects Bayle:

> That is speaking as if the defender and the opposer were equally unprotected; but the defender is like a besieged commander, covered by his defence works, and it is for the attacker to destroy

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[46] *T* 69/93.

[47] *T* 82/105.

[48] *T* 91 f./114.

them. The defender has no need here of self-evidence, and he seeks it not: but it is for the opposer to find it against him, and to break through with his batteries in order that the defender may be no longer protected.[49]

Here a military metaphor is joined to the legal, to clarificatory effects. The evident difference between the rules that might be valid for a battle on an open field as opposed to those that would hold in case of a siege provide a useful paragon for the legal debate under way. When the commander of a besieged fortress makes a *sortie* (which, as we have seen, to briefly drop the metaphor, is essentially what an apologetic argument represents), Bayle's rule – namely, that the contestant wins who successfully prevails over the other – can be said to hold. However, the defender may always retreat within his fortress, and in this case only the opposer must prevail in order to win. For the besieged, self-defence is sufficient.[50] This naturally implies, to stick to the terms of the metaphor, that the citadel is fortified very well indeed – i.e. that the *a priori* reasons which sustain the defender are valid and that the "batteries" of the opposer cannot break down the walls of the fortress, cannot provide demonstrations against these *a priori* arguments. Yet the possibility of such demonstrations is excluded by Leibniz on the basis of the nature of the truths in question.[51]

c) *It is not legitimate to do wrong in order to obtain that which is right*. This classical principle of law – *non esse facienda mala ut eveniant bona* – is quoted by Leibniz in § 25 of the *Theodicy*,[52] and considered again in the *Summary*.[53] It also appears in the *Causa Dei*.[54] This argument, unlike the other two, is not referred to the conditions of the conduct of a debate and to the roles of the participants therein, but rather regards the merit of the case itself and, in particular, the notion that God might be complicit in evil. It therefore constitutes an apologetic argument in itself. Like the other two arguments, this third also rests on the presumption that the object of the case is a mystery. As we will see, indeed, the pivot of the argument is the thesis of the best of all possible worlds which, as we know, can be upheld but not proven.

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[49] *T* 94/116 f.

[50] Cf. *T* 162/183.

[51] Kant adopted the same approach in his essay "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy" (Akademie Ausgabe. Vol. VIII, p. 256; Eng. trans. cit., p. 18). In describing the legal brief and the designation of the roles of prosecution and defence, he recognises that "There is only one thing which we cannot task him [the defender] to do – the demonstrate the supreme wisdom of God on the basis of that which we can draw from our experience in this world."

[52] Cf. *T* 117/137 f.

[53] Cf. *T* 381 f./382 f.

[54] Cf. *GP VI* 448 f.

As in the first argument, here, too, Leibniz would seem at first sight to be scoring points for the prosecution instead of the defence. As before, Leibniz only turns the argument in favour of the defence through his discussion of its "source" and the "reason" behind the principle[55] It would, indeed, seem impossible, on the basis of this legal maxim, to justify the fact that God permits evil (since permitting something constitutes complicity), even if His motives in doing so were good. This maxim renders illegitimate one of the classic apologetic arguments – namely, that God sometimes draws good from evil. Leibniz refers to this argument repeatedly over the course of his *Theodicy*, declaring unambiguously that he does not retain it legitimate in such a form, at least where it refers to moral evil:

> Concerning sin or moral evil, although it happens very often that it may serve as a means of obtaining good or of preventing another evil, it is not this that renders it a sufficient object of the divine will or a legitimate object of a created will.[56]

Leibniz therefore rejects this argument, as it is currently understood, but reinstates it in another sense. This is worth bearing in mind if we wish to understand the true meaning of this argument when we come across it in the *Theodicy*.

The decisive factor in Leibniz's discussion of the above-quoted legal maxim is his observation, already put forward with regard to the first of the legal arguments, that "the case in question is quite different from those which are common among men".[57] The difference lies in the fact that, in a human case, we are always faced with relative goods and evils, and the maxim presupposes this relativity, denying that evil can be a legitimate means for obtaining good. Thus, in Leibniz's own example, a queen cannot save her state by permitting a crime, since the salvation of the state is not an absolute, but only a relative good, both in the sense that it is uncertain and in the sense that the state's wellbeing depends on the order and legality thereof, which would in this way be infringed.[58] In God's case, however, it is the evil in question which is relative, since it represents one of the connected events of the world created by God. The good, instead, is absolute, since it refers to the best of all possible worlds, which depends not on the realisation or otherwise of evil, but rather comprehends the event of sin *a priori*, nonetheless continuing to be "absolutely the best":

> he [God] would fail in what he owes to himself, in what he owes to his wisdom, his goodness, his perfection, if he followed not the grand result of all his tendencies to good, and if he chose

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[55] Cf. *T* 117/138.

[56] *T* 117/137.

[57] *T* 70/94.

[58] Cf. *T* 117/138; cf. *FdCL* 175 for an analogous case.

not that *which is absolutely the best*, notwithstanding the evil of guilt, which is involved therein by the supreme necessity of the eternal verities.[59]

Mentioning that which God "owes to Himself" does not represent a legitimization of the autocratic egotism of a tyrant against the interests of his subjects. Such a notion would be morally odious and legally unfounded within a legal vision such as that of Leibniz wherein, as we have already seen, God's glory coincides with the common good.[60] It should rather be seen to indicate the absoluteness of the good in question, as the remainder of the passage makes clear. In this case the legal maxim retains its validity, since justice is the same for God and for men. However, the exceptional nature of the case in question alters the manner in which it is applied[61] In this case, in fact, God would be less observant of the maxim if, in order to obtain a relative good – i.e. to impede a sin – He committed an absolute evil, in creating a world that was not absolutely the best. Hence, the maxim comes to be combined with another, concerning the indispensable nature of duty:

> It [the sin] must only be admitted or *permitted* in so far as it is considered to be a certain consequence of an indispensable duty: as for instance if a man who was determined not to permit another's sin were to fail of his own duty, or as if an officer on guard at an important post were to leave it, especially in time of danger, in order to prevent a quarrel in the town between two soldiers of the garrison who wanted to kill each other.[62]

3. *The Apologetic Arguments*

The numerous apologetic arguments which recur throughout the *Theodicy* all have traditional precedents: in the Bible and in Graeco-Roman philosophy, in patristics, in Saint Augustine, in St. Thomas Aquinas and in scholastics, and then, likewise, after the Reformation[63] Moral evil, as the consequence of the perversion of man's free will, as a disobedience or rebellion; physical suffering as a punishment for or consequence of guilt, as a correction or as a pedagogical tool towards conversion, as a trial and a purification; evil as the absence of being or as a means towards good: Leibniz recalls all of these arguments, drawing on the confirmed, authoritative

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[59] *T* 117/138; *italics mine*.

[60] Cf. above, Chapter One, § 4.

[61] Cf. *T* 70/94.

[62] *T* 117/137; cf. *T* 397 f./402.

[63] Cf. G. GRUA, *Jurisprudence universelle et théodicée selon Leibniz*, cit., pp. 346 ff.; J. KREMER, *Das Problem der Theodicee in der Philosophie und Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Kant und Schiller*, Reuther & Reichard Verlag, Berlin 1909, pp. 33 f. Cf. Also the works quoted above in the *Introduction*, note 3. On apologetics in the era of Leibniz, cf. W. SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN, *Von der Apologie zur Kritik. Der Rezeptionsrahmen der Theodizee*, cit., pp. 169 ff.

heritage at his disposal. He collects them together, in no particular systematic order and uses them, where opportune, from time to time throughout his work. I have not deemed it necessary, for the purposes of the present study, to provide a precise and exhaustive overview of all the recurrent arguments in the *Theodicy*. Leibniz, nonetheless, provides us with just such a list, which may be considered as more or less complete, in §§ 10-33. It is significant that, at § 10, Leibniz introduces this list of apologetic arguments by reiterating, in order to assist his reader's memory and correct interpretation thereof, their *a priori* basis and his reservations regarding the possibility of formulating any *a posteriori* argument that might be demonstrative and valid *per se*:

> It is true that one may imagine possible worlds without sin and without unhappiness, and one could make some like Utopian or Sevarambian romances: but these same worlds again would be very inferior to ours in goodness. I cannot show you this in detail. For can I know and can I present infinities to you and compare them together? But you must judge with me *ab effectu*, since God has chosen this world as it is.[64]

Having established this fundamental premise, Leibniz lists the following interconnected arguments.

a) First of all, he presents the argument that ours is the best of all possible worlds, notwithstanding the existence of evil. This, as we have seen, is presented as an *a priori* demonstration,[65] which Leibniz also justifies, so to speak, *a posteriori*, with the consideration that Jesus Christ was incarnate therein.[66]

b) Leibniz then goes on to treat, from multiple points of view, of the argument which justifies evil inasmuch as it ultimately brings about good[67] and inasmuch as it serves as a contrast to good (as an unpleasant taste, as a shadow, as a dissonance), therefore rendering it "more discernible" and therefore "greater".[68] This argument also culminates with its christological implications, as Leibniz quotes the famous exclamation, "*O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum/ meruit habere Redemptorem!*",[69] condemned by many as scandalous but nonetheless firmly

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[64] *T* 108/129.

[65] Cf. *T* 108/129.

[66] Cf. *T* 109/130.

[67] Cf. *T* 108/129; cf. also 116/137, 117/137, 177 f./197.

[68] Cf. *T* 109/130; cf. also 116/137, 198/217, 313/326, 397/402.

[69] *T* 108/129. The theme of the *felix culpa* also appears in *GRUA* 343, although not formulated in precisely the same terms. For other references to this theme, cf. *GRUA* 319, note 166.

rooted in the most ancient Christian traditions and still today present in the Easter liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church![70]

c) Leibniz maintains that, despite appearances, good outweighs evil,[71] if we look at it within a fitting, universal perspective, rather than limiting ourselves to the smaller scope of our immediate vision[72] and if we bear in mind the compensation due in the life to come.[73]

d) Leibniz also quotes the definition of evil as a privation of being.[74]

e) Physical pain, instead, may be useful in inducing penitence,[75] or may serve a punitive,[76] or corrective function, for example,[77] as well as affording an opportunity for sufferers to perfect themselves.[78]

f) Evil may be permitted by God as a "certain consequence" of His "indispensable duty",[79] as we have already seen in the discussion of the legal arguments, above.

g) A further Christological argument emerges in § 122:

> These evils serve to make the elect imitators of their master, and to increase their happiness.[80]

Analogically, in §§ 68-73, Leibniz provides a series of reasons which might justify, in general, making provision for physical ill or well-being (punishment or reward): e.g. in defence, correction, stimulation, intimidation or atonement.[81]

We should note, once again, that these numerous arguments are cited by Leibniz *ad abundantiam,* which confirms their apologetic and supererogatory role, together with their inconclusiveness. Leibniz gathers together these traditional arguments and spiels them off, doubtless at the same time incorporating them into the

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[70] Des Bosses, in an addendum to his Latin translation of the *Theodicy,* following Cajetano, attributes this formula to Gregory the Great (cf. *D I* 130). It is inserted into the Roman Catholic Liturgy for Easter Saturday.

[71] Cf. *T* 109/130; cf. also 110/131, 249/264, 250/266, 266 f./281, 270 f./286, 272 f./287 f.

[72] Cf. *T* 113 f./134 f.

[73] Cf. *T* 111/132.

[74] Cf. *T* 115/136; cf. also 119/140, 119 f./140 f., 121/141 f., 122/142 f.

[75] Cf. *T* 111/132.

[76] Cf. *T* 116/137.

[77] Cf. *T* 116/137.

[78] Cf. *ibidem.*

[79] Cf. *T* 117/137.

[80] *T* 177/197.

[81] Cf. *T* 139-142/160-162.

overall framework of reference of his own thought and thereby imbuing them with a slightly altered significance. Nonetheless, he does not discuss them in any great depth and does not particularly bother to defend them from the equally traditional objections by which they are accompanied which (and here Bayle is right) are often more convincing than the arguments themselves. But these arguments, again, do not represent the most important element of *Theodicy* – the defensive bastion of the besieged fortress. They represent something supplementary and only have a meaning, legitimacy and limited persuasive capacity if they are grounded in an *a priori* theodicy.[82]

The significant presence of the Christological dimension in Leibniz's arguments is beyond discussion. Nonetheless, refraining from any assessment of the greater or lesser Christological emphasis in Leibniz's personal spirituality, this being an issue which lies beyond the reaches of the present study, I would nonetheless observe that, although present, Christology does not lie at the heart of Leibnizian apologetics. Indeed, in a philosophical apology, which employs reason to defend faith against objections, themselves presented in rational terms, this could not but be the case. The most significant philosophical themes are, instead: evil as the privation of good, evil as part of a harmonious whole and evil as a means for obtaining good. Leaving aside, for the time being, the first two of these themes, which require the consideration of various additional elements before they can be investigated, let us now consider the third argument, which already came under some preliminary scrutiny in the previous section.

Any argument which, in any form, assumes to explain evil as the means to a good end would appear unacceptable, scandalous and utterly inappropriate in an apology for a good and just God. Yet does Leibniz really justify evil in terms of a machiavellian calculation of ends? Does he defend a cruel God, who induces mankind to sin in order to be able to save them and thus revel in His own glory? Does he trivialise the dramatic nature of evil, cynically reconstruing it and placing it at the service of good? Leibniz's arguments certainly do nothing of the kind and must be understood on the basis of their meaning and aim. First of all, we should rue out the notion that Leibniz considers evil as a means to an end, in the negative sense outlined above. Leibniz himself, indeed, in developing his own conception of the "best," denies that the means can be separated from the end in this matter. As he clearly states in a letter to Malebranche:

> In effect, when I consider the works of God, I consider all of his means integral parts of the work as a whole, and their simple, fecund unity constitutes part of the work's overall excellence, since the total sum of the means are a part of the final end. For this reason I do not know if it is opportune to resort to sustaining that God, by remaining immobile in the face of man's fall and

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[82] Commenting on Leibniz's assertion that "there are a thousand ways of justifying the conduct of God [...]" (*T* 161/181), P. Burgelin (*op. cit.*, p. 279) explains: "A thousand legal strategies, which signifies that, at the end of the day, we are utterly ignorant. Faith places its trust in the sovereign wisdom, which hides itself behind events, behind the everyday goings on of the world as behind miracles."

permitting it, underlined the fact that even His most excellent creatures are nothing before Him. This argument might be abused to infer that the good and the salvation of God's creatures are indifferent compared to Him, which would lead, in turn, to the despotism of the supralapsarians and diminish the love due to God. At root, nothing is indifferent to God and no creature and no action on the part of any creature is irrelevant, even though these creatures, in themselves, are nothing before Him.[83]

Leibniz's position, then, has nothing in common with the "despotism of the supralapsarians," which conceives of a God whose sole preoccupation is His own glory and who is indifferent to the wellbeing of His creatures. Leibniz cleary rejects such a notion in his *Theodicy*.[84]

If Leibniz at times suggests that a just comprehension and assessment of evil can only be attained to by locating it in the broader context of universal harmony, within which it may play a positive role, as a shadow or dissonance, this does nothing to underestimate the dramatic nature of evil. Quite the contrary, evil can only at once be afforded a full recognition and a form of redemption when we understand its role and function in the harmonious overall outcome. Significantly, this argument is not proposed by Leibniz as having the presumed clarity of a demonstration, but rather in the light of hope based on faith, since the harmony of the world created by God cannot be "seen" by mankind in this life, but only believed in.

This aesthetic argument regarding the function of shadow and dissonance in universal harmony in no way impedes Leibniz from maintaining that the best for all is also the best for each individual part. God, writes Leibniz

> will never fail to do that which shall be the best, not only in general but also in particular, for those who have true confidence in him.[85]

Leibniz often repeats this point, throughout his writings and almost always in conjunction with the closing observation, quoted above, of the necessity of individual faith to understanding, not only the universal good, but also one's own particular good.[86]

How did Leibniz perceive this principle, whereby the best overall is linked to that which is best for the individual parts? According to what rational model did he seek to formulate it? Did he succeed in this enterprise? These are all interesting questions, which we will seek to answer later on. For now, it should suffice to bear in mind that this was the sense in which Leibniz conceived of his principle of the best. On this principle, then, no partial evil can be overlooked, and much less can any evil

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[83] *GP I* 360; cf. *T* 144/165.

[84] Cf. *T* 209/227, 259/273 f.

[85] *T* 134/154 f.; cf. 31/55, 262/277.

[86] Cf., for example, *GP IV* 463 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 68), 481 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 141); *VI* 498, 606 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 213), 623 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 224); *VII* 272, 307 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 154), 334 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 282), 391 (Eng. trans. *L-C* 58); *GRUA* 379.

become a direct means to the ends of divine goodness. When Leibniz considers that which appears evil as a shadow or dissonance, which only assumes its true significance within its whole context, this does not mean that he is accepting evil as a means to good, but only that he is positing a possible reading thereof, in the light of faith, as a *part* of the universal good.[87] This is not contradicted, but rather confirmed, by the fact that Leibniz sometimes refers to metaphysical and physical evils "as means to greater goods".[88] Here too he is not referring to a machiavellian use of evil for a good end, but rather to the conception of evil as part of the universal good and therefore as being itself good. The capacity to accept evil in the context of universal harmony is a consequence of faith and is, at the same time, coherent with reason's judgement of appearances in the light of truth. This is not to say that the part, the single entity, is a mere appearance to be sacrificed to the truth of the whole, but rather that a correct judgement of the apparent is only possible from the point of view of the whole. In the universe, writes Leibniz, we "find" things

> which are not pleasing to us; but let us be aware that it is not made for us alone. It is nevertheless made for us if we are wise: it will serve us if we use it for our service; we shall be happy in it if we wish to be.[89]

We "find" (appearance). We "[are] aware" (truth). "we shall be happy" (faith). This is the rhythm of Leibnizian argument. Going beyond immediate appearances, true reason teaches us to value, through faith, those same appearances. This is no fatalistic acceptance of evil, and much less a denial of evil in the name of necessity, as is the case with the F*atum Stoicum* which, as we have seen, has nothing in common with the F*atum Christianorum*. Leibniz is very clear on this point. In a polemic explicitly addressing stoicism, he writes:

> A *diligas oportet* (στέργειν χρή) is of no avail; a thing does not become pleasing just because it is necessary, and because it is destined for or attached to someone: and what for me would be an evil would not cease to be such because it would be my master's good, unless this good reflected back on me. One good thing among others in the universe is that the general good becomes in reality the individual good of those who love the Author of all good.[90]

The key to this passage lies in the terms "become … becomes." Evil is not good, nor can it become good. For this reason it is not loveable. Nonetheless, evil can become loveable for the wise, if they understand that the universal good is ordered, not by a grasping and tyrannous God, but by the "Author of all good," by the God

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[87] The difference between Leibniz's rightly chosen position here and the alternative approach are clearly evident, for example, in the discussion of the theory of the supralapsarians, quoted above: cf. *T* 259 f./274.

[88] *GP VI* 444.

[89] *T* 232/248.

[90] *T* 248/263; cf. *GP VI* 606 (Eng. Trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 212 f.); *VII* 391 (Eng. trans. *L-C* 58).

who, transcending the whole world, does not need good for Himself, but acts "to do good, and not to receive it".[91] The wise individual who has attained to such a faith loves God over every thing and every thing in God, secure in faith that the good of the universe is effectively his / her own particular good. As we can see, the wise individual to whom Leibniz is referring is not a stoic, but a Christian, for whom evil becomes loveable, not out of necessity but rather for the love of God and as a consequence of faith that this loveable God loves every creature and wants and brings about what is good for every creature. The individual, however, cannot comprehend how this comes about. To accept evil out of love for God entails an acknowledgement of mystery:

> we go astray in trying to show in detail the value of evil in revealing the good, as the Stoics do – a value which St. Augustine has well recognized in general […]. For can we enter into the infinite particulars of the universal harmony?[92]

Here is one key difference between stoics and Christians. The former do not acknowledge mystery in its true sense. They have no need to do so, because for them providence is a necessary – or, at least, inscrutable and arbitrary – fatality, which may also deploy evil as a means for good. The latter, instead, consider divine providence as being good and wise and, therefore, refuse to consider evil as a means for good but, observing the appearance that evil sometimes produces good, contemplate the mystery of the divine plan which is inscrutable but surely (*a priori*) good:

> when one considers that God, altogether good and wise, must have produced all the virtue, goodness, happiness whereof the best plan of the universe is capable, and that often an evil in some parts may serve the greater good of the whole, one readily concludes that God may have given room for unhappiness, and even permitted guilt, as he has done, without deserving to be blamed.[93]

Just a few lines below, Leibniz concludes the second part of the *Theodicy* with a further reference to mystery: "*Sic placuit superis; quaerere plura nefas*".[94]

4.   *The Antagonist of the Theodicy: Gnosis*

All the apologetic arguments which Leibniz uses, then, derive from previous traditions: from the Old and New Testaments as from Greek and Roman pagan antiquity. To simplify and schematise the matter, we might say that the apologetic

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[91] Cf. *T* 248/264.

[92] *GP IV* 567; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 582 f.

[93] *T* 259 f./274.

[94] *T* 260/275.

arguments of the biblical tradition all spring and draw inspiration from one fundamental principle: the goodness of God, expressed in the goodness of His creation. The pagan tradition, instead, rests its arguments on two distinct pillars, which are sometimes fused together: the harmony of the cosmos and the notion of evil as privation. The Church Fathers often united the principles, deriving from these distinct traditions, drawing inspiration from both in their apologetics. These same principles are easily recognisable in Leibniz's *apologia* and are often explicitly stated.

Nonetheless, since antiquity, there has also existed an radically different position which, with its violent impulse to conflict and contestation, opposes the abovementioned principles with a radically different outlook: gnosis. I will not here consider gnosticism as a specific historical movement, which developed from the first to the third century AD. Instead, I will refer to gnosis as a type of ideology which has always been potentially present and emergent throughout intellectual history, in ancient times and in Leibniz's own period, as at the present day. I am referring to the "eternal gnosis," [95] which the Church Fathers fought as the gravest of all heresies and some saw as the paradigm and ultimate source of every heresy. The Fathers of the Church, like the pagan philosophers (Plotinus, in particular, springs to mind) and the Jewish Fathers,[96] opposed their fundamental principles – the goodness of creation, the harmony of the cosmos and evil as privation – to the contestations of gnosis, because gnosis is the radical rejection of these principles. Theodicy, therefore, is essentially anti-gnostic because gnosis is anti-theodical.

The gnostic query – *unde malum?* – or, to be more precise, the gnostic acceptance of this query, already places gnosis in direct opposition to theodicy. It in fact requires and assumes an ontological principle of evil – not just an author, then, but a principle of evil – which excludes the possibility that it might suffice to consider only human free will, that being the moral cause of evil.[97] Evil is thus grafted into the originary drama of a theogeny and the decadence of the divine

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[95] Cf. H. CORNÉLIS-A. LÉONARD, *La Gnose éternelle*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris 1959. In my discussion of gnostic ideas I have drawn above all from: H. JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1958, 2001[3]; G. FILORAMO, *L'attesa della fine. Storia della gnosi*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1983. My thanks go to Giovanni Filoramo for his useful advice and bibliographical suggestions on various points.

[96] On the development of an anti-gnostic theodicy in the Jewish tradition, beginning with Rabbi Aqiba, drawing from the classics, Graetz, Krochmal and Joel, cf. H. Goitein (*op. cit.*, pp. 23 ff.). For a more detailed and up-to-date discussion, cf. A. F. SEGAL, *Two Powers in Heaven. Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*, EJ. Brill, Leiden 1977.

[97] H. Blumenberg (*Arbeit am Mythos*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1979, p. 146) notes: "The objective of gnosticism was to localise in the world the identity of physical suffering and moral evil, to enter into competition with the Biblical notion of Original Sin. Unlike the latter concept, in the gnostic myth, the sin of creating the world pre-dates any sin in the world. Man is distanced from the centre of guilt, because there is no longer any need to exonerate God, given that the origin of the world lies in evil" (cf. pp. 234, 235, 249 f., 320).

principle, or its duplicity, is traced back to the very moment of cosmogeny. This idea of evil as an ontological principle is opposed to the notion of evil as privation. Indeed, historically, even though its origins lay in classical Greek philosophy, this latter concept was developed by Plotinus, Saint Augustine and others as a specifically anti-gnostic argument, inasmuch as it offered a theoretical grounds for refusing to acknowledge evil as an ontological principle.

This ontology of evil brings with it, as a consequence, gnostic anti-cosmism, with the radical antinomianism which accompanies it, the conflictual dualism between man and world, man and God, God and world. Cosmic and historical pessimism and an emphasis on anguish as the only attitude which can viably be adopted by the individual in the world: such are the practical effects of these principles or perhaps, from another point of view, such are the historical and existential attitudes which the gnostics justified by adopting these principles.

Thus the goodness of creation is denied and replaced with a conception of the world as a demonic prison for mankind, work of a malign and tyrannical divinity. The principle of cosmic harmony is refuted in the most radical possible terms. gnosis, indeed, in its negative assessment of the created world, does not deny the existence of a governing order, does not attribute the negative character of the created world to a situation of chaos, but rather imputes the tragic state of the world to the malign ruling order. The gnostic *heimarméne* exercises a strict rule of iron, op pressing mankind and chaining the human spirit within the prison of creation. In this sense, gnosis is the most radical form of anti-theodicy. It does not deny divine justice but rather imputes negativity thereto, opposing an anarchic and transgressive attitude to the malign justice of the demiurge and to the arcontic powers that be. This attitude is identified with the love and compassion belonging to the supreme goodness, which constitutes a force absolutely alien to the world, and with the spirit of the elect, which yearns to flee from the world and to see its destruction.

This brief summary of the gnostic position represents no vain digression for the purposes of the present study of Leibniz. On the contrary, it brings us to one of the most crucial points of our discussion. Indeed, if it is true, as I have already argued, that gnosis is essentially an anti-theodicy, then theodicy cannot but confront itself with gnosis, cannot but consider gnosis as one of its foremost antagonists, together with scepticism, as we have already discussed.[98] There exist various relationships and points of thematic dialogue between gnosis and scepticism,[99] and it may be possible to trace a common root for these two positions, but for the moment, for the purposes of clarity, we will maintain the distinction between these two antagonists of theodicy,

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[98] O. Marquard (*Vernunft als Grenzreaktion. Zur Verwandlung der Vernunft durch die Theodizee*, in AA.VV., *Wandel des Vernunftbegriffs*, ed. H. Poser, Alber, Freiburg i. B. 1981, p. 115) writes: "Leibniz's direct response to Bayle is at the same time an indirect response to gnostic beliefs, which consider there to be a principle of evil. This emerges in an extreme form in Marcion, who opposes a good, redemptive god to an evil creative one."

[99] Cf. H. JONAS, *op. cit.*, pp. 272 f.

attributing to the first an opposition which we might term *gnoseological* and to the second one which we might term *ontological*. For this reason, Leibniz's rebuttal of gnostic objections in the *Theodicy* should be seen as in no way surprising or secondary.

Leibniz actually addresses his polemics to the manicheans. This is understandable, as Bayle, in his *Dictionnaire*, put forward his own arguments above all in the entry on "Manicheans." We should nonetheless consider that, at Leibniz's time, the discussion on manicheanism, which had taken on an increased momentum as a consequence of the polemics between Catholics and Protestants,[100] actually took into account a far broader tradition of heresy than that of the historical manichean sect, going back to its gnostic precedents and extending to various medieval and modern heresies which recalled its concerns.[101] That manicheanism was a Gnnostic sect is an assumption which recent historical and philological research, based, in part on newly discovered documents, has verified and confirmed.[102] In Leibniz's own time, the connection between the gnostic sects and manicheanism was already considered very close, as witness, for example, the title of a 1707 text by J. Christoph Wolf, *Manichaeismus ante Manichaeos et in Christianismo redivivus...*[103] The third[104] section in this work deals with Bayle's exposition of manicheanism, and the debate which arose as a consequence thereof, examining the main gnostic sects which are treated as precedents for manicheanism.[105] Indeed, Bayle does not limit his discussion

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[100] Cf., on this point, the *Première Partie*, in J. RIES, *Les Études manichéennes. Des controverses de la Réforme aux découvertes du XXe siècle*, Centre d'Histoire des Religions, Louvain-La-Neuve 1988, pp. 17 ff. The spread of anti-manichean polemics in the 1700s is also noted by K.Wollf (*op. cit.*, p. 55 note 21).

[101] H. Jonas (*op. cit.*, p. 208) confirms that manicheanism "as an abstract principle stripped of most of the mythological detail with which Mani had embroidered it, it again and again reappeared in the sectarian history of mediaeval Christendom, where often 'heretical' was identical with 'neo-Manichaean'."

[102] J. Ries (*op. cit.*, p. 16) writes: "In the course of the first three decades of the twentieth century scholars intuited that manicheanism represented a form of gnosis. The text of Medinet Madi confirmed this intuition and opened the way for the study of this type of gnosis." H. Cornélis and A. Léonard (*op. cit.*, pp. 38 f.), locating manicheanism within the "brief history of the birth and development of the gnostic germ" (p. 23), explicitly recognise it as a form of gnosis. H. JONAS, too, (*op. cit.*, pp. 206 ff.; IDEM, *The Gnostic Syndrome: Typology of its Thought, Imagination, and Mood*, in IDEM, *Philosophical Essays. From Ancient Creed to Technological Man*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs (NJ) 1974, pp. 275-276; and, implicitly, IDEM, *The Hymn of the Pearl: Case Study of a Symbol, and the Claims for a Jewish Origin of Gnosticism*, in IDEM, *Philosophical Essays. From Ancient Creed to Technological Man*, cit., pp. 277 ff.) considers Mani as a gnostic.

[103] J. Ch. WOLF, *Manichaeismus ante Manichaeos et in Christianismo Redivivus...*, Hamburg 1707, facsimile edition Leipzig, Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1970.

[104] Cf. *ibi*, pp. 305 ff.

[105] Cf. *ibi*, pp. 174 ff.

of theodicy to the entry on "Manicheans." These concerns also emerge in other entries, such as those on "Marcionites," "Paulicians," "Xenophanes," "Simonides" and "Zarathustra" (which, as a consequence, also appear in Leibniz's *Theodicy*).

Having thus offered a historical justification for passing from the historical notion of "manicheanism" to the typological one of "gnosis," I will present my two main reasons for wishing to do so. First of all, when we read the *Theodicy* today, it is noteworthy that the manichean references are of scarce interest, while reference to gnosis, as a fundamental type of heresy and as an anti-theodicy, is, to my mind, of considerable contemporary relevance and of crucial importance. Secondly, as we will see, although Leibnizian discourse (like that of Bayle) places considerable evidence of the typically manichean theme of the duplicity of the divine principles (which is not, however, altogether alien to gnostic sects, such as that of Marcion), this also implies a polemic against other characteristics of gnosis in general – a polemic which touches on the very question of the possibility the legitimacy of theodicy.

It is certainly true that Bayle, in expounding on the theories of the manicheans, overtly condemns them. Yet this does not rule out the suspicion, which has been expressed by various critics, that he has some covert sympathy with the ideas in question.[106] Leibniz, in accordance with his custom of respect for and remaining open to dialogue with his antagonists, does not endorse any such suspicion. It is true that, at one point in the *Theodicy*, he appears to make a veiled remark to this effect:

> He [Bayle] believes that an able man on their side [of the manichaeans] would have thoroughly embarrassed the orthodox, and it seems as though he himself, failing any other, wished to undertake a task so unnecessary in the opinion of many people.[107]

Notwithstanding this, his attitude towards Bayle is in general benevolent and respectful and he misses no occasion to acknowledge the intellectual honesty of his interlocutor. Nonetheless, Leibniz absolutely disagreed with Bayle in this regard. Bayle, as Leibniz writes,

> confesses that the 'Dualists' (as with Mr. Hyde he calls them), that is, the champions of two principles, would soon have been routed by *a priori* reasons, taken from the nature of God; but

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[106] Amongst his recent readers, for example, E. Labrousse (*Pierre Bayle*, vol. II: *Hétérodoxie et rigorisme*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1964, pp. 383 f.) writes: "Unlike many of his contemporaries and, above all, unlike his immediate successors, Bayle is profoundly pessimistic Just like the gnostics, his original intuition is that existence constitutes a misadventure. This is the liminal reason for his resistence against the arguments of theodicy. Evil, for him, is not just one aspect of human condition. For Bayle, life itself is oppressive. "
H. Titze (*Betrachtungen zu Leibnizens bester Welt*, in AA.VV., *Akten des II. Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 17.-22. Juli 1972, vol. III: *Metaphysik - Ethik - Ästhetik - Monadenlehre*, cit., p. 15) also maintains that Bayle is a manichean.

[107] *T* 195/214.

he thinks that they triumph in their turn when one comes to the *a posteriori* reasons, which are taken from the existence of evil.[108]

Leibniz, too, as we have seen, sustains that the true basis for theodicy lies in *a priori* reasons but, unlike Bayle, Leibniz holds that *a posteriori* reasons cannot contradict *a priori* reasoning and that, therefore, *a posteriori* apologetics can be successful, despite their non-demonstrative nature, because they rest on *a priori* justifications. Beneath this difference lies another, yet more fundamental, difference of approach between Bayle and Leibniz. The very fact Bayle's presumed "*a priori* reasons" can be confuted by his "*a posteriori* reasons" demonstrates that the former are not, in fact, "reasons" (because reason cannot contradict itself), but rather opinions of faith which are not motivated by reason. This is because Bayle's position, as he himself explicitly acknowledges, is that of fideism, which opposes faith to reason. And it is on this point that Leibniz objects to Bayle's anti-manichean arguments:

> As he paid particular attention in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* to expounding the objections of the manichaeans and those of the Pyrrhonians, and as this procedure had been criticized by some persons zealous for religion, he [Bayle] placed a dissertation at the end of the second edition of this *Dictionary*, which aimed at showing, by examples, by authorities and by reasons, the innocence and usefulness of his course of action. I am persuaded (as I have said above) that the specious objections one can urge against truth are very useful, and that they serve to confirm and to illumine it, giving opportunity to intelligent persons to find new openings or to turn the old to better account. But M. Bayle seeks therein a usefulness quite the reverse of this: it would be that of displaying the power of faith by showing that the truths it teaches cannot sustain the attacks of reason and that it nevertheless holds its own in the heart of the faithful.[109]

Leibniz's main arguments against the manicheans in the *Theodicy* appear in §§ 136-157. The first part of this section (§§ 136-143) is a historical-etymological overview of the universal emergence of the manichean notion of the duplicity of the divine principles. Leibniz, in his *Preface,* presents this *excursus* as a cultural curiosity, granted to the reader in order to temporarily lighten the weighty matters being treated of in the main body of the argument.[110] In reality, however, this exposition has more serious implications, which also emerge in similar discussions present in other contemporary studies on the subject.[111] It suggests that manicheanism, that is to say, gnosis, i.e. the anti-theodicy, is a universal and permanent phenomenen, present in all cultures across history.

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[108] *Ibidem.*

[109] *T* 72 f./96.

[110] Cf. *T* 47 f./71 f.

[111] Cf. J. Ch. WOLF, *op. cit.*

Leibniz follows up this introduction with eleven arguments against manichean dualism:

1) Disorder is part of the overall order.[112]
2) Only when we can see a work of God (such as the solar system) in its entirety can we truly grasp its perfection. The perception of such a harmony permits us to assume the existence of harmony at a universal level.[113]
3) Evil is a product of man's free will. God only intervenes to redirect its effects towards the ends of the universal good.[114]
4) There is more good than evil in the world.[115]
5) There are not two opposed principles, but rather various different attributes of the single divine principle.[116]
6) To assume that evil constitutes a principle *per se* does nothing to explain it.[117]
7) Evil is a privation.[118]
8) We do not justify free will by referring it to a duality of principles.[119]
9) Moral evil is caused not by God but by man. God induces physical suffering, as a punishment for moral evil.[120]
10) To impede evil, God would have had to compromise the principle of order through recourse to continuous miracles.[121]
11) The devil is the author, but not the origin of sin. The imperfection of man is the origin, but not the principle of sin.[122]

As we can see, all of these points, some of which were already mentioned in our more general discussion of apologetic arguments, can be traced back to the three traditional arguments against gnosis: the goodness of creation, the harmony of the cosmos and the notion of evil as privation. They all, then, ultimately seek to uphold a

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[112] Cf. *T* 196/214.

[113] Cf. *T* 196/215.

[114] Cf. *T* 197/215 f.

[115] Cf. *T* 198/216.

[116] Cf. *T* 198/217.

[117] Cf. *T* 200/218.

[118] Cf. *T* 201/219.

[119] Cf. *T* 201/220.

[120] Cf. *T* 202/220.

[121] Cf. *T* 202/221.

[122] Cf. *T* 203/221.

single thesis: there is no principle of evil. We can identify an author of moral evil, which is human free will (and, only in a limited and precise sense, the devil). Likewise, we can identify an author of physical suffering, which is again human free will. The immediate cause of physical suffering is God, but only in the form of Providence, inasmuch as He punishes moral evil with physical suffering. This entails that the true cause of physical suffering is moral evil. We can, finally, identify an origin for both evil and suffering – human imperfection, but this is not to be understood as a principle per se, not only because it is something created, but also because it "renders … [creatures] capable"[123] of sin, but is not the *causa efficiens* thereof. We will return to this last point later on in our discussion.[124]

The main, and apparently the only theme discussed by Leibniz, as by Bayle, in this regard, is the notion of dualism. This theme is certainly typical of manicheanism and was only explicitly adopted by a few gnostic sects. However, a more careful analysis of the matter in hand partially alters this outlook. It is certainly true that this is the point on which Leibniz dwells most insistently (also in consequence, I repeat, of a similar emphasis in Bayle and, more generally, in the contemporary debates of Leibniz's time). In addition to the paragraphs considered above the issue comes up for discussion again on numerous occasions in the *Theodicy* itself[125] and elsewhere.[126] Nonetheless, what interests Leibniz most of all, in refuting this thesis, is not so much dualism as the imputation of evil to God. Leibniz clearly acknowledges that the notion of there being more than one divine principle is substantially absurd inasmuch as it constitutes a return to polytheism and that its significance should therefore be understood as almost purely metaphorical. He forcibly argues that, even were this hypothesis to be dropped, the original question would remain. Indeed, this question acquires all its force and gravity at the very moment when the "dualist" theory is abandoned, since it is at this point that its true meaning becomes clear – namely, the accusation against God which underlies the dualist hypothesis and is concealed rather than being revealed thereby. Leibniz writes:

> All these three dogmas, albeit a little different from one another, namely, (1) that the nature of justice is arbitrary, (2) that it is fixed, but it is not certain that God will observe it, and finally (3) that the justice we know is not that which he observes, destroy the confidence in God that gives us tranquillity, and the love of God that makes our happiness. There is nothing to prevent such a God from behaving as a tyrant and an enemy of honest folk, and from taking pleasure in that which we call evil. Why should he not, then, just as well be the evil principle of the manichaeans as the single good principle of the orthodox?[127]

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[123] *Ibidem*.

[124] Cf. *infra*, Chapter Five, § 3.

[125] Cf. *T* 74 f./98, 80 f./103 f., 103/124 f., 118/138, 234/251, 414/419.

[126] Cf. *GP III* 28, 479; *IV* 581; *GRUA* 363 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 113), 413, 435, 457, 489; *CF* 54.

[127] *T* 220/237; cf. 29/53, 35/59, 71 f./95; *GP III* 310; *VI* 449; *GRUA* 462.

What seems clear to Leibnz, then, is that if we acknowledge a metaphysical principle of evil, we inevitably come to discuss God's goodness. To uphold the notion of a good divinity absolutely detached from and indifferent to the world, whose only presence consists in a certain spark of light in the spirits of the elect (which is the characteristic approach of the gnostics) does nothing to avoid such an outcome. The extraneous divinity, indeed, will never constitute a reality for mankind, if not to the extent to which it is present in the elect spirits. Hence a belief in this presence will only result, not in the adoration of this unreachable divinity, but rather in the deification of man (of the elect) and of his resurgent hatred of the sole divinity with whom he effectively interacts – the malevolent God who governs worldly things. To Leibniz's mind this, as we have seen, reduces the doctrine of dualism back to the imputation of evil to God – i.e. to the notion of a non-Christian fate.

Secondly, in Bayle and, as a consequence, also in Leibniz, there is another important implication to the consideration of manichean ideas. Bayle, in fact, attacks the manicheans as representatives of reason in explaining the origin of evil. In so doing he followed a traditional line of argument. It is doubtless interesting to note, incidentally, that, whereas nowadays philosophy is often criticised for its inability to face the problem of evil without denying it altogether, in the past philosophy was rather criticised for inspiring the radical conception of evil as an ontological principle.[128] For Bayle, then the manicheans are exponents of a philosophical and rational discourse on evil, to which the force of pure faith stands in opposition. Leibniz takes an entirely different approach in opposing manichean discourse, in accordance with his fundamental divergence from Bayle.

When we consider that every form of rationalism, i.e. every form of thought which sustains the validity of rational knowledge, has always come across those who suspect it of gnosis, it should come as no surprise that Leibniz, too, encountered such accusations.[129] In reality, in Leibniz's case, such accusations could not be more

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[128] For example, Tertullian (*De praescriptione haereticorum*, § 7, in *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, *Tertulliani Opera*, vol. I, Brepols, Turnhout 1954, pp. 192 f.) accuses philosophy of stirring up the gnostic heresies. Thus, again, in the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Socrates Scholasticus, the inspiration for manicheanism is traced to the philosophy of Empodecles and Protagoras (cf. *Socratis Scholastici Ecclesiastica Historia*, libro I, cap. XXI, ed. R. Hussey, Tip. Academica, Oxford 1853, vol. I, pp. 124 f. J). Ch. Wolf (*op. cit.*) also cites numerous Greek philosophers amongst the antecedents of manicheanism.

[129] L. Chestov (*Athènes et Jérusalem. Un essai de philosophie religieuse*, J. Vrin, Paris 1938, p. 376) already accused Leibniz of gnosis, as did J. Guitton (*Pascal et Leibniz. Étude sur deux types de penseurs*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris 1951, pp. 163 f.). E. Cione (*op. cit.*) alligns himself with Guitton, imputing a gnostic character to Leibniz's philosophy, not only due to its rationalism, but also, surprisingly, as a consequence of its affirmation of the harmony between nature and grace, because "it does not present redemption as a *hyatus* in the history of creation." The position adopted by R. E. Butts (*Kant and the Double Government Methodology. Supersensibility and Method in Kant's Philosophy of Science*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster 1984, pp. 29 ff.), is of less interest to us here, because he attributes a gnostic character to Leibniz's Monodology and its sources. Guitton's accusation is convincingly rejected by A. HEINEKAMP,

unfounded. Leibniz's rationalism has nothing to do with gnosis. It constitutes, rather, the very antithesis thereof. First of all, gnostic knowledge, in general, cannot be compared to modern rational knowledge. It constitutes a faculty of the pneumatic man, whilst the psychic man, like the hylic, is part of the corrupt world.[130] Now, if we were to seek to place reason (which is a natural faculty of man), within gnostic anthropology, it should surely fall in the psychic, not the pneumatic sphere. This is such an important issue that Hans Jonas maintains that it is its attitude towards the psychic, not to the hylic sphere, which constitutes the defining characteristic of gnosis.[131] Secondly, a fundamental characteristic of gnostic knowledge is its salvational character, whilst, as I have extensively illustrated in the previous chapters, knowledge for Leibniz is not redemptory *per se*, but serves only to justify and sustain virtue, together with which it constitutes true piety.[132] Leibniz's refutation of manicheanism (and, in this sense, also Bayle's), is not, therefore, solely concerned with dualism but also calls into question the presumed rationality of the manichean arguments, which Leibniz unmasks as being fundamentally irrational and to which he

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Leibniz und die Mystik, in AA.VV., *Gnosis und Mystik in der Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. P. Koslowski, Artemis Verlag, Zürich-München 1988, p. 184.

[130] H. Jonas (*The Soul in Gnosticism and Plotinus*, in IDEM, *Philosophical Essays. From Ancient Creed to Technological Man*, cit., pp. 324 ff., 328) emphasises a "re-evalution, i.e., a downgrading of 'soul'" (p. 325) in gnosticism. In truth, he attributes this "re-evalution" not only to gnosticism, but also to Origen and Plotinus, thus falling in with a set of conceptions which were widely held at the time of writing. The correctness or otherwise of this thesis is highly significant for the interpretation of Origen and Plotinus, and from various other points of view, but is irrelevant from the point of view of the thesis which is being presented here – namely, that the exercise of modern and, especially, Leibnizian reason cannot be interpreted as a new form of gnosis.

[131] H. Jonas (*The Gnostic Religion*, cit., p. 158) writes: "that what attaches itself to the soul on its downward journey has the character of substantial though immaterial entities, and these are frequently described as 'envelopments' or 'garments'. Accordingly the resultant terrestrial 'soul' is comparable to an onion with so many layers, on the model of the cosmos itself, only in inverse order: what is outermost there is what is innermost here, and after the process is completed with incarnation, what is innermost in the spherical scheme of the cosmos, the earth, is a body the outer garment of man. That this *body* is a fatality to the soul had long ago been preached by the Orphics, whose teachings were revived in the era of Gnosticism. But now the *psychical* envelopments too are considered impairments and fetters of the transmundane spirit." Cf. *ibi*, pp. 327, 332-333, and IDEM, *Myth and Mysticism: A Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought*, in IDEM, *Philosophical Essays. From Ancient Creed to Technological Man*, cit., pp. 293, 294-295 f.

[132] On the essential difference between gnostic knowledge and natural, philosophical and scientific reason, cf. H. JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion*, cit., pp. 32, 34 ff., 329-330. With regard to knowledge, see also the typology of gnosticism presented by Jonas in *The Gnostic Syndrome: Typology of its Thought, Imagination, and Mood*, cit., pp. 263 ff. G. Filoramo (*op. cit.*, pp. 63 ff.) also underlines this difference: "*Gnosis* designates [...] a form of meta-rational knowledge, which is a gift of the divinity who has the power to save those who accomplish it" (p. 64).

opposes a true form of reason. Leibniz wonders at the high esteem expressed by Bayle for the demonstrative force of the manichean doctrines:

> I wonder that this admirable man could have evinced so great an inclination towards this opinion of the two principles.[133]

Leibniz, on the other hand, seeks to demonstrate that there is nothing rational at all about the manichean doctrine and that, indeed, reason lies with its categorical refutation.[134] In a letter to Bourguet, written on 14 April 1710, Leibniz expresses his opinion of those who he calls, in accordance with patristic traditions (originating perhaps in *1Tm* 6:20), "the ancient pseudo-gnostics." He presents them as espousing an irrational and over-imaginative school of thought which is utterly ungrounded and can be compared to certain forms of mystical fanaticism. Such forms of error can only be curbed and suppressed through the rigorous application of reason:

> And just as you write: from the foolish errors of the pseudo-cabbalists and the pseudo-philosophers, who mixed up the true with the false, arose the monstrous dogmas of the ancient pseudo-gnostics. And this kind of thing happens above all when half-learned man are permitted to contemplate matters which are too sublime for their understanding and let their imaginations run wild. We can find an example of a recent such case in Jacob Boehme who, after having read a few books of metaphysics, mysticism and chemistry in the vulgar tongue, conjured up a whole series of extraordinary absurdities, which to many, who contented themselves with a merely superficial consideration of things, seemed to constitute great mysteries. To flee from these phantasms of the imagination, there is nothing better than exercising oneself in the use of reason or the art of thought. If men would only heed Aristotle's and Descartes' admonition that we should admit nothing which cannot be affirmed by the reason and that our minds are not enlightened, but rather perverted by dulcet dreams![135]

Leibniz, then, turns Bayle's anti-gnostic argument on its head. If, for Bayle, gnosis represents the rational contestation of faith, for Leibniz, instead, it represents an irrational and anti-rational opposition to faith, for which theodicy offers the rational *apologia*. And since, as we have stated, there exists a close connection between reason and the harmonious order of the universe, it will suffice to reveal the relationship between these two elements and divine justice, which constitutes the principle behind both, to bring to light the deepest and most essential aspect of the antithesis between gnosis and theodicy. Gnostic antinomianism, for which the essential meaning and practical outcome of libertinism or of asceticism are basically the same, consists in the negative evaluation of and hostility towards justice in all its forms, be it legal or moral, be it cosmic law or divine justice. Gnosis opposes the good and compassionate God to the just God, creator and tyrant, and when we disregard dualism, it comes to oppose God's attribute of goodness to that of His

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[133] *T* 198/217.

[134] Cf. *T* 72/96, 75/98, 340 f./352 f.; *GP III* 562 f.; *GRUA* 489, 501; *FdCL* 181 f.

[135] *GP III* 551.

justice. The gnostic contestation of theodicy, then, does not consist in calling God's justice into question, but rather in opposing God because He is just and therefore not good (incidentally, this kind of anti-theodicy necessarily cancels out one of the classic issues dealt with by theodicy – that of the infelicity of the just and the felicity of the unjust). The gnostic therefore represents an antagonist to theodicy, together with the sceptic, because, with his accusations, he opposes the justice of God to his goodness and condemns as one the world created by God, together with His order, His laws and His rationality.[136] Nothing could be more antithetical to Leibniz's philosophy and faith than this. One of the fundamental themes of the *Theodicy*, as we will see, is the unity and harmony of the divine attributes – of the unity of goodness with power through wisdom. Moreover, as we will come to recall, Leibniz considers the connection between justice and goodness as being so close that he calls justice the "charity of the wise."

Before concluding, I would like to add a final note on the theme of angst which, for the gnostics, as a consequence of their antinomianism and anticosmism, is the permanent and insurmountable sentiment of the individual in the world. We do not come across any explicit argument on this point in the *Theodicy*. Christian felicity is placed in antithesis to stoic patience, not to gnostic angst. A few implicit references to this theme might be traced in the apologetic argument, cited above, regarding the quantitative relationship between good and evil in the world. This argument which, at first sight, appears entirely empirical is, in fact, anything but, since it is clear that no such calculation can be founded on a mere empirical quantification. It thus becomes clear that such an assessment depends on the attitude and perspective of the individual who seeks to weigh up good and evil in the world. Herein, then, we might in some sense trace Leibniz's response and opposition to pessimist angst. Only in a comment on Shaftesbury's *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* have I found any explicit reference to this theme, which would seem to confirm such a notion (especially if we bear in mind that the letter was written shortly after the *Theodicy*):

> What follows is excellent. That is to say, its good humour, contentment, or joy constitutes the surest foundation for religion and piety. In such a state, the soul distances itself from the opinion of those who believe the world to be governed by an evil principle. Indeed, there is little else but ill humour which can lead us to fall into atheism, since when one is in a bad mood it is easy to take exception to the universe and end up denying God or holding him in low esteem. This, he argues, is because it is our sad humour alone which leads us to attribute malice, cruelty and pride to God. All of this is good sense.[137]

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[136] H. Jonas (*The Gnostic Religion*, cit., p. 328) emphasises that for the gnostics "The blemish of natura lies not in any deficiency of order, but in all too pervading completeness of it. Far from being chaos, the creation of the demiurge, unenlightened as it is, is still a system of law. But cosmic law, once worshiped as the expression of a reason with which man's reason can communicate in the act of cognition, is now seen only in its aspect of compulsion which thwarts man's freedom. The cosmic *lógos* of the Stoics, which was identified with providence, is replaced by *hermaiméne*, oppressive cosmic fate." Soon after (p. 331) he specifies that "The very concept of law was affected thereby in in all its aspects – as natural law, political law, and moral law."

[137] *GP III* 412.

CHAPTER FOUR

PREDETERMINATION AND FREE WILL

As we have seen, for Leibniz, the apologetic arguments do not have any demonstrative force. They are not even able to uphold faith by themselves. Their use is legitimate only if it is founded on other *a priori* arguments. Even these latter arguments, we must not forget, cannot bring us to a demonstrative understanding of mystery. They must, however, be able to provide a solid foundation in "motives of credibility" for our "upholding" of mystery against the antagonists of faith.

If our current line of enquiry is to carry us back from the finished work to its foundations, we must now consider those notions – necessity, possibility, contingency, freedom, the principle of the best and evil – which constitute the pillars upon which the apologetic arguments stand yet which do not yet represent the ultimate foundation of the discourse as whole. These notions are a necessary moment in theodicy, in which the truths of faith are confronted with and put to the test by the philosophical reason. The outcome is neither reciprocal refutation nor the severance of the latter from the former. Rather, the encounter yields an affirmation of important aspects of the "conformity of faith with reason." We will here be concerned, in the majority of cases, with philosophical themes in Leibniz which have already been widely studied and discussed. I will, therefore, refrain from reiterating points which have already been made clear and limit myself to considering these themes exclusively from the point of view of the overall scope and aims of the present study.

1.   *Absolute Necessity vs. Hypothetical and Moral Necessity*

The difference between absolute necessity and hypothetical and moral necessity is of fundamental importance for the very statement of the problem of theodicy. Anyone who fails to grasp this issue, in fact, already jeopardises any chances of resolving the issue at hand. Leibniz writes that this distinction is that "which M. Bayle and other modern philosophers have not sufficiently understood"[1] and that the confusion of these concepts is "the misapprehension of my opponents".[2] Indeed, if we do not recognise the difference between these two "degrees" of necessity, the relationship between predetermination and free will, which is one of the main issues of theodicy, is transformed into the problem of reconciling necessity and free will. This, however, constitutes a false problem: between necessity and freedom, there exists only opposition, and the relationship between the two cannot but be one of mutual

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[1] *T* 37/61.

[2] *T* 413/418.

exclusion. No reconciliation, no point of juncture is possible between these two opposites: that which is necessary is not free, and vice versa. Anyone who poses the question in these terms, then, cannot but conclude by denying necessity in favour of an absolute freedom and absence of determination, or denying freedom in favour of an absolute necessity. Since no one has every managed to trace even the slightest inclination towards the former position in Leibniz, since it is utterly antithetical to all his thinking, one might feel tempted to interpret his intentions and results by measuring and assessing the distance between his necessary determinism and other systems of this type – above all that of Spinoza. This, however, in my opinion, is a line of enquiry which rests upon a mistaken hypothesis.

We need, instead, to restate the question in its authentic terms. The problem is this: how can we reconcile human free will with divine predetermination; and since no reconciliation can be made between freedom and necessity, the only possible approach, to Leibniz's mind, is to enquire if and how one can conceive of divine predetermination as non necessary and non-necessitating. The question of divine predetermination, then, should be posed, not introducing necessity, but rather eliminating it. Leibnizian discourse on necessity aims not to affirm but rather to deny it, or at least to restrict it to the confines of eternal truths and the divine being. If, in formulating his conceptual alternative to absolute necessity, Leibniz deploys the term "necessity" ("hypothetical necessity," "moral necessity"), this is due in part to his recourse to a pre-existent terminology and in part, as we shall see, to his wish to underline the deterministic character of his conception. Nonetheless, this does not change the fact that the "hypothetical necessity" and "moral necessity" which Leibniz opposes to "absolute necessity" *are not forms of necessity at all, but are rather simply forms of determination*. Leibniz himself sometimes hints at this intent, when he points out that absolute necessity is "real necessity",[3] while hypothetical and moral necessity "has the name by analogy only".[4] Leibniz's intentions emerge far more clearly, however, in his persistent and indefatigable efforts to demonstrate that hypothetical and moral necessity do not stand in opposition to contingency, and are not opposed to freedom, either. As evidence that such was effectively the intention of Leibniz, I will here quote the opening of what is perhaps the most famous of his writings to bear the title *De libertate*. Here it clearly emerges that, for Leibniz, the the issue of the relationship between predetermination and free will can only be correctly posed and a way towards its solution be opened up when we set aside the theory of the absolute necessity of the real:

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[3] *T* 37/61; cf. *GP III* 401 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 193).

[4] *T* 386/387; cf. *S* 96 f. This is so clear that, when Leibniz made recourse once again to the distinction between absolute and hypothetical and moral necessity on one of the uncountable occasions in which he found himself obliged to defend himself against charges of having upheld the necessity of divine predetermination (cf. *GP VII* 389 ff. [Eng. trans. *L-C* 55ff.]), Samuel Clarke retorted: "*Necessity*, in philosophical questions, always signifies absolute necessity. *Hypothetical necessity*, and *moral necessity*, are only figurative ways of speaking, and in philosophical strictness of truth, are no necessity at all" (*GP VII* 423; Eng. trans. *L-C* 99).

How freedom and contingency can coexist with the series of causes and with providence is the oldest worry of the human race. And the difficulty of the problem has only increased through the investigations Christians have made concerning God's justice in providing for the salvation of men.

When I considered that nothing happens by chance or by accident (unless we are considering certain substances taken by themselves), that fortune distinguished from fate is an empty name, and that no thing exists unless its own particular conditions (*requisitis*) are present (conditions from whose joint presence it follows, in turn, that the thing exists), I was very close to the view of those who think that everything is absolutely necessary, who judge that it is enough for freedom that we be uncoerced, even though we might be subject to necessity, and close to the view of those who do not distinguish what is infallible or certainly known to be true, from that which is necessary.

But the consideration of possibles, which are not, were not, and will not be, *brought me back from this precipice*.[5]

Leibniz therefore distinguishes between "the different degrees of necessity"[6] entrusting the resolution of many of theodicy's most thorny issues to this distinction:

I will point out that absolute necessity, which is called also logical and metaphysical and sometimes geometrical, and which would alone be formidable in this connexion, does not exist in free actions, and that thus freedom is exempt not only from constraint but also from real necessity. I will show that God himself, although he always chooses the best, does not act by an absolute necessity, and that the laws of nature laid down by God, founded upon the fitness of things, keep the mean between geometrical truths, absolutely necessary, and arbitrary decrees; which M. Bayle and other modern philosophers have not sufficiently understood. Further I will show that there is an indifference in freedom, because there is no absolute necessity for one course or the other; but yet that there is never an indifference of perfect equipoise. And I will demonstrate that there is in free actions a perfect spontaneity beyond all that has been conceived hitherto. Finally I will make it plain that the hypothetical and the moral necessity which subsist in free actions are open to no objection, and that the 'Lazy Reason' is a pure sophism.[7]

Leibniz's discussion of "degrees" of necessity, then, is connected with the need to "keep the mean" of hypothetical and moral necessity between absolute necessity and absolute free will.[8] This expression is somewhat debatable, above all because, for Leibniz, randomness and arbitrarism are inconsistent hypotheses, errors and illusions. It follows that hypothetical and moral necessity is by no means a middle way between two alternatives but is rather the sole alternative to necessity in the true sense (and therefore not a "degree" thereof). Nonetheless, if Leibniz uses this image it is above all because, in addition to demonstrating that there is a type of order which is not opposed to contingency and freedom, he also wishes to assert that this order is

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[5] *FdCNL* 178; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 94; *italics mine*.

[6] *T* 33/57.

[7] *T* 37/61.

[8] Cf. also *T* 321/334: "the middle course".

every bit as determined and certain as the necessary one. It is this second concern, more than the first, which, in Leibniz's eyes, connects the "labyrinth" of predestination to the "labyrinth" of the continuum.[9]

Through infinitesimal calculus, Leibniz had opened up the possibility of elevating the "approximated" calculus to the same degree of determination and certainty guaranteed by "analytical" calculus, the "mechanical" construction to the same degree of determination and certainty to that guaranteed by the "geometric".[10] He now felt that he might transpose this mathematical model of a perfect determination of the finite via the infinite indeterminate into the field of theodicy. In theodicy, too, he would theorise a completely determined and certain order which was nonetheless not "geometric," i.e. which was not absolutely necessary and was therefore not opposed to the contingency of the real. He would do so through recourse to the infinite character of the determination of the contingent.[11]

This parallelism between the issues of predetermination and the mathematical problems of determination by means of the infinite is the "new and unexpected light" which, Leibniz writes, enabled him to proceed fruitfully towards the solution of the knotty problem of the determination of the contingent. In the brief text entitled *De libertate*,[12] to which I have already referred above, Leibniz, deals with the problem of freedom and predetermination, of contingency and necessity and positis as a universally valid principle, for all the necessary and contingent (affirmative) propositions

> that the predicate is in the subject, that is, that the notion of the predicate is involved somehow (*aliqua ratione*) in the notion of the subject.[13]

On this basis, he confronts the difficulties connected to the application of this absolute principle of truth to contingent propositions:

> if the notion of the predicate is in the notion of the subject at a given time, then how could the subject lack the predicate without contradiction and impossibility, and without changing that notion?[14]

It is at this point that Leibniz is illuminated with a "new and unexpected light":

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[9] Cf. *T* 29/53 *passim.*

[10] Cf. *GM V* 119 f.

[11] Cf., for example, *GRUA* 479.

[12] Cf. *FdCNL* 178 ff. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 94 ff.).

[13] *FdCNL* 179; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 95.

[14] *Ibidem.*

At last a certain new and unexpected light shined from where I least expected it, namely, from mathematical considerations of the nature of infinity. For there are two labyrinths of the human mind, one concerning the composition of the continuum, and the other concerning the nature of freedom, and they arise from the same source, infinity.[15]

Leibniz hence follows through this analogy between the sure, although non-demonstrative, scientific knowledge which humanity may have of the continuum, and the equally certain and similarly non-demonstrative scientific knowledge which God has of the contingent, concluding that:

just as incommensurable proportions are treated in the science of geometry, and we even have proofs about infinite series, so to a much greater extent, contingent or infinite truths are subordinate to God's knowledge, and are known by him not, indeed, through demonstration (which would imply a contradiction) but through his infallible intuition (*visio*).[16]

It seems, then, that Leibniz willingly accepted the improper term, "hypothetical and moral *necessity*," inasmuch as it permitted him to stress the degree of determination and certainty of the order of the contingent, which is no lower than that of the determination and certainty to be found in the necessary.[17] Indeed, Leibniz himself insists on this point on many occasions, thus evincing the importance which he attributes to this thesis, counter to any assertion of randomness or arbitrarism.

If, however, the determination of the contingent is similar to that of the necessary and excludes every non-deterministic consideration, this does not mean that the contingent and the necessary are identical. Given the definition of the necessary as that of which the opposite is impossible, or implies contradiction, the contingent, then, is exactly that which is not necessary, since its opposite is that which is possible, or does not imply contradiction. Even, then, if we choose to refer to the determination of the contingent in terms of hypothetical and moral necessity, this name should nonetheless be taken to designate "non-necessity".[18] Only under these conditions can the term "necessity" be used unambiguously in reference to the contingent. We are not concerned, writes Leibniz, with an absolute necessity, which can be harmful to us,[19] which we must fear,[20] and which is incompatible with

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[15] *FdCNL* 179 f.; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 95.

[16] *FdCNL* 184; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 97. A similar argument can also be found in the untitled piece published in *COUT* 16 ff. Cf. also the *Generales Inquisitiones*, in *COUT* 388 f. [Eng. trans. *LP* 77 f.], and *GRUA* 479. Cf. also, in the form of an outline, *COUT* 1 ff. [Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 98 ff.].

[17] Cf. H. POSER, *Zur Theorie der Modalbegriffe bei G.W. Leibniz*, in "Studia Leibnitiana", Supplementary vol. VI, Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden 1969, p. 99.

[18] *T* 296/310.

[19] Cf. *T* 33/57.

[20] Cf. *T* 37/61, 380/381, 386/387.

morality,[21] but rather with hypothetical and moral necessity, which is not contrary to contingency and free will. This brings us no inconvenience.[22] It is a "happy necessity",[23] which "instead of destroying religion […] shows divine perfection to the best advantage".[24]

2.   *Contingency*

The next question which arises, then, is how Leibniz can conceive of contingency as remaining contingent even though it is determined and certain, since were sure determination to exclude contingency, as we have seen, everything would be absolutely necessary and there would be no arena for free will.

The logical significance of "contingency" is ambiguous and problematic, as the concept's own history demonstrates. In Leibniz, too, diverse definitions and formulations of this concept recur, which are not always reconcilable with one another and are not always immune to difficulties pertaining to the vaster, extremely complex and far from resolved issue of Leibniz's modal logic. This constitutes one of the most studied areas of Leibniz's thought nowadays, and perhaps also one of the most fertile in bringing forth new contemporary insights. Many scholars have produced and continue to produce wide-ranging and often fascinating studies on this matter.[25] I will here refrain from describing the conclusions drawn by others and, even more, from discussing or passing judgement on them. Above all, I will refrain from investigating Leibniz's modal logic since, for the purposes of the present research, the only point which really needs examining and clarifying is that which has already been indicated above: that is to say, how, in the *Theodicy*, does Leibniz seek to uphold the determination of contingency without this meaning that contingency ceases to be contingent?

The fundamental principle, presupposed by every further consideration of the contingent, is an affirmation of the "*possibility of things that do not happen*",[26] or

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[21] Cf. *T* 380/381, 386/387, 390/395, 412/416.

[22] Cf. *T* 184/203, 390/395.

[23] *T* 219/236; cf. 182/201, 319/332, 338/350, 386/387; *GP VII* 390 (Eng. trans. *L-C* 57); *GRUA* 289 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess*. 20).

[24] *T* 338/350.

[25] I will here limit myself to citing H. Poser's now classic study (*op. cit*.), which begins by providing a comparative overview of the various formulations of the fundamental concepts of modal logic in Leibniz and rightly seeks to highlight the embedded implicit and explicit, resolved and unresolved implications of the logical, ontological and gnoseological perspectives in Leibniz's speculation on those concepts.

[26] *T* 211/229.

rather that "not every possible thing attains existence".[27] That this presupposition underlies every defence of contingency, as well as constituting Leibniz's effective starting point, Leibniz himself informs us in the passage from the *De libertate* which I have already partially quoted:

> But the consideration of possibles, which are not, were not, and will not be, brought me back from this precipice [of absolute necessity]. For if there are certain possibles that never exist, than the things that exist, at any rate, are not always necessary, for otherwise it would be impossible for others to exist in their place, and thus, everything that never exists would be impossible.[28]

As I already noted in the first chapter, this very thesis of the existence of all possible is one of the key points on which Leibniz bases his harshest polemics against Spinoza and against Descartes, who he holds to have presented this argument before Spinoza. Leibniz returns to this question in the *Theodicy*,[29] demonstrating how this thesis inevitably leads to a belief in "blind necessity".[30] In the brief overview of the history of this thesis and its exponents, Leibniz proves more benign towards various authors, such as Wyclif and Hobbes, who he had condemned outright elsewhere but here is willing to interpret with a certain indulgence.[31] He stands firm, instead, in his condemnation of Spinoza.[32] It is worth bearing in mind that the thesis according to which not every possible is realised in existence is the fundamental presupposition and the pivotal argument of Lorenzo Valla's dialogue on free will:

> ANTONIO. I've got you there. Perhaps you're unaware of the precept of the philosophers: that everything that is possible must be conceded as if it really were? [...]
> LORENZO. Are you going to adopt the formulae of the philosophers in discussion with me? As if I wouldn't dare to contradict them? I hold this precept of which you speak, whoever its author may be, to represent the very height of absurdity.[33]

The importance of Valla's teachings for Leibniz is well-known[34] as is the way in which he always had in mind Valla's ideas and made them his own, at the same time as reaching beyond them, in his reworking of the Vallian dialogue at the end of

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[27] *GRUA* 305; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 30; cfr. *GRUA* 300, 478; *CF* 66.

[28] *FdCNL* 178 f.; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 94.

[29] Cf. *T* 211 ff./229 ff.

[30] *T* 217/234.

[31] Cf. *T* 216 f./234.

[32] Cf. *T* 217/234 f.

[33] L. VALLA, *Dialogo intorno al libero arbitrio*, in IDEM, *Scritti filosofici e religiosi*, ed. G. Radetti, Sansoni, Firenze 1953, p. 267.

[34] Cf. *T* 43/67.

the third part of the *Theoodicy*. Indeed, in those very pages, Leibniz paraphrases this passage from Valla's dialogue[35].

The issue of the possibility of that which does not effectively happen is closely linked with that of the determination of future contingents. This is because if, denying this possibility, those who do not wish to accept necessary fate must assert the indeterminacy of future contingents in accordance with the stance attributed to Epicureus,[36] Leibniz, instead, bases his theory of the determination of future contingents on this very presupposition of the possibility of that which does not effectively take place. This is the position which Leibniz ultimately endorses when he refers to the intricate polemics between "predeterminators" and "supporters of mediate knowledge".[37]

Leaving aside the theory of the indetermination of future contingents as a notion which has by now been dismissed ("Philosophers agree to-day that the truth of contingent futurities is determinate"),[38] Leibniz examines the essential qualities which characterise the approach of the "predeterminators" and that of the "supporters of mediate knowledge." The former explain divine prescience with the divine predetermination of future contingents. The latter, on the contrary, disturbed by the fact that this approach cancels out contingency, have recourse to a special divine science of conditionals, "mediate knowledge," between the "knowledge of mere intelligence" regarding the possibles and the "knowledge of intuition" regarding current events, which would permit God to foresee events given their conditions, without predetermining their existence. Leibniz moves between these two positions, giving credit where credit is due but ultimately moving beyond both to an original new approach. In the face of the predeterminators' objection that an absolute science of the conditional contingent is impossible if not on the basis of the predetermination of its conditions by divine decree, Leibniz sides with the supporters on mediate knowledge, responding that God may be well aware of the various possible series of conditional events (of the "possible worlds") "before he decrees their admission into existence:"

> For this result I resort to my principle of an infinitude of possible worlds, represented in the region of eternal verities, that is, in the object of the divine intelligence, where all conditional futurities must be comprised [...].Thus we have a principle for the certain knowledge of contingent futurities, whether they happen actually or must happen in a certain case. For in the region of the possibles they are represented as they are, namely, as free contingencies. Therefore neither the foreknowledge of contingent futurities nor the foundation for the certainty of this foreknowledge should cause us perplexity or seem to prejudice freedom. And though it were true and possible that contingent futurities consisting in free actions of reasonable creatures were

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[35] Cf. *T* 359/367.

[36] Cf. *T* 211 f./229 f.

[37] Cf. *T* 123 ff./143 ff.

[38] *T* 123/143.

entirely independent of the decrees of God and of external causes, there would still be means of foreseeing them; for God would see them as they are in the region of the possibles, before he decrees to admit them into existence.[39]

As we can see, Leibniz's solution is based on the thesis of the infinity of possible worlds, i.e. on the principle that not every possible comes into existence, together with that of the determination of contingency. We should bear in mind, however, that in this way the contingent does not coincide with the existent possible, but with the possible in general, which is considered prior to and independently of its future existence, only in relation to its possible existence. To this is added and connected, in the Leibnizian solution, the distinction between the divine prescience of determinate contingents and the divine decree of admission into existence of a possible series of contingencies, or possible worlds.

Yet it is this very distinction which distances Leibniz from the supporters of mediate knowledge. If he agrees that prescience does not imply determination of existence, since this occurs prior to the decree of admission into existence, in the "region of the possibles," or "free contingencies",[40] he nonetheless does not believe that we can stop here. On the contrary, we must concede that God foreordained his decrees regarding the existence of one possible world rather than the others:

> if the foreknowledge of God has nothing to do with the dependence or independence of our free actions, it is not so with the foreordinance of God, his decrees, and the sequence of causes which, as I believe, always contribute to the determination of the will.[41]

Leibniz is not content, as are the supporters of mediate knowledge and as is Lorenzo Valla, to reconcile human freedom with divine prescience, avoiding the issue of God's predetermination of future contingents to existence:

> God is not as a man, able to look upon events with unconcern and to suspend his judgement, since nothing exists save as a result of the decrees of his will and through the action of his power.[42]

In his dialogue, indeed, Lorenzo Valla has the God of foresight, Apollo, respond to the prayer of Sextus Tarquinius with a less than noble denial of responsibility, leaving mankind at the mercy of obscure fate and the inscrutable counsel of Jupiter:

> At these words, Sextus: "What are you saying, oh Apollo? What have I done to you that you should forecast such a cruel fate for me? Such a miserable death? Retract, for pity's sake, your

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[39] *T* 126/146 f.; cf. *GP VI* 441; *GRUA* 310 f., 381.

[40] *T* 126/146.

[41] *T* 126/147.

[42] *T* 103/124.

reply. Predict happier events. Be kinder to me, who came to you bearing a gift." In response, Apollo: "I am grateful for and acceptant of your gifts, oh youth, and in thanks for them I have granted you my prophesy. It is miserable and sad, and I would have wished it happier, but it is beyond my power to alter it. I know the fates, I do not define them. I can proclaim fortune, not change it. I am the prophet of individual destinies, not their arbitrator. I would prophesy happier events for you if such events awaited you. I am without guilt in this matter, since I cannot even oppose myself to those unhappy events which I foresee for myself. Rail, if you will, against Jupiter, against the fates, against fortune, from whom descend the causes of events. The power of destiny and decision lies in their hands, in mine that of naked foresight and prediction."[43]

If Valla's solution here can be seen to resolve the issue of divine prescience, it certainly does not solve any of the problems faced by theodicy. Rather, it aggravates them. Valla himself is aware of this and has Antonio remark:

> Apollo does a good job of defending himself, but lays even more blame on Jupiter's doorstep.

To this, Lorenzo responds:

> Herein lies the crux of the argument I am proposing: the usefulness of this myth lies in the fact that, while it is impossible separate God's wisdom from his will and power, the image of Apollo and Jupiter enables me to sever them, thus obtaining a result with reference to two separate Gods which would be inconceivable with reference to one […]. It thus becomes evident that providence is not the cause of necessity, but that this latter, whatever it may be, stems exclusively from the will of God.[44]

Leibniz reproaches Valla for "cutting the knot",[45] shirking the thornier problem,[46] not daring to hope to reconcile freedom, not only with prescience, but also with providence. For his own part, after having summarised Valla's dialogue, Leibniz pursues and develops it in order to respond to this second difficulty which, contrary to Valla's assumption, is no greater than the first.[47]

The reference to Valla leads the discussion to the relationship between divine predestination and free will. Nonetheless, we must now put off this discussion a little longer and dwell briefly on the presupposition on which it rests, i.e. the relationship between divine predestination and contingency. That which preserves the contingent

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[43] *Ibi*, p. 269.

[44] *Ibi*, p. 272.

[45] Cf. *T* 361/369.

[46] Cf. *CF* 36.

[47] Cf. *T* 331/344. G.E. Barié's observation (*op. cit.*, p. 305, note 1) that, for Leibniz, it was only possible to discuss "divine prescience," inasmuch as God "knows, without determining" seems to me utterly unfounded. This does not correspond to Leibniz's thought, both because he makes explicit reference to predetermination and because God, for Leibniz, effectively determines the order of contingency, even if it is not absolutely necessary.

quality of the real, then, notwithstanding its full determination, is its hypothetical necessity, whereby that which is determined in one way is not determined *per se* but on the basis of external circumstances. Its determination depends on a given condition and is only valid on this basis, since its opposite would be possible were the condition *ex hypothesi* to alter.

As I already noted in my first chapter, this is the argument which Leibniz makes against the lazy sophism of the *Fatum Mahometanum*. To recognise the hypothetical necessity of contingency is to refute lazy sophism, since we thereby disprove the thesis that everything which happens is fatal, i.e. necessary. Events are not absolutely determined but hypothetically determined by their conditions, which means that changing the conditions will also change the effects.[48] In reality, this can only ever represent a partial response to lazy sophism. It is in need of supplementation and foundation if it is to withstand possible objections, whereby it would otherwise be vanquished.

First of all, in order to stick to the consideration of simple contingency without getting ahead of ourselves and anticipating the discussion of free will, let us observe that hypothetical necessity conserves the contingency of the individual event (and also in this case only apparently), but not that of the total connection of events. In other words, in an order determined by hypothetical necessity, the contingency of the individual event remains but is situated within a total system of connections which might itself be necessary. Hence, clearly, the contingency of the individual event would also be illusory, inasmuch as it is cancelled out by the necessity of the whole. However, this objection is overcome with the theory of the primacy of moral necessity over hypothetical necessity and the notion that the former constitutes the foundation of the latter. There is a conceptual difference between hypothetical necessity and moral necessity:

> what happens by a hypothetical necessity happens as a result of the supposition that this or that has been foreseen or resolved, or done beforehand; and moral necessity contains an obligation imposed by reason, which is always followed by its effect in the wise.[49]

Hypothetical necessity, then, is a rule of determination, while moral necessity is a rule of choice, and if the first operates in accordance with the principle of reason, the second embodies this very principle or, rather, represents the foundation thereof. Leibniz, then, constantly acknowledges the primacy of moral necessity over the hypothetical and founds and conditions the validity of the latter on the former. Indeed, this is why he prefers the term "hypothetical necessity" to "physical necessity." When, in exceptional cases, Leibniz does refer to "physical necessity" in the *Theodicy*, he defines it as "hypothetical necessity" but stresses that it is also founded on "moral necessity";[50] and in a letter to Des Bosses, of 16 June 1712, he

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[48] Cf. *T* 32 f./56 f., 132 f./153, 333/345, 380 f./381 f.; *GP VI* 445, 454 f.; *GRUA* 363 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 113), 481, 483; *CF* 68 ff.

[49] *T* 390/395.

corrects Sebastiano Izquierdo's terminology, which had been proposed to him by Des Boses, along the lines we have just described, referring to the *Theodicy*:

> Certain phrases of Izquierdo in the passages which you have excerpted diverge somewhat from mine, but we seem to agree in the essence: For example, when he says that in creating the world, God was necessitated morally but not physically, I should prefer to say morally, not metaphysically, for in my book I explain physical necessity as the consequence of moral.[51]

Moral necessity, then, "comes from the free choice of wisdom in relation to final causes".[52] It is God's absolutely free choice of the best, which brings into being one of the determinate series of possibles – one of the possible worlds. For this reason, the determined connection of the existing world, even taken in its totality, remains contingent, even though God Himself cannot change it once He has decreed it into existence.[53] God could have chosen differently. God could have "chosen or done what was not the best",[54] either in the sense of choosing another possible world or in the sense of not choosing any. His goodness and wisdom alone, as expressions of His sovereign freedom, led Him to choose the best.[55]

The contingency of all existence, which is the precondition for the contingency of the individual event even when located in a necessarily connected chain of events, is therefore guaranteed by the freedom of divine choice and the transcendence of God – the fact that He is extraneous to and lies at the origin of the connection between events. The contingency of the whole is nothing more than a reflection of God's transcendence and the relationship between the two constitutes the very act of *creation*, which is continuously extended and renewed in divine providence:

> The decree whereby God creates things is not a proposition whose opposite implies contradiction. In other words, it is not necessary but a matter of free choice that, in addition to God, other things exist.[56]

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[50] Cf. *T* 62/86.

[51] *GP II* 450 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 604); cf. 455 f.

[52] *T* 321/334.

[53] Cf. *T* 131/151.

[54] *T* 256/272.

[55] Cf. *T* 256 f./271.

[56] *GRUA* 301. M. Ruggenini ("*Perché qualcosa piuttosto che niente?" Leibniz e l'onto-teo-logia moderna*, in "aut-aut", March - June 1993, n. 254-255, pp. 101-123) rightly insists on the Christian (or rather, I would say, biblical) origin of the idea of the contingency of the whole, which opens up the fundamental question of being instead of nothingness. Ruggenini clearly brings to light the fact that the positive answer to this question implies the acknowledgement of an "extra-logical" principle (i.e. a principal external to formal Greek logic), of a gratuitous creative act on the part of God's will. Herein, and I agree with Ruggenini on this point, lies Leibniz's path in recognising the principle of reason as the principle of reality, irreducible to the principle of identity and non-

Hypothetical necessity, founded on moral necessity, therefore permits us to consider the contingent as being determined:

> Now this truth which states that I shall write tomorrow […] it is not necessary. Yet supposing that God foresees it, it is necessary that it come to pass.[57]

Leibniz here sums up the argument which I have just presented: the denial of absolute necessity ("[...] it is not necessary [...]") and the affirmation of moral necessity ("[...] supposing that God foresees it [...]"), on which hypothetical necessity is founded ("[...] it is necessary that it come to pass"). Yet the very situation given here as an example ("[...] that I shall write tomorrow [...]") is amongst those cases where to understand the relationship between predetermination and contingency is not enough, as it is concerned with a voluntary act (writing) and therefore falls into the domain of free will. Among the contingencies there are a number of, in fact, intelligent and spiritual beings, gifted with free will. These are the parties concerned with the problem of theodicy and, in their regard, all that has been stated so far is nothing more than a premise, albeit a necessary premise. Leibniz needs to go further, if he wishes, I will not say to comprehend, but at least to uphold the consistency of divine predetermination with free will. To go further means, first of all, to argue that, in the case of free spiritual beings, the determination of contingent acts, while losing none of their certainty, does not necessitate but rather inclines. This does not imply an abandonment of the hypothetical determination which applies to natural phenomena, to contingents,[58] but rather a different application thereof. This is a point which Leibniz repeats on several occasions. For example, just a few pages after the passage cited above, he reaffirms his belief in divine predetermination,

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contradiction. I differ from Ruggenini, instead, regarding his conclusion that, in this way: "the world is nothing but a factum of the onto-theo-logy" in the face of which human reason is impotent. The principle of reason for mankind, then, is ultimately nothing more than a requirement […], but this could only be justified if the demonstration of the existence of God in turn signified something more than just begging the question (p. 121). To my mind, instead, in accordance with the Leibnizian philosophical path, the world, or rather being instead of nothingness, may perhaps be termed a factum (even though it also constitutes a task), but not a factum in the face of which reason is impotent. It is rather, so to say, a rational factum, which it is certainly true that reason is incapable of comprehending, but of which we can sustain the meaning, because the choice of God, albeit gratuitous, is not irrational, and even if human reason is infinitely inferior to divine reason, it is not different therefrom. In Chapter Six I will argue that the principle of reason, precisely because it is originary, is certainly an assumption of the reason, but not only as a requirement, but also as a principle, from which human reason cannot shy away without denying itself and cancelling out any meaning for its own theses (including that of self-denial).

[57] *T* 123/144.

[58] Cf. *GP V 161/A VI/6* 176.

provided always that predetermination be taken as not necessitating. In a word, I am of opinion that the will is always more inclined towards the course it adopts, but that it is never bound by the necessity to adopt it. That it will adopt this course is certain, but it is not necessary.[59]

At first sight, this passage seems to contradict that quoted previously: there, he says that an event is not necessary (in terms of absolute necessity), but, given the conditions, it is necessary that it should take place (hypothetical necessity). Here, instead, he argues that not only is the event not necessary, but it is not even necessary that, given the conditions, it should take place (even though this is certain). This contradiction can be removed if we assume that in the first example the act is considered in its contingency alone (abstracting this away from its freedom). In the second, instead, the act is considered, not only in its contingency, but also in its freedom. How, then, can we continue to uphold the notion of divine predetermination by means of the concepts of moral and hypothetical necessity when we must also bear in mind the moral freedom of spiritual creatures? Herein lies a further problem, which represents one of the key issues of theodicy. Before tackling it, however, we should dwell briefly on another premise: the meaning of "will."

3.   The Will

The notion that freedom exists in relation to the will may seem obvious, but for Leibniz it is anything but. Indeed, we should point out that for Leibniz such a statement is inexact or, at least, is in need of clarification if it is to assume a determined meaning. Writing to Basnage, with regard to the definition of freedom given by Jaquelot, Leibniz states:

> He argues that freedom signifies the power to do what one wants because one wants to, so that, if one did not want to do something, one would not do it If one wished to, indeed, one would do something quite other than what one actually does. I believe that even the most obstinate adversaries of human free will are obliged to recognise that, in this sense, we are free. I don't know if even Spinoza ever denied this point. But it would seem that the contradiction lies elsewhere.[60]

In the *Theodicy* we do not find much elucidation regarding the meaning of "will." Nonetheless, if we examine the relevant passages we can infer various firm tenets together with a number of problems. First of all, it is certainly true that Leibniz, in accordance with tradition, conceives of the will as a practical faculty, i.e. as a faculty whose final end is action,[61] and as a moral faculty, whose final end is the

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[59] *T* 126/147.

[60] *GP III* 133.

[61] Cf. *T* 130/151.

good.[62] Beyond these certainties, however, we begin to run into difficulties. First of all, a certain unease emerges on Leibniz's part when he has to discuss the will in terms of a psychology of the faculties, rather than of the functions. This is apparent in his preference for considering the function of "volition" instead of the faculty of "will" and the paradox which he observes in the relationship between faculty and function:

> As for *volition* itself, to say that it is an object of free will is incorrect. We will to act, strictly speaking, and we do not will to will; else we could still say that we will to have the will to will, and that would go on to infinity.[63]

If we seek answers in the *Nouveaux Essais,* which are certainly the most interesting Leibnizian work on this topic, we see this tendency confirmed. In the twenty-first chapter of Book Two, entitled *De la puissance et de la liberté,* Leibniz, in accordance with his dynamic conception of substance, comes to a definition, not of the will, but of volition. He begins by declaring preferable the dynamic concept of "tendency" to that of simple "power" as a "faculty:"

> Power in general, then, can be described as the possibility of change [...] there will be two powers, one active and one passive. The active power can be called 'faculty' [...]. It is true that active power is sometimes understood in a fuller sense, in which it comprises not just a mere faculty but also an *endeavour*; and that is how I take it in my theorizing about dynamics.[64]

Soon after, this conceptual overview is referred to the will. PHILALETHES presents the following definitions:

> We find in ourselves a power to begin or forbear, continue or end several actions of our [soul], and motions of our bodies, barely by a thought or preference of the mind ordering, or as it were commanding the doing or not doing such … a particular action. This power … is that which we call the *will*. The actual exercise of the power [is called] *volition* ... . The forbearance of performance of that action, consequent to such … command of the [soul] is called *voluntary*. And whatsoever action is performed without such a [direction of the soul] is called *involuntary*,[65]

In response, THEOPHILUS narrows down the focus to volition alone:

> That all strikes me as sound and true. However, to speak more directly and perhaps to go a little deeper, I shall say that volition is the effort or endeavour (*conatus*) to move towards what one finds good and away from what one finds bad.[66]

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[62] Cf. *T* 300/314.

[63] *T* 130/151.

[64] *GP V* 155 f./*A VI/6* 169.

[65] *GP V* 158/*A VI/6* 172.

[66] *Ibidem.*

The distinction between the discussion of the will as faculty and the will as function, together with the author's preference for the latter, is made more specific a few lines later:

> THEOPHILUS – The question is whether there is a real distinction between the soul and its faculties, and whether one faculty is really distinct from another, has long exercised the Scholastics. The realists have said Yes, the nominalists No; and the same question has been debated concerning the reality of various other *abstract beings* which must stand or fall with faculties. But I do not think that we need here plunge into the brambles in an attempt to settle this question, despite the fact that Episcopius, I remember, attached such importance to it that he thought that if the faculties of the soul were real beings then human freedom would be untenable. However, even if they were real, distinct beings, it would still be extravagant to speak of them as real *agents*. Faculties or qualities do not act; rather, substances act through faculties.[67]

Here, then, is the first drawback of the abstraction produced by a psychology of the faculties, and therefore also by the consideration of the will as a faculty of the soul. The unique subject of the psychic functions, substance, is replaced with an abstract faculty as subject. This has immediate repercussions for the issue with which we are at present concerned. The terms of the question regarding free will are poorly stated:

> PHILALETHES – Let us see if we cannot now 'put an end to that long agitated, and, I think, unreasonable, because an unintelligible, question, viz. *whether man's will be free, or no.*'
> THEOPHILUS – There is good reason to exclaim at the strange behaviour of men who torment themselves over misconceived questions: 'They seek what they know already, and they know not what they seek,'
> PHILALETHES – 'Liberty, which is but a power, belongs only to agents, and cannot be an attribute or modification of the will, which is [itself nothing] but a power.
> THEOPHILUS – You are right, sir, if the words are used properly. Still, the accepted way of talking can be defended in a fashion. Just as we customarily attribute a power to heat or to other qualities, that is to a body in so far as it has this quality, so here the intention is to ask whether a man is free when he wills.[68]

Yet there is another, even graver, defect in the abstract distinction between the various faculties of the soul. This lies in the fact that the distinction is at least partially arbitrary and gives a distorted impression of psychic activity, obscuring its unity and continuity. We can already glimpse Leibniz's dissatisfaction on this point in an observation on simple ideas in the *Nouveaux Essais*:

> It is doubtful whether these are all simple ideas; for it is evident for instance that the idea of the will includes that of the understanding.[69]

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[67] *GP V* 160/*A VI/6* 174.

[68] *GP V* 165/*A VI/6* 179.

[69] GP *V* 116/*A VI/6* 129.

Leibniz's dissatisfaction then becomes clearly manifest in the definition of volition provided in the chapter quoted above. Here[70] Leibniz distinguishes the tendency of volition from that which simply derives from insensible perceptions, that is to say from perceptions which are not apperceived, which he refers to as "appetitions." The voluntary actions of men are then distinguished from the efforts of animals, inasmuch as these latter are triggered by simple appetitions, without apperception, or by "appetitions of which one can be aware," while voluntary action is characterised by apperception united with reflection, i.e. with the "consideration of good and bad." Yet these two characteristics are distinguishing features of the function of the intellect – i.e. of intellection:

> 'understanding' in my sense is what in Latin is called *intellectus*, and the exercise of this faculty is called 'intellection', which is a distinct perception combined with a faculty of reflection, which the beasts do not have.[71]

Since, evidently, the intellect is an integral part of the definition of the will, which might be described as a tendency (*conatus*) accompanied by the intellect, where the first part of the definition stresses the connection between will and action, the second part stresses the will's involvement with the intellect.[72]

In effect, the two definitions of the will which usually recur throughout Leibniz's oeuvre reflect these two concerns. The definition with the highest recurrence is: "*The will* is the tendency (*conatus*) of the individual who practises intellection (*intelligentis*)"[73] (the definition given in *CF* 64 – "To will something is to rejoice in its existence" – can also be traced back to this same conception). On occasion, however, we also come across another definition: "*The will* is a conviction (*sententia*) regarding good and evil".[74] Leibniz explains that

> the two definitions coincide, as God formed intelligent nature in such a way that from any conviction regarding good or evil there follows a tendency to act.[75]

We may certainly accept that there is a coincidence between the two definitions. Nonetheless, this very link brings to light the unsatisfactory nature of the theory of

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[70] Cf. *GP V* 158 f./*A VI/6* 172 f.

[71] *GP V* 159/*A VI/6* 173; cf. GP *III* 622; *IV* 532 (Eng. trans. *PhT* 200); *GRUA* 282.

[72] Leibniz also explains his caution in drawing too neat a distinction between the human intellect and will in his notes to Malebranche's *Recherche de la Verité* (cf. A. ROBINET, *op. cit.*, pp. 155 ff.).

[73] *COUT* 498; cf. *GRUA* 287 (*Phil. Ess.* 19), 512 f., 538, 542, 725, 750.

[74] *GRUA* 14; cf. *GRUA* 750.

[75] *GRUA* 750.

the faculties. It in fact results in an oscillation between a conception of the will as the origin of action, dependent on the choices made by the intellect, and a notion of the will as the final moment of the very intellectual choice from which action follows. This oscillation is evident, for example, in the following remark:

> What else is an actuality arising from potentiality if not the outcome of its ultimate disposition? What is the will of man if not the tendency to action, or rather the beginning of the action which follows on from that disposition? Will is potentialiality. What, then, is that formal element therein which determines it to actuality? There must necessarily also be something from which actuality originates.[76]

The continuity, in the will, between the final moment of predisposition and the first moment of action is highlighted in the following passage:

> The last of the thoughts is the *will*. To will something is the same thing as tending towards something or actually acting on a conviction, or, rather, because we have established that it should be so. I am referring to a tendency within oneself, since the will is in fact the primary internal tendency.[77]

All of this is expressed yet more clearly in the *Elementa verae ptetatis*, where Leibniz's scarce consideration for the problematic language of the theory of the faculties and his sole interest in affirming the inextricable connection between intellect and will or, rather, between deliberation and volition, becomes clearly apparent:

> *The will* is a conviction regarding good and evil […]
>   *A conviction* is a practical thought, or, rather, a thought united to a tendency towards action […].
>   If we incorporate the definition of *conviction* into that of *the will*, we will note that the will is thought regarding good and evil connected to the tendency towards action, which would be consistent with the arguments of those who would have it that the will is the final moment of deliberation. Deliberation is the doubt connected to the inquiry as to whether a future action or omission would be good or evil. As long as we deliberate, we are not yet disposed to action. Instead, at the very moment when the inquiry is over and, with it, the doubt, we seriously establish what is the best course of action and right then we tend to dispose ourselves and the things external to us to action.
>   To those who argue, instead, that the will is not a conviction regarding good and evil, but is instead the tendency towards action which immediately follows on from conviction, I would raise no objections, as long as they acknowledge that the tendency towards action arises from conviction. Indeed, any tendency towards action which does not arise from knowledge is brutish.[78]

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[76] *GRUA* 354.

[77] *GRUA* 544.

[78] *GRUA* 14 f.

As a conclusion to this preliminary analysis we can therefore state that Leibniz is not so much concerned with the psychological analysis of the faculty of will as with a metaphysical enquiry into practical reason. On the basis of this study, the rational choice of the good and the impulse towards action emerge as essential and inextricably connected elements of practical reason.

Having now shed some light on the Leibnizian conception of the will, however, we have still to tackle a question which is more directly pertinent to theodicy, inasmuch as it is connected to the issue of free will – i.e. the manner in which the will determines action and how it is itself determined. Leibniz points out a crucial difference between theoretical and practical reason, between the intellect and the will: while, in the former case, the perception of truth coincides with the affirmative judgement thereof, in the latter there is no identification between the perception of the good and the effort made to realise it. In the latter case, in other words, the two elements are utterly external to each other, not only from a logical point of view, but also chronologically, which is what makes the intervention of other, non-rational influences on the tendency to action possible. All of this is clearly explained in the following passage from § 311 of the *Theodicy*:

> As for the parallel between the relation of the understanding to the true and that of the will to the good, one must know that a clear and distinct perception of a truth contains within it actually the affirmation of this truth: thus the understanding is necessitated in that direction. But whatever perception one may have of the good, the effort to act in accordance with the judgement, which in my opinion forms the essence of the will, is distinct from it. Thus, since there is need of time to raise this effort to its climax, it may be suspended, and even changed, by a new perception or inclination which passes athwart it, which diverts the mind from it, and which even causes it sometimes to make a contrary judgement.[79]

The faculty of suspending judgement, here and elsewhere,[80] is presented by Leibniz as evidence for the time-lapse between the moment in which the rational choice of the good occurs and the moment of the impulse to action. In this interval between deliberation and action occur diverse perceptions and appetitions, which also effect the inclinations of the will, but in a different direction to that of rational judgement. This characteristic of the will is of particular importance, as it demonstrates that the relationship between rational judgement and action eschews necessity:

> Thus the connexion between judgement and will is not so necessary as one might think.[81]

Nonetheless, if we are to attribute to the will not only contingency, as an exemption from necessity, but also freedom, we must necessarily identify a moment

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[79] *T* 300 f./314.

[80] Cf. *T* 138/158, 413/418; *GP IV* 454 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 61); *V* 167/*A VI/6* 181; *GRUA* 253, 385; *COUT* 21.

[81] *T* 301/314.

of choice therein. For Leibniz, this moment is made possible by the recognition that the will is determined to action, not by the last inclination of the judgement, but rather by the inclination, of the multiple and various inclinations which, as we have seen, may act upon it, which *prevails*:

> As for me, I do not require the will always to follow the judgement of the understanding, because I distinguish this judgement from the motives that spring from insensible perceptions and inclinations. But I hold that the will always follows the most advantageous representation, whether distinct or confused, of the good or the evil resulting from reasons, passions and inclinations, although it may also find motives for suspending its judgement. But it is always upon motives that it acts.[82]

The will, for this reason, may be determined by the judgement of the reason, if this manages to prevail over the passions. Alternatively it may be determined by the passions, if they vanquish and silence the voice of reason:

> Besides, we do not always follow the latest judgement of practical understanding when we resolve to will; but we always follow, in our willing, the result of all the inclinations that come from the direction both of reasons and passions, and this often happens without an express judgement of the understanding.[83]

Nonetheless, this in no resolves the issue of the freedom of the will. It is rather simply posited. The will, indeed, is not capable of evaluation and choosing between inclinations, but is rather subject to their influence. Leibniz rejects the metaphor of the will as a sovereign queen who scrutinises her minister, the intellect, and her courtiers, the passions, and evaluates and deliberates on this basis.[84] The defect of such a metaphor is evident:

> If the will is to judge, or take cognizance of the reasons and inclinations which the understanding or the senses offer it, it will need another understanding in itself, to understand what it is offered.[85]

In reality, the soul does not scrutinise the intellect and the senses, but is subject to their inclinations,

> understands the reasons and feels the inclinations, and decides according to the predominance of the representations modifying its active force, in order to shape the action.[86]

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[82] *T* 413/418.

[83] *T* 130/151.

[84] Cf. *T* 416/421.

[85] *Ibidem*.

[86] *Ibidem*.

Yet if such a duplication of the intellect is unacceptable, neither is a duplication of the will. It is impossible to will oneself into willing,

> else we could still say that we will to have the will to will, and that would go on to infinity.[87]

The process whereby one inclination prevails over another is therefore, in this sense, involuntary, representing in truth a mechanism or conflict of the inclinations, similar to the composition of the physical forces.[88] Nonetheless, Leibniz does attribute to the individual the power to *indirectly* influence his / her own will:

> It is true that we are not directly the masters of our will, although we be its cause; for we do not choose volitions, as we choose our actions by our volitions. Yet we have a certain power also over our will, because we can contribute indirectly towards willing another time that which we would fain will now.[89]

In the above quoted chapter of the *Nouveaux Essais,* Leibniz dedicates several especially acute and interesting pages to methods for conditioning our will in such a way that those superior inclinations to action, i.e. the rational, prevail over those which are inferior, i.e. the passions.[90] In these pages, in which Leibniz analyses the reciprocal influence between the intellect and the will,[91] a reciprocal influence of which we have already observed one specific case in the relationship between light and virtue in the true piety, Leibniz develops a doctrine for the education of the will. Although we will not examine this doctrine in any detail, we must at least take note of the considerable role which Leibniz attributes to sentiment. He distinguishes between the clarity and distinctness of an idea and the clarity and distinctness with which we feel it, which means that sometimes thoughts with the potential to be clear and distinct remain "faint" (*pensées sourdes*)[92] and "empty of perception and sensibility," while "confused thoughts often make themselves vividly sensed".[93] The education of the will should therefore consist in directing the attention and the sentiment towards the intellect's judgement of the true good and in delivering them from the influence of the passions which incline them towards the apparent good, in

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[87] *T* 130/151; cf. 257/272, 296/310; *GP V* 167/*A VI/6* 182; *CF* 80.

[88] Cf. *T* 116/137, 309/322; *GP V* 178 f. /*A VI/6* 193.

[89] *T* 296/310; cf. 137 f./158, 309/322, 357/365, 391 ff./396 ff.; *GP III* 403 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 195); *V* 167 f. /*A VI/6* 182; *GRUA* 253.

[90] Cf. *GP V* 167 ff./*A VI/6* 182 ff.

[91] Cf. *GP V* 166/*A VI/6* 180.

[92] Cf. also *T* 301/314.

[93] Cf. *GP V* 171 f./*A VI/6* 185 ff.

order to condition that will towards "our own conversion" and not our "perversion".[94] Yet such an exercise and an education of the will and the sentiment must be founded on a more solid principle and a more universal law:

> Since we cannot always analyse the notions of true good and true evil to the point where we can see the pleasures and pains which they involve, so as to be influenced by them, we must make this rule for ourselves once and for all: wait till you have the findings of reason and from then of follow them, even if they are ordinarily retained only as 'blind thoughts' devoid of sensible charms. We need this rule so as finally to gain control both of our *passions* and of our *insensible inclinations,* or disquiets, by acquiring that custom of acting in conformity with reason which make virtue a pleasure and second nature to us.[95]

As we will see, Leibniz clearly presents the conformity of the will's maxim with the moral law of reason as constituting a fundamental ethical principle. This principle, together with its application firmly founded in moral education, makes it possible for the will to be put to good use and for moral inclinations to prevail over the passions:

> So it is all a matter of 'Think about it carefully' and 'Remember' – by the first to make laws, and by the second to follow them even when we do not remember the reasons from which they sprang. It is wise to keep those reasons in mind as much as possible, though, so that one's soul may be filled with rational joy and enlightened pleasure.[96]

At this point, we can tackle two questions which have so far remained unanswered. Firstly, in what sense do moral and hypothetical necessity, which determine the order of contingency, leave space for the freedom of the will? Secondly, how does the free will fit into the mechanism of the inclinations? The answer to these two interconnected questions lies in the influence of the intellect on the voluntary via moral law. The more the soul is guided and determined by the reason, the more it is independent from the inclinations of the passions. This is because the soul becomes autonomous, that is to say, it becomes subject to inclinations which it provides to itself. The prevalence of one inclination over another, despite retaining its "mechanical" aspect, is determined by reason, through a moral choice of the "best." As a consequence, the causal nexus between the action and the prevalent inclination whereby it is determined in accordance with hypothetical necessity is not eliminated, but is determined by a free rational process: by moral choice. Thus, on the one hand, Leibniz observes that

> if everything which acts without impediment were therefore 'free', a ball which had been set in motion along a smooth trajectory would then be a free agent. But Aristotle has rightly noted that

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[94] Cf. *GP V* 168/*A VI/6* 182.

[95] *GP V* 173/*A VI/6* 187 f.

[96] GP *V* 175/*A VI/6* 189 f.

we are not prepared to call an action 'free' unless as well as being unconstrained it is also deliberate.[97]

On the other, emphasising the significance of freedom as moral autonomy, he writes:

> In reasoning about the freedom of the will, or about 'free will', the question is not whether a man can do what he wills to do but whether his will itself is sufficiently independent. It is not a question about whether his legs are free or whether he has room to move about, but whether he has a free mind and what that consists in. On this way of looking at things, intelligences will differ in how free they are, and the supreme Intelligence will possess a perfect freedom of which created beings are not capable.[98]

God is perfectly free, because his will is not subject to the passions, which incline us towards apparent goods, but only to the judgement of reason, which inclines us towards the true good. All the inclinations of his will, which enter into conflict amongst themselves, are purely rational. Hence, also the choice of the best constitutes a pure judgement of the reason which is absolutely autonomous and therefore free. The will of man, instead, is subject to the passions, in addition to the reason. The more it is able to remove itself from the influences of the passions, so that the pure judgement of reason, the greater will be its freedom. Reason alone can steer the will, which is beset on all sides by apparent goods, in the direction of the true good. At this juncture, as you will observe, our study of the will has brought us to the question of free will, the final issue to be investigated in this chapter.

4.   Freedom

If there is little material to be found in the *Theodicy* on the will, there is, instead, a great deal on freedom, which represents one of the main themes of the whole book. In Leibniz's oeuvre as a whole, writings on this matter also abound.[99] From a preliminary overview of the material in question, it emerges that Leibniz's treatment of freedom in the *Theodicy* faithfully reflects and recapitulates his earlier discussions and that, therefore Leibniz's position on this matter is sufficiently constant and clear.

For Leibniz, freedom consists in intelligence, spontaneity and contingency. He is conscious that, with this definition, he is locating himself in traditions dating back

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[97] *GP V* 161/*A VI/6* 175 f.

[98] *GP V* 166 s./*A VI/6* 181.

[99] Cf. for a general idea, the considerable section dedicated to this theme in *GRUA* 259-508. Other writings on the theme of freedom or making reference thereto abound right across Leibniz's oeuvre.

to Aristotle, for the first two elements, and to scholasticism, for the third.[100] Let us now briefly examine each of these aspects. To begin with the last, we should note that to identify contingency as a condition of freedom is not so obvious as it might appear. It rather constitutes the sole sense in which Leibniz accepts the freedom of indifference. Contingency does certainly not entail freedom *per se*. It is rather a prior condition thereof, in the sense that where there is no contingency but only necessity, it is impossible to even raise the issue of freedom. However, contingency alone does not found freedom. It must be accompanied by spontaneity and intelligence.[101] Leibniz nonetheless insists on contingency as a condition of freedom, since this is the only sense in which he accepts the definition of freedom as "indifference." He acknowledges that the free being is effectively in possession of the faculty or potential to choose between one alternative and another, while he denies the "indifference of equipoise," where the choice between the various alternatives would have no basis in any single criterion or prevalent inclination:

> I therefore admit indifference only in the one sense, implying the same as contingency, or non-necessity. But [...] I do not admit an indifference of equipoise, and I do not think that one ever chooses when one is absolutely indifferent.[102]

To distinguish between indifference or contingency and spontaneity, then, as does Leibniz, is neither unuseful nor plethoric, since it means distinguishing between the power to bring about an action from self-determination in bringing it about. Power is a condition of self-determination, but freedom does not reside therein. Leibniz here explains clearly with an example:

> He [Hobbes] gives also a good enough notion of *freedom*, in so far as it is taken in a general sense, common to intelligent and non-intelligent substances: he states that a thing is deemed free when the power which it has is not impeded by an external thing. Thus the water that is dammed by a dyke has the power to spread, but not the freedom. On the other hand, it has not the power to rise above the dyke, although nothing would prevent it then from spreading, and although nothing from outside prevents it from rising so high. To that end it would be necessary that the water itself should come from a higher point or that the water-level should be raised by an increased flow. Thus a prisoner lacks the freedom, while a sick man lacks the power, to go his way.[103]

The distinction between the power and the free will to bring about an action proves particularly opportune as a response to the thesis of freedom as indifference of

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[100] Cf. *T* 122/143, 288/303, 296/310; *GP VI* 441. A concise formulation of this conception of freedom, containing definitions and a clear statement of the thesis, can be found in Latin and French in *GP VII* 108 ff.

[101] Cf. *GP III* 167 f.

[102] *T* 296 f./310; cf. *GP II* 359; *III* 58, 402 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 194 f.); *V* 160 f./*A VI/6* 175; *VI* 441; *VII* 108 ff.; *GRUA* 308, 480 f.

[103] *T* 391/396.

equipoise, which is thereby revealed as a conception, not so much of freedom, as of human omnipotence, as a perverse dream of mankind of extending its own power beyond every limit and thus of deploying it in an arbitrary fashion. Such an extension results, paradoxically, in a situation of necessity, since under such circumstances the will could only exist by demonstrably realising this potential, free will thus coming to consist in the (effectively implemented) faculty to sin.[104] All of these points emerge in Leibniz's criticism of King's book on the origin of evil. He begins by summarising King's thesis of the freedom of perfect indifference:

> He imagines that it is only God and the free creatures who are active in the true sense, and that in order to be active one must be determined by oneself only. Now that which is determined by itself must not be determined by objects, and consequently the free substance, in so far as it is free, must be indifferent with regard to objects, and emerge from this indifference only by its own choice, which shall render the object pleasing to it.[105]

Leibniz's refutation takes as its starting point the distinction between the activity of a substance, which does not imply freedom, and the spontaneous determination of that activity.[106]

For there to be freedom, then, there must be *spontaneity*. It would seem that this point should create considerable difficulties for Leibniz, given his theory, illustrated above, that the will is conditioned by inclinations over which it has no control. Certainly, inasmuch as freedom constitutes spontaneity in this moral sense – i.e. as self-determination – it is not a quality or property of mankind, but rather a capacity and therefore a task. However, when Leibniz considers spontaneity as a condition to freedom, he is, in general, using the term to refer to the absence of external constraint. Every substance which has within itself the principle of its own actions can be termed spontaneous. From this point of view, Leibniz can well defend his thesis of the spontaneity of the soul, indeed of every simple substance, with reference to his own theory of pre-established harmony, whereby no monad communicates with the external world, and each has uniquely within itself the principle of its own modifications since, as Leibniz often repeats, recalling a maxim of St. Teresa of Avila:[107]

> the soul must often think as if there were nothing but God and itself in the world.[108]

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[104] Cf. *T* 174/193.

[105] *T* 421/426.

[106] Cf. *T* 421/426 f.

[107] On this maxim, oft-recalled by Leibniz, cf. J. Baruzi (*op. cit.*, p. 494), who traces signs of Leibniz's mysticism therein; cf. also P. BURGELIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 282 f.

[108] *GP IV* 458; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 64.

Leibniz, then, argues:

> And now, to bring to a conclusion this question of *spontaneity*, it must be said that, on a rigorous definition, the soul has within it the principle of all its actions, and even of all its passions, and that the same is true in all the simple substances scattered throughout Nature, although there be freedom only in those that are intelligent. In the popular sense notwithstanding, speaking in accordance with appearances, we must say that the soul depends in some way upon the body and upon the impressions of the senses: much as we speak with Ptolemy and Tycho in everyday converse, and think with Copernicus, when it is a question of the rising and the setting of the sun.[109]

The true and full meaning of freedom, however, is that of moral freedom. Both contingency and spontaneity are but preconditions. Without intelligence, they do not constitute freedom. In a passage from the *Nouveaux Essais* already quoted above, Leibniz notes:

> if everything which acts without impediment were therefore 'free', a ball which had been set in motion along a smooth trajectory would then be a free agent. But Aristotle has rightly noted that we are not prepared to call an action 'free' unless as well as being unconstrained it is also deliberate.[110]

Leibniz thus attributes a veritable primacy to the intelligence over all the other constitutive elements of freedom:

> Intelligence is […] the soul of freedom, and the rest is as its body and foundation».[111]

In the *Confessio Philosophi* Leibniz already attributes "the true root of freedom"[112] to the reason. He therefore defines freedom as "intelligent spontaneity," explaining that:

> that which is spontaneous in the animal, or in other substances without intellect, ascends to a higher level on mankind, or in other intelligent substances, and can be termed "free";[113]

He specifies:

> *The more we act rationally, the more we are free. The more we act on the passions of the soul, the more we are slaves.* Indeed, the more we behave rationally, the more we pursue the perfection of our nature. The more, instead, we allow ourselves to be spurred on by the passions, the more we come to be enclave by external things.[114]

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[109] *T* 138/158; cf. 289/304; *GP III* 168; *IV* 485 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 144).

[110] *GP V* 161/*A VI/6* 175 f.

[111] *T* 288/303.

[112] *CF* 86; cf. *GRUA* 384.

[113] *GP VII* 108; cf. 109.

Leibniz thus attains to a full and complete definition of freedom as the rational self-determination of the intelligent being:

> The free substance is self-determining and that according to the motive of good perceived by the understanding, which inclines it without compelling it: and all the conditions of freedom are comprised in these few words.[115]

Here he not only reconnects to tradition, by assuming the thomistic definition of freedom,[116] but he also attributes freedom to the will and makes it depend thereon. How, then, can Leibniz consider freedom as self-determination if, at the same time, in order to safeguard spontaneity, he has denied that substances are in any way externally influenced, thus considering any action, free or otherwise, as influenced by internal inclinations? The answer to this question is not hard to find, if we dwell for a moment on the distinction between inclination and choice or deliberation. Freedom consists in a choice between inclinations. This very process indeed, distinguishes those agents who are free from those who are not. While the latter are directly determined by "causes," in accordance with the order of hypothetical necessity, the former are inclined in various directions by reasons similar to causes, but the prevalent inclination only becomes determinant through choice. In this way, free agents neither suspend nor neutralise the order of hypothetical necessity, but rather operate therein under the peculiar circumstances that, in their case, the determinant inclination results from a choice, made on the basis of the order of moral necessity:

> And as for the connexion between causes and effects, it only inclined, without necessitating, the free agency […]; thus it does not produce even a hypothetical necessity, save in conjunction with something from outside, to wit, this very maxim, that the prevailing inclination always triumphs.[117]

The function of choice is carried out by the will, which either allows itself to be guided by the intellect towards the true good, or submits itself to the passions and the seeming goods which they pursue. Without touching the ontological affirmation of the spontaneity of substance in each and every inclination, in another sense, i.e. in the moral sense, which is also "a true and philosophic sense",[118] we can legitimately refer to the self-determination and hetero-determination of the soul and of the reciprocal interdependence between body and soul:

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[114] *GP VII* 109; cf. 110; *GRUA* 277.

[115] *T* 288/303

[116] Cf. *GRUA* 298 f.

[117] *T* 131 f./152

[118] *T* 138/158.

It is that the one of these two substances depends upon the other ideally, in so far as the reason of that which is done in the one can be furnished by that which is in the other [...]. For in so far as the soul has perfection and distinct thoughts, God has accommodated the body to the soul, and has arranged beforehand that the body is impelled to execute its orders. And in so far as the soul is imperfect and as its perceptions are confused, God has accommodated the soul to the body, in such sort that the soul is swayed by the passions arising out of corporeal representations. This produces the same effect and the same appearance as if the one depended immediately upon the other, and by the agency of a physical influence.[119]

Divine predetermination by no means neutralises this process of choice on the part of free beings, since God does not predetermine the choices made by man, but rather the existence of a series of compossibilities (possible world), within which a given individual freely makes a given choice:

Since, moreover, God's decree consists solely in the resolution he forms, after having compared all possible worlds, to choose that one which is the best, and bring it into existence together with all that this world contains, by means of the all-powerful word *Fiat*, it is plain to see that this decree changes nothing in the constitution of things: God leaves them just as they were in the state of mere possibility [...]. Thus that which is contingent and free remains no less so under the decrees of God than under his prevision.[120]

As Leibniz conceives of freedom as self-determination, he clearly rejects the notion of freedom as indetermination, i.e. as "indifference of perfect equipoise".[121] Such a conception of the will, which considers the human will as utterly undetermined, corresponds to the notion of divine arbitrarism, upheld, coherently, by Descartes and the Cartesians, which attributes an equally undetermined will to God.[122] For Leibniz, the indifference of perfect equipoise is nothing more than a "chimera".[123] Indeed, such an equipoise is impossible and contrary to experience.[124]

First of all, it is impossible, because "it is not, and cannot be found in nature".[125] Considering the classic case of the Buridan's ass, which had already been

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[119] *T* 138 f./158 f.; cf. 288 f./303 f.

[120] *T* 131/151; cf. *GP III* 472; *VI* 454; *VII* 311, 390 (Eng. trans. *L-C* 56); *GRUA* 382 f.,489; *COUT* 24.

[121] *T* 37/61.

[122] Cf. *T* 89/112, 130/150, 218 f./236, 297/310, 331/343

[123] Cf. *T* 219/236, 297/310, 298/312, 303/316, 306/319, 401/407, 427/432; *GP III* 401, 402 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 194, 195), 471; *VI* 571; *COUT* 25; *CF* 86. F. Kaulbach (*Das Labyrinth der Freiheit*, in AA. VV., *Akten des Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 14.-19. November 1966, vol. I: *Metaphysik - Monadenlehre*, cit.) wisely draws our attention to the practical and concrete stance assumed by Leibnizian rationality - in his polemics against the freedom of perfect equipoise - against a hypothesis stemming, instead, from an abstract rationalism.

[124] Cf. *T* 123/143.

[125] *GP III* 168.

discussed by Bayle, Leibniz denies that the ass would be inclined indifferently to both of the pastures between which it finds itself. This is due to the fact that the universe is not "ambidexter," and therefore its two parts, differentiated by an ideal axis which passes through the middle of the ass, cannot be the same, and neither can their details.[126] This argument, which constitutes a variation on the principle of indiscernibles, demonstrates the inexistence of perfect indifference in nature. To this, Leibniz adds another argument, in demonstration of the *a priori* impossibility thereof. Perfect indifference, in fact,

> is caught up [...] in one of the greatest difficulties, by offending against the grand principle of reasoning which makes us always assume that nothing is done without some sufficient cause or reason.[127]

The notion of the indifference of perfect equipoise is also contradictory to experience. Herein emerges once more the fundamental difference between Leibniz and Descartes. Descartes and the cartesians, indeed, made frequent recourse to personal experience as constituting the greatest proof of free will as perfect indifference. If Leibniz makes recourse thereto in order to maintain the contrary, it is because his notion of experience is very different from that of the cartesians. While for the cartesians, experiential evidence is intuitive, for Leibniz such a form of evidence would be of no worth whatsoever in guaranteeing truth, because it is often nothing more than the fruit of our ignorance of the small and obscure inclinations which act upon us:

> the reason M. Descartes has advanced to prove the independence of our free actions, by what he terms an intense inward sensation, has no force. We cannot properly speaking be sensible of our independence, and we are not aware always of the causes, often imperceptible, whereon our resolution depends.[128]

The experience to which Leibniz refers us, instead, consists in a rational reflection on our choices and actions:

> This equipoise [the perfect equipoise] is also absolutely contrary to experience, and in scrutinizing oneself one will find that there has always been some cause or reason inclining us towards the course taken, although very often we be not aware of that which prompts us.[129]

This contrast between two conceptions of experience is also a contrast between two conceptions of freedom: as indeterminate free will or as rational autonomy. It is

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[126] Cf. *T* 129 f./150, 297/311, 298/312; *GP III* 402 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 195).

[127] *T* 402/407; cf. 219/236, 297/310, 308/321; *GP III* 471, 529 f.; *VII* 109, 110, 392 (Eng. trans. *L-C* 59 f.); *COUT* 25.

[128] *T* 130/150; cf. 297 f./311.

[129] *T* 123/143.

evident in Leibniz's discussion of King's book on the origin of evil.[130] This develops through the various arguments already considered and results, significantly, in Leibniz's rejection of the notion that an illusorily gratuitous and disinterested rebellion of the will against the reason constitutes a supreme sign and manifestation of freedom. For Leibniz, instead, such a rebellion constitutes nothing more than simple obstinacy and vanity and, far from being a manifestation of freedom, represents only a subjection to the passions.[131]

The impossibility of freedom as an indifference of perfect equipoise constitutes not a limitation for mankind, but rather a perfection, since such an indifference is

> the thing which is the least reasonable in the world, the advantage whereof would consist in being privileged against reason.[132]

Such an absolute freedom of will, which, besides anything else, as Leibniz notes, "was unheard of in antiquity",[133] "would be as harmful, and even objectionable, as it is impracticable and chimerical".[134] In a passage which, surprisingly, foreshadows a kierkegaardian concern, Leibniz suggests that freedom as full indetermination is a vain and perilous aesthetic illusion. Indeed, he conceives of such a freedom as being possible only in the literary imagination, with regard to which he refers to the example of Don Juan:

> This principle of choice without cause or reason, of a choice, I say, divested of the aim of wisdom and goodness, is regarded by many as the great privilege of God and of intelligent substances, and as the source of their freedom, their satisfaction, their morality and their good or evil. The fantasy of a power to declare one's independence, not only of inclination, but of reason itself within and of good and evil without, is sometimes painted in such fine colours that one might take it to be the most excellent thing in the world. Nevertheless it is only a hollow fantasy, a suppression of the reasons for the caprice of which one boasts. What is asserted is impossible, but if it came to pass it would be harmful. This fantastic character might be attributed to some Don Juan in a St. Peter's Feast (*dans un Festin de Pierre*), and a man of romantic disposition might even affect the outward appearances of it and persuade himself that he has it in reality. But in Nature there will never be any choice to which one is not prompted by the previous representation of good or evil, by inclinations or by reasons: and I have always challenged the supporters of this absolute indifference to show an example thereof.[135]

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[130] Cf. *T* 426 ff./431 ff.

[131] Cf. *T* 428 f./433 f.; cf. also *T* 128/148; *CF* 82.

[132] *T* 411/416.

[133] *COUT* 25; cf. *T* 402/407.

[134] *T* 303/316; cf. 302/315 f.

[135] *T* 401/406.

There is therefore no place, in an entirely ethical conception of freedom, such as that of Leibniz, for the indifference of perfect equipoise, since such a notion is impossible, absurd and damaging. True freedom, instead, lies in moral autonomy. Only this lifts us up and brings us closer to divine perfection:

> I have proved sufficiently that only ignorance or passion has power to keep us in doubt, and have thus given the reason why God is never in doubt. The nearer one comes to him, the more perfect is freedom, and the more it is determined by the good and by reason.[136]

Freedom, then, is perfect in God, in the sense that in God there is a perfect self-determination to the good. God

> cannot be ignorant, he cannot doubt, he cannot suspend his judgement; his will is always decided, and it can only be decided by the best.[137]

This is because the holy will of God is not subject to the passions, but is solely determined by the judgement of true reason to realise the true good. The moral will of man, instead, is imbued with an imperfect, but perfectible freedom. Each individual will be freer and more similar to God in proportion to the extent to which (s)he determines his/her own by means of his/her own intellect, without succumbing to the influence of the passions and appearances:

> either God will act through a vague indifference and at random, or again he will act on caprice or through some other passion, or finally he must act through a prevailing inclination of reason which prompts him to the best. But passions, which come from the confused perception of an apparent good, cannot occur in God; and vague indifference is something chimerical. It is therefore only the strongest reason that can regulate God's choice. It is an imperfection in our freedom that makes us capable of choosing evil instead of good, a greater evil instead of the lesser evil, the lesser good instead of the greater good. That arises from the appearances of good and evil, which deceive us; whereas God is always prompted to the true and the greatest good, that is, to the absolutely true good, which he cannot fail to know.[138]

Here emerge, in relation to freedom, the already discussed issues of the distinction between truth and appearance, of the judgement of true reason as opposed to the fallibility of apparent reason, of the influence of light on virtue, of the *Fatum Christianum*. Ultimately, all of this brings us back once more to the conception of freedom as autonomy, since if the determination of the will by the intellect is not felt to be external and coactive, it is because the intellect and the will are nothing other than two complementary aspects, the one theoretical, the other practical, of the reason. Thus, our enquiry into Leibniz's conception of freedom has led us to unite the idealistico-critical elements which we had already discovered in his conception of

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[136] *T* 305/318 ; cf. 432/438; GP *III* 168; *VII* 109, 110 f.; *GRUA* 277, 480; *CF* 86 f.

[137] *T* 315/328.

[138] *T* 305 f./319; cf. *GP VII* 109, 111.

theoretical reason with the other equally idealistico-critical conception of practical reason. We should observe, finally, that, just as mankind's theoretical reason does not differ from that of God and is certainly not opposed thereto, representing rather a divine gift, by means of which God "communicates" himself, so the moral freedom of man is in continuità with the sanctity of God, because in making us free

God has communicated to us a degree of his own perfection and freedom.[139]

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[139] *GP VII* 111; cf. 109

CHAPTER FIVE

EVIL AND THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

After having explored the issue of free will and predestination, we must now turn to the second fundamental problem[1] of theodicy: the goodness of creation and the existence of evil. Unlike the former issue which, despite participating in mystery inasmuch as it concerns matters of predetermination, is nonetheless sufficiently clear and comprehensible with regard to the possibility of reconciling its terms, this latter issue is entirely wrapped up in mystery and is therefore incomprehensible. Mystery, indeed, does not only consist in our incapacity to understand why this or that evil has been inserted into the order of the world. It also invests the world in which evil exists with its very meaning and with the criteria on the basis of which God has chosen to create this particular world.

As a consequence Leibniz tackles this matter, in accordance with the *a priori* approach to theodicy which we have already defined, by moving between the *a priori* affirmation of the goodness of the world created by God and apologetic arguments regarding the possible meaning of the world in which evil exists. Neither the affirmation nor the argument is demonstrative, since the former is a thesis upheld *a priori* and axiomatically and the latter takes the form of persuasive and defensive arguments in response to real or possible objections. Little wonder, then, that Leibniz's discourse on these matters, even when it moves on the metaphysical plane, normally results in the adoption of one or another of the apologetic arguments from the repertory which we have already examined. Above all, we should not forget that the basic assumption on which the discourse is founded is that the eminent goodness of this world is not a thesis to be demonstrated but an axiomatic starting point. The arguments put forward, then, are not aimed at demonstrating that which, being a mystery, is incomprehensible, but only at partially explaining it, affording us "some analogical understanding"[2], wherewith to reasonably uphold it. As Leibniz writes:

> it appears that M. Bayle asks a little too much: he wishes for a detailed exposition of how evil is connected with the best possible scheme for the universe. That would be a complete explanation of the phenomena: but I do not undertake to give it; nor am I bound to do so, for there is no obligation to do that which is impossible for us in our existing state. It is sufficient for me to point out that there is nothing to prevent the connexion of a certain individual evil with what is the best on the whole. This incomplete explanation, leaving something to be discovered in the

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[1] Cf. *T* 102/123.

[2] *T* 80/103.

life to come, is sufficient for answering the objections, though not for a comprehension of the matter.[3]

As with the arguments discussed in the previous chapter, these arguments, too, have been the subject of in-depth, abundant and fruitful research, aimed at both the interpretation of Leibnizian thought and at the independent development of his various themes. In particular, the theory of the possible worlds has been the cue and the source for enquiries into one of the main fields of modal logic. Here, too, I will abstain from commenting on all these various lines of enquiry, in order to avoid, as much as possible, straying from the logical path of my argument towards its final objective.

1.   The Principle of "the Best"

The principle of the best, whereby, of all the infinite number of possible worlds, God chose one to bring into existence, not arbitrarily, but guided by his own anterior will towards the good and by his own consequent will towards the best, is comprehensible as an application of the principle of reason, bearing in mind the perfection of the divine will and choice. The criteria whereby God chooses the best, instead, lie within the realm of mystery. Were we able to clearly comprehend these, indeed, we would clearly perceive the operations of God's justice and providence in the world. In this case, there would be no more space for objections and murmurings against God and therefore no need for theodicy. Any attempt to explain the divine criteria for the choice of the best, then, cannot but be partial, defective and approximate. Above all, our enquiry must proceed analogically, attributing to God eminentially yet, nonetheless, always anthropologically, those criteria of choice which would apply for a wise and virtuous man. Such an approach is legitimate, for Leibniz, as a consequence of the continuity between finite human reason and infinite divine reason. In the same way, anthropomorphism, which projects the models of human wisdom onto God, is legitimised on the basis of the theomorphism of human wisdom to the extent that, preserving mystery this latter is nonetheless elevated to an infinite degree of perfection. In this way, man's inchoate participation in divine reason and wisdom enable him to accept the mystery of divine wisdom as incomprehensible but not extraneous to himself.[4] If, instead, the anthropomorphous concept of divine wisdom were not founded in a theomorphism in human wisdom, presumption and *superbia* would result, leading to a denial of mystery and a reduction of divine wisdom to the level of the human. Such is the attitude of the accusers of God who, like king Alfonso of Castile, would assume to advise God about how to improve the world.[5]

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[3] *T* 196/214; cf. 108/129, 177/197, 178/197 f., 248/264, 250/265 f., 253/268, 264/279.

[4] Cf. *T* 236/252.

[5] Cf. *T* 231/247 f.

That this is the method adopted by Leibniz proves evident if we consider the frequency with which, in the *Theodicy* and elsewhere, he represents God through recourse to human analogies: the architect, the monarch, the father, etc. For each of these human types we can identify the model of wisdom and then attribute it analogically to God. There is a nice passage in the *Discours de métaphysique* in which this is particularly evident, since, after having clearly affirmed the mysterious and incomprehensible character of divine choices, Leibniz nonetheless seeks to say something about them, deploying a sort of portrait gallery of analogies to God, which collects together those types of human wisdom which often recur in the *Theodicy*:

> Therefore it is sufficient to have confidence that God does everything for the best and that nothing can harm those who love him. But to know in detail the reason that could have moved him to choose this order of the universe – to allow sins, to dispense his saving grace in a certain way – surpasses the power of a finite mind, especially when it has not yet attained the enjoyment of the vision of God.
>
> However, we can make some general remarks concerning the course of Providence in the governance of things. We can therefore say that one who acts perfectly is similar to an excellent geometer who can find the best constructions for a problem; or to a good architect who makes use of his location and the funds set aside for a building in the most advantageous manner, allowing nothing improper or lacking in the beauty of which it is capable; or to a good householder, who makes use of his holdings in such a way that there remains nothing uncultivated and sterile; or to a skilled machinist who produces his work in the least difficult way possible; or to a learned author who includes the greatest number of truths [*realités*] in the smallest possible volume.[6]

The above quoted passage, in addition to bringing clearly to light the analogical path adopted by Leibniz in his enquiry into God's choice of the best, also reveals a further important characteristic of that enquiry. It becomes evident, in fact, from the models of human wisdom which Leibniz here invokes, that Leibniz identifies more than one criterion of the best. The recognition of and respect for the mystery which surrounds the choice of the best of all worlds by God implies that we must, on the one hand, attribute to God all of the aspects and modalities of wisdom which we can identify in mankind. On the other, however, we must accept the diversity – sometimes even the incompatibility – between these various aspects, which will inevitably come to the surface upon observation of human, finite and imperfect reality. We should be aware that these aspects can and must be united and reconciled in the infinity of divine wisdom but that, as a consequence of its mysterious character, such a unity eludes us.[7]

This explains how Leibniz's reflection on the criteria of divine choice of the best does not lead to a single, univocal result, but rather to the identification of

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[6] *GP IV* 430; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 38. On this passage and the analogical images of God listed herein, cf. the comment by P. BURGELIN, *op*. *cit*., pp. 117 ff.

[7] Cf. N. RESCHER, *Leibniz und die Vollkommenheit der Welten*, in AA.VV., *Akten des II*. *Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 17.-22. Juli 1972, vol. III: *Metaphysik-Ethik-Ästhetik-Monadenlehre*, cit., pp.4 f.

numerous and varied criteria. Inasmuch as such a thing is possible, Leibniz also attempts to achieve reconciliation between these criteria, but always does so in full awareness of mystery and of the limits of any intellectual enquiry into such matters.[8]

Before examining the various criteria of the best which Leibniz considers, we should first note the absolute final end of divine choice: God created the best of all possible worlds for his own glory.[9] This unique and absolute end of divine choice is not, however, in conflict with other ends and first of all with the felicity of mankind. Any polemic on this presumed conflict is overcome as soon as we observe that the two ends are pretty much identical.[10] Indeed, glory consists, not in the "satisfaction one finds in being aware of one's own perfections," but rather in the fact "that others become aware of these perfections".[11] In the former sense, God would always be fully satisfied with himself and his satisfaction could be neither increased nor diminished. Were this the case, God would have no need to create anything outside of himself. Yet when we instead state that, in addition to loving himself, God loves his

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[8] On Leibniz's conviction that all the divine criteria for the best concur, despite their diverse and heterogeneous natures, cf. H. POSER, *op. cit.*, p. 93. D. Mahnke (*op. cit.*, p. 241) stresses that the principle of the best also has a moral significance for Leibniz. N. Rescher (*Logische Schwierigkeiten der Leibnizschen Metaphysik*, in AA.VV., *Akten des Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 14.-19. November 1966, vol. I: *Metaphysik-Monadenlehre*, cit., pp. 261 ff.) notes a "powerful conflict" (p. 263) between the metaphysical and moral criteria for the best: "Leibniz never satisfactorily bridged this gap – or, rather, never satisfactorily resolved this tense relationship – between the *ontological* perfection of God, who operates universally, and his specifically *moral* excellence. To invoke the 'pre-established harmony' in order to clear up this point would seem to be putting off the controversy, rather than resolving it" (p. 264). P. Burgelin (*Théologie naturelle et théologie révélée chez Leibniz*, in AA.VV., *Akten des Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 14.-19. November 1966, vol. IV: *Theologie-Ethik-Pädagogik-Ästhetik-Geschichte-Politik-Recht*, cit.) notes an incompatibility in Leibniz between his philosophical conception of God the architect and his faith in God the monarch: "We would then suggest that Leibniz has a complete faith in the ontological value of reason, that the contents of metaphysics and revelation, for Leibniz, are, rightly, equally reasonable. But the God he is defending derives from two different sources, one of which is philosophical, the other scriptural and dogmatic, which Leibniz is unable to reconcile when he juxtaposes God as architect and God as monarch" (p. 2). This unreconciled juxtaposition would consist in the impossibility of connecting the good of the whole to that of the single spirits (cf. p. 11). Although I would agree with Rescher and Burgelin with regard to the problematic nature of any attempt to reconcile all the various criteria for the best, it seems to me that the antithesis set up by Burgelin between natural harmony and the felicity of the spirits stems from an overestimation of the degree to which Leibniz believed natural harmony to be comprehensible. Burgelin in fact concludes: "It is therefore the God of natural harmony who the reason fully grasps, the God of grace conserves his mystery, even though we may still think that the law of harmony governs the spirits" (p. 20). It seems to me that the metaphor of the two labyrinths which Leibniz often uses suggests a greater degree of continuity between science and faith, even though the recognition of mystery on the part of faith goes undiscussed.

[9] Cf. *T* 144/164.

[10] Cf. *T* 144 f./164 ff., 181/201.

[11] Cf. *T* 163/183.

own glory, we suggest a free and gratuitous movement out of himself by God with which, out of pure goodness, he has created a world in which creatures lives who could know and praise his perfections and thereby participate in his felicity.[12] We might ask ourselves what novelty or enrichment of meaning is attained to by asserting that God's glory is the absolute end of his creation, when we identify that glory with the felicity of his creatures. The implications of this identification are in fact of the utmost importance, both for God and for man. On the one hand, the fact that the final end of God's choice lies in his own glory demonstrates the absolute autonomy of his choice from any particular inclination towards the good of one creature or another, although every particular good is indeed included in the divine choice of the best. On the other, that God pursues such an absolute end orients our research into the meaning of the world and of personal felicity towards their foundations in a love for the universal good, identical with divine glory. We thereby avoid making a false evaluation of the goodness of the world on the basis of the satisfaction of our own selfish requirements, or, anyway, of the selfish requirements of a small minority. One might say that the apparent absolute selfishness of God, in pursuing solely his own glory, which is, however, in truth, an absolute altruism, serves as a guarantee and remedy against every manifestation of selfishness on the part of creatures in evaluating the goodness of the world and, therefore, in the praise of God.[13]

In the *Theodicy*, then, Leibniz refers, at different times, to various different criteria for God's choice of the best: convenience,[14] the felicity of rational creatures,[15] variety and order,[16] perfection,[17] intelligibility,[18] the simplicity of the paths taken together with their effective fruitfulness,[19] beauty,[20] and harmony.[21] These are just a

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[12] Cf. *T* 145/165, 163/183, 256/271.

[13] This is also the only (paradoxical) sense in which Leibniz accepts the dfinition of justice presented by Plato's Thrasymachus: "Thrasymachus well says, in Plato's *Republic*, Book I, that *justice* is what is useful to the more powerful. For in a proper and simple sense, God is more powerful than others. In an absolute sense one man is not more powerful than another, since it is possible for a strong man to be killed by a weak one. Besides, usefulness to God is not a matter of profit but of honor. Therefore *the glory of God is obviously the measure of all law*" (GP *IV* 43; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 76). In his polemic against Hobbes, Leibniz preserves the platonic Thrasymachus's egotistical and utilitarian maxim in the letter, but completely denies and transforms it in the spirit, since the only legitimate subject for such a maxim is God, whose interest coincides with the universal and whose "egotism" is realised in a universal altruism Cf., on this topic, O. Saame's note, in *CF* 139 f.; G. GRUA, *Jurisprudence universelle et théodicée selon Leibniz*, cit., p. 165.

[14] Cf. *T* 44/68, 144/165, 241/257.

[15] Cf. *T* 169/189, 426/430.

[16] Cf. *T* 178/198, 229/246.

[17] Cf. *T* 236/252, 241/257, 252/267.

[18] Cf. *T* 236/252.

[19] Cf. *T* 238/255, 241/257.

few of the passages in the *Theodicy* which reveal the multiplicity of the criteria for the best set out by Leibniz. We might also refer to other passages, such as that in which Leibniz seeks to list the main criteria, citing to this end "beauty, perfection and reason in the universe".[22] A list of criteria for the choice of the best which is similar but perhaps more comprehensive and, above all, put together on a basis which, if not systematic, is at least discursively coherent is to be found in a brief and famous untitled and undated essay.[23] I will here structure my argument around the close examination of each of the criteria there listed.

After providing a summary of the cornerstones of metaphysics, beginning, significantly, with the principle of reason and then citing the existence of God, the dependence on God of both possibles and things realised in existence, the tendency of possibles to strive towards existence, and the incompatibility between possibles, Leibniz comes to specify the criteria according to which God chooses the sole series of compossibles which should exist, inasmuch as it is the best. These are perfection (points 9-11), variety (points 12-13), intelligibility (point 14), order and beauty (points 15-17), and the felicity of the spirits (points 18-24).[24]

The perfection, or "quantity of reality",[25] of possibles is the principle behind that "conflict between all possibles",[26] which Leibniz, famously, also discusses in his *De rerum originatione radicali*, referring to it as "a certain Divine Mathematics or Metaphysical Mechanism".[27] Elsewhere in his writings, too[28]   Leibniz makes

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[20] Cf. *T* 241/257.

[21] Cf. *T* 241/257, 264/279.

[22] *T* 172/191.

[23] Cf. *GP VII* 289-291; *COUT* 533-535.

[24] In commenting on the statement in Leibniz's *Discours de métaphysique*: "God [...] acts in the most perfect manner, not only metaphysically, but also morally speaking" (*GP IV* 427; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 61), P. Burgelin (*Commentaire du Discours de métaphysique de Leibniz*, cit., p. 82) provides the following list of the criteria for the best: "Perfection is *metaphysical* inasmuch as God produces the maximum effects with the minimum causes, inasmuch as he chooses the simplest order and means together with the maximum degree of diversity. It is moral inasmuch as God is particularly concerned with the felicity of the creatures which resemble him: he treats them with justice, compassion and goodness, at the same time as applying these perfections to the whole universe."

[25] *GP VII* 290.

[26] *Ibidem*.

[27] GP *VII* 304; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 151.

[28] Cf. *GPI* 331 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 211); *IV* 462 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 68); *VI* 603 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 210); *GRUA* 16 f., 285 f., 530 f.

reference to this quantitative criterion for perfection. It also crops up in the *Theodicy,* although it is not afforded such a prominent status:

> as soon as God has decreed to create something there is a struggle between all the possibles, all of them laying claim to existence, and that those which, being united, produce most reality, most perfection, most significance carry the day.[29]

Leibniz, however, does not stop at this sole, purely quantitative criterion. The best is also the best in a qualitative sense. This means that the perfection of the existent is also defined in terms of its "variety," which is determined by its "form:"

> Moreover, perfection is not to be situated in matter alone, that is to say, in that which occupies space and time, however an equal quantity thereof should be disposed, but rather in form or variety.[30]

The diversity of form is essential for the existence of a multiplicity of phenomena, since, were they not distinguished formally, on the basis of the principle of indiscernibles, phenomena would no longer exist since there would only be one sole phenomenon.[31] Moreover, the multiplicity of forms also produces the variety, richness and abundance of phenomena, i.e. their aesthetic quality which, for Leibniz, is every bit as important as any purely quantitative concern. This criterion, too, is mentioned elsewhere in Leibniz's *oeuvre*.[32] In Leibniz's comment on the "*Rorarius*" entry in Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, we come across a further endorsement of the variety principle with the beautiful image of the monads as representative substances which multiply and vary the already infinite variety of the world *ad infinitum*.[33] This criterion also emerges in the *Theodicy*:

> And besides, wisdom must vary. To multiply one and the same thing only would be superfluity, and poverty too. To have a thousand well-bound Vergils in one's library, always to sing the airs from the opera of Cadmus and Hermione, to break all the china in order only to have cups of gold, to have only diamond buttons, to eat nothing but partridges, to drink only Hungarian or Shiraz wine would one call that reason?[34]

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[29] *T* 236/253.

[30] *GP VII* 290.

[31] Cf. *ibidem*.

[32] Cf. *GP IV* 430, 447 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 38, 54 f.); *V* 303/*A VI/6* 323 f.; *VI* 603 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 210), 616 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 220); *GRUA* 267.

[33] Cf. *GP IV* 554, Eng. trans. *PhT* 239.

[34] *T* 179/198.

Form, however, is not only the variety principle, but is also the principle of order. Leibniz himself explicitly foregrounds this crucial point: the very *same* principle of form, which lies at the foundation of determination and therefore of the variety of creation, also institutes the order of things and establishes the rules whereby it is governed. In this order resides the intelligibility of the world and its beauty, for those who "ponder on it:"

> Its distinct propensity to be pondered on lends order to the thing, and beauty to the one who ponders on it. Order, indeed, is nothing other than the distinctive relation between many things. Instead there is confusion when many things coexist but there is no reason to distinguish between one thing and another [...].
> And it follows from this, in general, that the world is a κόσμος of achieved beauty, i.e. of beauty created in such a way as to satisfy the one who understands it to the greatest possible extent.[35]

Intelligibility and beauty are effects of the principle of form, i.e. of order in variety. All of these characteristics together constitute harmony or "convenience," the basis and the supreme criterion for the choice of the best. Harmony is "unity in variety":[36] Leibniz continuously returns to this or similar definitions throughout his writings, as the foundation or the novelty of his own philosophy:

> Here, in a few words, is my whole philosophy. It is very popular, without a doubt, because I accept nothing which does not correspond to that which we experience and because it is founded on two very popular sayings: the first from Italian theatre, *che altrove è tutto come qui* [that elsewhere everything is just the same as it is here]*;* and the second from Tasso, *che per variar natura è bella* [that nature is beautiful because of its variety]. These two edicts would seem to contradict each other, but we must reconcile them, under standing the one as referring to the heart of things and the other to their modalities and appearances.[37]

As we will see later, this conception of harmony lies at the basis of Leibniz's discussion, in the *Theodicy*, of Malebranche's conception of the best of all possible worlds.

Any exposition of the criteria for choosing the best would not, for Leibniz, be complete if it did not also take into account the moral dimension, which is every bit as essential as, and complementary to, the metaphysical. Indeed, Leibniz observes,

> God has no less the quality of the best monarch than that of the greatest architect; [...] matter is so disposed that the laws of motion serve as the best guidance for spirits.[38]

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[35] *GP VII* 290.

[36] *GRUA* 12.

[37] *GP III* 348; cf. *IV* 431 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 39); *V* 303/*A VI/6* 324; *VI* 603 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 210); *GRUA* 267. D. Mahnke (*op. cit.*, p. 231) stresses the importance of this passage.

[38] *T* 264/279; cf. *GP VII* 306 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 152 f.).

Hence, as Leibniz writes in his *Discours de métaphysique*,

> God, possessing supreme and infinite wisdom, acts in the most perfect manner, not only metaphysically, but also morally speaking.[39]

This is an important point for theodicy, since, in response to the objections of the antagonist the notion of God as supreme architect might not be sufficient or might, even, suggest that God is indifferent to the good of men, interested only in his own glory and the grandiose architecture of creation.[40] Such an accusation is naturally irreconcilable with the notion of God's glory developed above, and nonetheless merits further consideration.

In the brief piece around which we have chosen to structure our argument, this aspect also comes under consideration: "and of the intellects he is particularly heedful, since with them he obtains the greatest possible variety in the least possible space".[41] For Leibniz, too, the spirits are privileged creatures, also if this does not mean that God's design is carried out with these alone in mind. This privilege proves manifest in the fact that the criterion according to which God chooses the best is also a criterion of justice and goodness for spiritual creatures:

> Justice, too, descends from that which is respected in the universe, since *justice* is nothing other than order or perfection in matters concerning the spirits […].
>
> The first cause is endowed, moreover, with absolute *goodness*. This is because, while it produces the greatest perfection in things, it also gives the greatest pleasure to the spirits, since pleasure consists in the perception of perfection.[42]

This criterion for the best should be absolutely clear, if we recall the significance of true happiness and its difference from mere present pleasure, which I have examined in Chapter One. The world created by God is also the best possible from the point of view of human happiness, and this is not contradicted by evidence of human pain and suffering, because true felicity does not consist in mere present well-being, but "in the pleasure of he who understands" – an understanding which "is no other than the perception of beauty, order and perfection".[43]

All things considered, in the *Theodicy* too, Leibniz's intention regarding this distinction is clear, despite a certain terminological vagueness, which may confuse the reader. He writes:

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[39] *GP IV* 427; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 35; cf. *GP IV* 460 ff. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 66 ff.).

[40] Cf. *T* 264/279.

[41] *GP VII* 291.

[42] GP *VII* 290 f.

[43] *GP VII* 290.

It is not strictly true (though it appears plausible) that the benefits God imparts to the creatures who are capable of felicity (*félicité*) tend solely to their happiness (*bonheur*) [...].The felicity (*félicité*) of all rational creatures is one of the aims he has in view; but it is not his whole aim, nor even his final aim. Therefore it happens that the unhappiness (*malheur*) of some of these creatures may come about *by concomitance*, and as a result of other greater goods.[44]

If the presence of a certain degree of ambiguity in this passage leaves us unconvinced, it is cleared up a few pages later:

If we knew the city of God just as it is, we should see that it is the most perfect state which can be devised; that virtue and happiness (*bonheur*) reign there, as far as is possible, in accordance with the laws of the best.[45]

Human happiness is, then, one of God's criteria in choosing the best of all possible worlds. If we are not always able to find evidence to demonstrate this fact, this is due to the character of mystery, which impedes us from distinctly comprehending the divine order of the world: "If we knew [...] we should see." For Leibniz, this should not be taken to imply that "if we knew" we would understand why the other criteria for the choice of the best should limit human happiness. "If we knew," we would rather "see" how all the criteria for the best, including that of the greatest possible human felicity, have found perfect satisfaction and reconciliation in God's choice. Such a vision is denied us in this life, but we may nonetheless attain to true piety or *Fatum Christianum*, which will allow us to be "happy by anticipation",[46] in the belief that God, in choosing the best of all possible worlds, has also chosen the greatest possible degree of human felicity.

2.   *The Best of all Possible Worlds*

Even if Leibniz founds his thesis of the best of all possible worlds, *a priori*, on the goodness of God, he cannot, however, limit himself to upholding it with apologetic arguments, because he is faced with several objections which call into question the concept itself. Before upholding his thesis that this is the best of all possible worlds, then, Leibniz must demonstrate that such a world is possible. On this point, too, Leibniz does not assume to attempt a complete demonstration. Here, too, he has frequent recourse, as a final argument, to the goodness of God. The best of all possible worlds must be possible because God created it. Were it impossible, God would not have created anything. However Leibniz does also make some attempt to ward off objections.

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[44] *T* 169 f./189.

[45] *T* 177/197.

[46] *T* 27/51.

First of all, there is the question of God's choice to create one of the possible worlds, excluding the others, instead of creating them all. After affirming *a priori* that

> if there were not the best (*optimum*) among all possible worlds, God would not have produced any,

Leibniz proceeds:

> I call 'World' the whole succession and the whole agglomeration of all existent things, lest it be said that several worlds could have existed in different times and different places. For they must needs be reckoned all together as one world or, if you will, as one Universe. And even though one should fill all times and all places, it still remains true that one might have filled them in innumerable ways, and that there is an infinitude of possible worlds among which God must needs have chosen the best, since he does nothing without acting in accordance with supreme reason.[47]

The reasons why Leibniz cannot accept the hypothesis that God created all the possible worlds are evident and of primary importance to his philosophy. First of all, this would mean recognising the theory of the existence of all possibles, which Leibniz considered to constitute the most serious error of Descartes and Spinoza and which coincides with the absolute necessity of the *Fatum Mahometanum*. Yet if Leibniz's reasons for rejecting this thesis are clear, readers have found the arguments with which he demonstrates its impossibility to be far less clear and convincing.[48] Firstly, doubtless, when Leibniz refers to spatio-temporal limitations as evidence for the limited realisation of possibles,[49] he is adopting an argument which is weak, if not simply wrong. The argument of spatio-temporal capacity is also deployed in the passage from the *Theodicy* quoted above, but it is treated in a different, more interesting manner. Here, indeed, Leibniz does not deny that space and time can contain infinite possibilities. Indeed, this infinite capacity represents the backbone of his argument, since its acknowledgement brings us to the conclusion that whichever world or series of possibles were realised, it would never represent another world, but would rather continue to represent a part of the unique world, which is the infinite (in the sense that it has an infinite capacity) universe – i.e. an infinite series – of possibles. Since Leibniz goes on to qualify "even though one should fill all times and all places [...]," we can take it that these words no longer refer to a spatio-temporal

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[47] *T* 107/128; cf. *GP VI* 440.

[48] In Italy, Vittorio Mathieu, has been particularly concerned with this issue (*L'equivoco dell'incompossibilità e il problema del virtuale*, in "Atti della Accademia delle Scienze di Torino", CLXVI [1949-50], vol. 84, tomo II; IDEM, *Die drei Stufen des Weltbegriffes bei Leibniz*, in "Studia Leibnitiana", I [1969], 1; IDEM, *Introduzione a Leibniz*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1976, 1986², pp. 59 ff.; IDEM, *Saggio introduttivo. La conciliazione di ragione e fede punto culminante della riflessione leibniziana*, in G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Saggi di teodicea sulla bontà di Dio, sulla libertà dell'uomo, sull'origine del male*, cit., pp. 25 ff., 32 ff.).

[49] Cf. *A VI/3* 472 (Eng. trans. *SR* 21 f.); *GP VII* 303 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 150 f.).

finiteness. The implication is rather that, even if it is possible to think of the world as an infinite spatio-temporal series containing an infinite number of creatures (and such is Leibniz's conception), such a series would nonetheless always exclude certain possibles, not because they are in excess of the infinite number of creatures (which would be contradictory), but because they belong to another infinite series, which is incompatible with that realised in existence. Here too, however, the issue of the principle on which this incompatibility between diverse infinite spatio-temporal series – i.e. the principle of incompossibility – remains unresolved.

A second objection would challenge the legitimacy of the concept of the best of all possible worlds, since in the scale of perfection of the contingent, a higher level is always imaginable:

> Someone will say that it is impossible to produce the best, because there is no perfect creature, and that it is always possible to produce one which would be more perfect.[50]

In response to this objection, too, Leibniz refers to the definition of the world, but here his emphasis shifts to another aspect of the definition. In response to the first objection, Leibniz defines the world as "the whole succession and the whole agglomeration of all existent things." This is the definition of the world which Leibniz normally presents. In the *Theodicy* we also find, for example, the world as "the whole assemblage of *contingent* things",[51] a definition which is analogous, since "contingent" is here synonymous with "existent" and not of "possible." Elsewhere, the world is defined as an aggregation of finite things,[52] or as an "aggregation of multiple substances [....] This series of realised possibles",[53] or as the "visible universe".[54] Again, in response to this second objection, Leibniz refers to this conception of the world. Yet, while in his arguments against the first objection, his emphasis is on world as a whole, as the agglomeration of all realised possibles, and hence on its uniqueness, not only from an empirical but also from a logical point of view, the focus here shifts to the world's infinity, which does not, however, constitute a totality in an ontological sense, i.e. a substantial unity. In other words, while in the former case he referred to the world as an actual infinity, here he refers to it as a potential infinity:

> I answer that what can be said of a creature or of a particular substance, which can always be surpassed by another, is not to be applied to the universe, which, since it must extend through all future eternity, is an infinity. Moreover, there is an infinite number of creatures in the smallest particle of matter, because of the actual division of the *continuum* to infinity. And infinity, that is

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[50] *T* 232/249.

[51] *T* 106/127.

[52] Cf. *GP VII* 303; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 150.

[53] *GRUA* 396.

[54] *COUT* 442.

to say, the accumulation of an infinite number of substances, is, properly speaking, not a whole any more than the infinite number itself, whereof one cannot say whether it is even or never […] for the world or the universe cannot be regarded as an animal or as a substance.[55]

This argument, which Leibniz also repeats elsewhere (e.g. in his correspondence with Des Bosses,[56] also proves useful in response to another objection, connected to that just considered, according to which, if the world were perfect, it would be identical to God.[57] Perfectibility, then, for Leibniz, does not exclude perfection, since it is an internal characteristic of the world. This opens up the hypothesis that the world is progressing, a very interesting theme, to which Leibniz alludes in the *Theodicy*[58] and which he develops in more depth elsewhere.[59]

Leibniz's arguments against the two objections considered above are interesting, but are in no way satisfactory *per se*. The main problem which remains unsolved is that of incompossibility, and this is significant, since incompossibility is the presupposition on which both Leibniz's arguments rest. The passage from the possible to the compossible is one of the most difficult and obscure issues in Leibniz's thought. Many scholars have laboured on this point, finding it more fruitful to elucidate and elaborate upon the unfoundedness of this Leibnizian doctrine than to seek to provide a credible justification thereof. I will not here venture into this difficult matter in any depth, since to do so would be to wander too far from the main objective of the present study. I will rather limit myself to a few general (and also, perhaps, generic) considerations, connected to the issues with which we are here concerned. Leibniz's difficulty in explaining the passage from possibility to compossibility is certainly aggravated, if now exclusively generated, by the multiplicity of diverse criteria for the best and the difference between them. The

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[55] *T* 232/249.

[56] cf. *GP II* 362, 424.

[57] Cf. *T* 232/249, 235/251.

[58] Cf. *T* 237/253 f.

[59] Cf. *GP III* 582 ff. (partial Eng. trans. *PhPL* 664); *GRUA* 94 f. A thorough and detailed study of the theory of progress in Leibniz, with an analysis of all the main references thereto throughout his oeuvre, can be found in M. SERRES, *op. cit.*, pp, 213 ff. For an interpretation of Leibniz's theory of progress in a kantian sense, i.e. as a regulative ideal, cf. A. GÖRLAND, *op. cit.*, pp. 39 f. On Leibniz's conception of historical progress cf. also E. CASSIRER, *op. cit.*, pp. 396 ff., and F. OLGIATI, *op. cit.*, pp. 206 ff. G.E. Barié (*op. cit.*, p. 372) instead argues that Leibniz's system is not optimistic, since it denies the possibility of progress, but this claim seems to me to be unfounded. E. Cione (*op. cit.*) denies that there is any "real and precise notion of progress" in Leibniz, since the "metaphysical bases" for such a conception would be lacking (pp. 220 f.), even though, thanks to a duality of inclination which he traces throughout Leibniz's thought, he recognises that "Leibniz, although anchored to platonising approach according to which the result would already be pre-constituted, nonetheless feels a powerful attraction towards freedom and progress" (p. 279).

difference is insurmountable, as we observed above, given the necessity to proceed analogically, without ever fully understanding the mystery of the divine choice. What complicates matters further is the fact that, even though we cannot perfectly reconcile these criteria, we must necessarily think of them in unity if we wish to have an idea of God's wisdom which is not absolutely inadequate. This conception of unity, however, sometimes results in the confusion, evident in certain passages in Leibniz, whereby the quantitative principle of perfection and the qualitative principle of harmony become blurred:

> After due consideration I take as a principle the harmony of things: that is, that the greatest amount of essence that can exist, does exist.[60]

In general, at least in those writings most relevant to the present study, Leibniz connects the issue of compossibility predominantly with the quantitative principle of the best, thereby giving rise to the famous "mechanism" or "conflict" of possibles. Clearly this is the criterion for the best which is least fit to justify incompossibility. Indeed, compossibility is actually a necessary, unfounded premise thereof. Had the theological criterion of originary harmony as being present at the foundation of God's creative act been presented in its stead, the quantitative criterion functioning only on the basis of and within the framework of the qualitative, the situation would be quite different. At that point, the quantity of reality would be limited, not on the basis of an unjustifiable spatio-temporal capacity, as a mere totality resulting from a quantitative agglomeration, but within the totality of harmony, understood as a teleological principle, which would also provide a more satisfactory explanation of incompossibility.[61] This, however, would also imply a decided prevalence and

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[60] *A VI/3* 472 (Eng. trans. *SR* 21); cf. *GP VI* 616 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 220).

[61] F. Barone (*Logica formale e logica trascendentale*. *I*. *Da Leibniz a Kant*, Edizioni di "Filosofia," Torino 1957, p. 29) underlines the teleological basis for the choice of possibles by God in Leibniz. He rebukes Couturat for having erroneously maintained that Leibnizian metaphysics derived from his own logic, an error which he attributes to his lack of consideration for this moral-teleological foundation to the calculus of possibles. A. Heinekamp (*Zu den Begriffen realitas, perfectio und bonum metaphysicum bei Leibniz*, in AA.VV., *Akten des Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 14.-19. November 1966, vol. I: *Metaphysik-Monadenlehre*, cit.), too, is convinced that this is effectively Leibniz's idea. He writes: "Perfection *(Vollkommenheit)*, for Leibniz, does not consist in the totality of realities in an individual being, if by reality we mean the determination of things or of empirical facts. Not all of the determinations of a thing are important for its perfection, but – as Leibniz underlines to Wolff – only those which are 'harmonic:' 'you might also say that [perfection] is a degree of essence, if essence is evaluated on the basis of its harmonic properties, which constitute, so to say, its weight and moment'" (p. 220). Again, later on, he writes: "I wish to underline that the terms 'gradus' or 'quantitas,' in the definition 'perfectio est gradus seu quantitas realitatis,' are used in a specific sense here, which differs from their usual application. And this is because perfection and reality belong to the 'intense grandeur.' For this reason, I cannot agree with Couturat, when he writes that Leibniz understood perfection, not as something qualitative, but as something quantitative. As Leibniz himself stresses: 'On peut douter, si la perfection consiste dans l'addition, et si elle se forme par composition comme les nombres; puisqu'il paroist plustost, qu'elle se forme par la negation des limites'" (p. 221).

primacy of the reason principle over the principle of non-contradiction, since only the former carries a teleological significance.

In reality, even in those texts in which Leibniz develops his theory of the conflict of the possibles, he places the reason principle at the very foundation of his formula for the prevalence of being over non-being (which I will later refer to as the first significance of the reason principle) or of its immediate consequence, i.e. the striving of possibles towards existence.[62] In several of these texts, then, as in the *De rerum originatone radicali,* or in the brief undated text already quoted above with regard to the various criteria for the best, the statement of this principle is followed by an explication of the selection made between the various series of possibles on the basis of a criterion of order and determination, i.e. of harmony, and not of a mere algebric sum.[63] However, immediately afterwards the mechanism of possibles is treated as a system of combinations, corresponding more to the solution of a problem of logical or mechanical exclusion than to a response to an issue of teleological incompatibility.

This reference to the *ars combinatoria* is not without significance, since at this stage of Leibniz's philosophical development a set of precise limits emerged which conditioned his treatment of incompossibility and the best of all possible worlds. Famously, in his *Dissertatio de arte combinatoria,* Leibniz defines "variation" as "a change of relation"[64] and "variability" as the "quantity of all variations".[65] He then goes on to distinguish between two "kinds"[66] of variation: the "situation [*situs*]," or "the locality of parts",[67] and the "complexion," or the "union of a smaller whole in a larger".[68] The "complexion," then, is a specific aspect of the more general concept of "situation." As Leibniz specifies:

> Situation is either absolute or relative; the former is that of parts to whole, the latter is that of parts to parts. In the former, one considers the number of places and their distance from the beginning and the end; in the latter, no attention is paid either to beginning or end, but one considers only the distance of a part from a given part […]. In the former, the greatest attention is paid to priority and posteriority; in the latter no such attention is paid. The former, therefore, would best be called 'order', the latter, 'vicinity'; the former, 'disposition', the latter, 'composition'.[69]

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[62] Cf. *GP VII* 289 f., 303 f.(Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 150 f.); *A VI/3* 472 (Eng. trans. *SR* 21); *E* 99.

[63] Cf. *GP VII* 290, 304 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 151).

[64] *GP IV* 36; Eng. trans. *LP* 1.

[65] *Ibidem.*

[66] *GP IV* 36; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 77.

[67] *GP IV* 36; Eng. trans. *LP* 1.

[68] *GP IV* 37; Eng. trans. *LP* 2.

[69] *GP IV* 36 f.; Eng. trans. *LP* 1.

The term "situation" is only used in the remainder of the work to indicate the "absolute situation," while regarding "relative situation" the terms "composition," "combination" or "complexion" are adopted instead. The term "complexions," then, does not indicate the "variability of order," but the "variability of a complexion".[70]

With these definitions the direction of the *ars combinatoria* has already been defined – one might even say prejudiced. Moreover, its boundaries have already been established. The *ars combinatoria*, indeed, excludes outright, more as a question of pure fact than on principle, the consideration of "situation" and of "order" – i.e. of those very elements which, as Cassirer has well highlighted,[71] might have constituted a significant innovation in Leibniz's logic. Leibniz comes to redress and surmount this defect of his *ars combinatoria* when, on the wings of his new conception of the continuum, he comes to develop his *analysis situs* and infinitesimal calculus.

If, in his *Dissertatio de arte combinatoria*, Leibniz only mentions the issue of the *situs* "in passing",[72] it is because he is still immersed in the logical conception of totality and of number as the sum of the parts:

> A whole, and therefore number or totality, can be broken into parts, as smaller wholes. This is the basis of 'complexions'.[73]

Leibniz therefore still considers "variation" as a mutation in the relationship between discrete quantities:

> So there arise two kinds of *variations*: *complexion* and *situs*. And viewed in themselves, both complexion and situs belong to metaphysics, or to the science of whole and parts. If we look at their variability, however, that is, at the quantity of variation, we must turn to numbers and to arithmetic. I am inclined to think that the science of complexions pertains more to pure arithmetic, and that of situs to an arithmetic of figure.[74]

In the *ars combinatoria*, then, Leibniz remains in the realms of discrete quantity, of the whole and its simple parts, of "arithmetic," of simple identity and contradiction, of predicative logic – i.e. in that very conceptual universe in which the labyrinth of the composition of the continuum persists, without the liberating "thread" provided by the calculus of "complications." Leibniz then discovered this "thread" upon his consideration of the continuum as a "continuation," of the reason principle, of relational logic – i.e. in the field of quality, of intensive greatness, of the

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[70] GP *IV* 37; Eng. trans. *LP* 2.

[71] Cf. E. CASSIRER, *op. cit.*, pp. 126 f..

[72] Cf. *GP IV* 36, 63; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 77.

[73] *GP IV* 36; Eng. trans. *LP* 2.

[74] *GP IV* 36; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 77.

"direction" of movement, of the infinitesimal. In other words, he did so by developing the concepts of "situs" and "order" (and a development in which the concept of "harmony" played an important, although not exclusive, role), which had already been identified in the earlier work but without their crucial importance being recognised.[75]

In those writings in which he is concerned with the mechanism of possibles, Leibniz has already overcome a purely combinatorial conception of compossibility, as witness his comparisons of this mechanism with the problems pertaining to the calculus of variations.[76] Nonetheless, at the same time, he still remained tied to such a conception. In fact, even the parallel with the calculus of variations is not yet sufficient for a satisfactory consideration of the teleological order of the world, i.e. of an order founded, not only on the mathematical conception of quality as intensive quantity, but also on the axiological conception thereof. Leibniz does not even attain to a full solution to these problems in the *Theodicy*. Nonetheless, in this late work he does seem to come a few steps closer to the solution. For example, the axiological problem of quality is explicitly stated, even though it is still not resolved:

> What is deceptive in this subject, as I have already observed is that one feels an inclination to believe that what is the best in the whole is also the best possible in each part. One reasons thus in geometry, when it is a question *de maximis et minimis* [...]. But the inference from *quantity* to *quality* is not always right [...].
> This difference between quantity and quality appears also in our case. The part of the shortest way between two extreme points is also the shortest way between the extreme points of this part; but the part of the best Whole is not of necessity the best that one could have made of

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[75] Cf. *ibi*, p. 124.

[76] On the connection between the problem of the best of all possible worlds and the calculus of variations, cf. below, Appendix One. Già E. Du Bois-Reymond (*Leibnizsche Gedanken in der neueren Naturwissenschaft* (1870), in IDEM, *Vorträge über Philosophie und Gesellschaft*, hg. von S. Wollgast, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 1974, p. 28) notes the link, in Leibniz, between the divin creation of the best of all possible worlds and the calculus of variations. L. Couturat, too (*La logique de Leibniz d'après des documents inédits*, Felix Alcan, Paris 1901, reprint Georg Olms, Hildesheim 1961 p. 278), obseves in passing the connection between the problem of the best and those relating to the calculus of variations (and, in particular, to the problem of the problem of the Brachistocrone Curve), although he does not pursue the point. M. Serres (*op. cit.*) displays a full awareness of the role of the calculus of variations in Leibniz's mathematical thought and the applications of this model in metaphysics and in theodicy (cf. pp. 19 f. note, 35 and note, 37, 52, 266 note, 267 ff., 272, 278 and note, 350, 451 note, 526 note, 570); cf. also IDEM, *Etablissement, par nombres et figures, de l'Harmonie préétablie*, in "Revue Internationale de Philosophie" XX (1966), p. 218, note 7. N. Rescher (*Logische Schwierigkeiten der Leibnizschen Metaphysik*, cit., p. 261) also makes explicit acknowledgement of this relationship. Cf. also IDEM, *Leibniz und die Vollkommenheit der Welten*, cit., pp. 6 f.; IDEM, *The Contribution of the Paris Period (1672-76) to Leibniz's Metaphysics*, in AA.VV., *Leibniz à Paris (1672-1676),* Symposion de la G.W. Leibniz-Gesellschaft (Hannover) et du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris) à Chantilly (France) du 14 au 18 novembre 1976, tomo II: *La philosophie de Leibniz*, in "Studia Leibnitiana", Supplementa vol. XVIII, Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden 1978, p. 46.

this part. For the part of a beautiful thing is not always beautiful, since it can be extracted from the whole, or marked out within the whole, in an irregular manner.[77]

Furthermore, in the *Theodicy,* Leibniz considers the possible worlds as *series* and not as *combinations* of possibilities. Even when the term "combination" occurs it is almost always used to denote a "series."[78] More interestingly still, he seems to attribute to divine wisdom, i.e. to the discretional faculty intending a specific end, not only the choice of the best from the series of compossibles, but also the choice which determined the very constitution of these series, i.e. the origin of compossibility. On this point see, for example, the definition of *"mediate will"*,[79] or the passage in which Leibniz presents the principle of the prevalence of being over non-being, wherefrom derives the conflict of possibles, as a decree which originates *at once* from the goodness and the wisdom of God,[80] or, finally, the passage in which he explicitly attributes the formation of the systems of compossibles to divine wisdom.[81]

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[77] *T* 245/260 f. J. Iwanicki (*op. cit.*), on the problem of the Leibnizian difference between the mathematical science of quantity and the metaphysical science of quality, draws some useful parallels with Aquinas, before Leibniz, and Mendelsson and Kant, after.

[78] I. Pape (*Von den "möglichen Welten" zur "Welt des Möglichen". Leibniz im modernen Verständnis*, in AA.VV., *Akten des Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 14.-19. November 1966, vol. I: *Metaphysik-Monadenlehre*, cit.) rightly notes that the Leibnizian concept of a "possible world" is not a totality which results from the composition of its parts, but is rather a series generated by the law by which it is produced and ordered (cf. pp. 269 ff.). From this, Pape also infers that, from Leibniz's point of view, we can legitimately refer to "possible worlds" but not to a "world of the possible," since *the totality of all possible worlds*, as a consequence of the modal principle of *compossibility*, cannot in any case be a 'mundus,' since the law of order which founds and composes a world generates the 'infinite number of possible worlds' as being incompatible *with each other*" (p. 278). (In this regard, we should recall that H. Bergson [*Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, in IDEM, *Oeuvres*, textes annotés par A. Robinet, introduction par H. Gouhier, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1963, vol. III, p. 1198] had already rejected "the idea of the 'whole,'" when understood as "the conglomeration of the possible" on the grounds that it is nothing more than a "clutter of words," a "pseudo idea" a "purely verbal entity"). Taking as his starting point the Leibnizian conception of possible worlds as series generated and ordered by laws, Pape usefully and effectively describes them as "possible dramas:" "Beyond this, it now emerges that the so-called *possibles,* if they are taken to include both the necessary and the contingent, in no way stand before the eyes of the divine creating will as a 'totality of all that is possible.' Such a totality would have to look more like a warehouse full of tools, which a divine director inspected before launching the 'theatre of the world' for a usable possible. The 'real worlds,' instead, which (according to Leibniz) really stand before the eyes of the creature of the world, are *dramas*, possible courses for the world to follow, wherein – in accordance with the *invariable* dramatical laws, i.e. with the 'eternal truths' – the *variable* individual actors are composed together with the *variable* intentions of the divine playwright ('loix de l'ordre général') and the chosen requisites for a world drama" (pp. 278 f.).

[79] Cf. *T* 170/189.

[80] Cf. *T* 236/252.

[81] Cf. *T* 252/267.

Notwithstanding this, in the *Theodicy*, too, these hints at a formulation of the compossibles never materialise into a fully-fledged doctrine. They nonetheless do permit us to consider how such a doctrine might be developed in a manner coherent with the overall perspective of Leibnizian theodicy.[82] From this perspective, the famous passage in which Leibniz acknowledges that "it is as yet unknown to men from whence the incompatibility of that which is diverse arises",[83] should not so much be read as an expression of hope in the future progress of logic as rather as a reflection of Leibniz's recognition of the great elevation of God's wisdom and of the mystery of his ways, which we will not be able to "see" until the revelation of his glory.[84]

Let us now take a final brief look at the meaning of the expression "the best of all possible worlds." This expression presents us with a considerable ambiguity, inasmuch as it might indicate either an absolute superlative (absolute, complete excellence) or a more modest relative value (the best that can be achieved),[85] and has even been interpreted in a pessimistic light, as if Leibniz wished to be ironic about the fact that this highly malevolent world is actually the best.[86] To my mind, this

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[82] Y. Bélaval (*op. cit.*) writes that, for Leibniz, "finality is the root of contingency" (p. 398), explaining: "To say that finality is the root of contingency is equivalent to maintaining that the real is rational because it is governed by an ideal being. Hence – and there is nothing like this to be found in Spinoza of Hegel – this ideal, taken up as an objective by the creating will, becomes an end for this very reason" (p. 428).

[83] *E* 99.

[84] In adopting this line of interpretation (which will, necessarily, be more completely developed in Chapter Six) I am substantially adopting, although from a rather different angle, Vittorio Mathieu's perspective as expressed, above all, in his article *Die drei Stufen des Weltbegriffs bei Leibniz*, cit.. I would underline that, although Leibniz's position on this matter is not univocal, this nonetheless represents Leibniz's actual perspective. It seems to me that also G. Zingari shares a similar point of view (*La possibilità nella logica e nella morale di G. W. Leibniz*, in "Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana", LV [1976], 3, pp. 387-395).

[85] G.E. Barié (*op. cit.*) seems to interpret this expression in a reductive sense, when he writes: "Given that not even God can create a perfect world, but only the best of all possible worlds" (p. 296). A relative significance is attributed to the expression by O. Lempp (*Das Problem der Theodizee in der Philosophie und Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts bis auf Kant und Schiller*, Verlag der Dürr'schen Buchhandlung, Leipzig 1910, p. 86), J. Ortega y Gasset (*Del optimismo en Leibniz*, in IDEM, *Obras Completas*, vol. VIII, Revista de Occidente, Madrid 1965[2], pp. 341 f.), P. Koslowski (*Gnosis und Gnostizismus in der Philosophie. Systematische Überlegungen*, in AA.VV., *Gnosis und Mystik in der Geschichte der Philosophie*, cit., p. 380) and S. Semplici (*op. cit.*, p. 53), amongst others. Y. Bélaval (*op. cit.*, pp. 393 and above all 412) instead interprets the expression in the absolute sense of "perfect," taking issue with the paradoxical reading of Leibniz as pessimist put forward by Friedmann and Corsano.

[86] This interpretation was suggested by Voltaire in Chapter Six of his *Candide*: "If this is the best of possible worlds, what then are the others?" (VOLTAIRE, *Candide*, Introduction by Ph. Littell, Boni

ambiguity is not to be resolved through a simple linguistic analysis of the Latin, French and German expressions used by Leibniz, but can rather be clearly overcome with reference to the general context. Albeit that the world is created by God and is therefore inevitably finite from a metaphysical point of view, its perfection, however great, being ontologically incommensurable with that of God, within these limits Leibniz nonetheless considers this world's perfection to be absolutely maximal and not simply superior to others.[87] Leibniz states in the *Theodicy* that to assert that God has created any less than the best is equivalent to accusing him of malevolence.[88] In the *Discours de métaphysique*, he adopts the same argument and continues, yet more explicitly:

> since the series of imperfections descends to infinity, God's works would always have been good in comparison with those less perfect, no matter how he created them but something is hardly praiseworthy if it can be praised only in this way.[89]

The best is therefore absolute. It is not the proportionally best mediation between the values of the various assessment criteria. It is rather the maximisation of all values, as the metaphor of the pyramid which Pallas Athena shows to Theodorus.[90] Moreover, responding, elsewhere in the *Theodicy*, to questions put to Bayle by Arnauld, Leibniz writes:

> I agree with M. Bayle's principle, and it is also mine, that everything implying no contradiction is possible. But as for me, holding as I do that God did the best that was possible, or that he

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& Liveright, New York 1918, p. 24). Such a reading is shared, for example by G. Friedmann (*Leibniz et Spinoza*, Gallimard, Paris 1946, pp. 218 ff.), J. Ortega Y Gasset (*op.cit.*, pp. 341 f.), A. Corsano (*G.W. Leibniz*, Libreria Scientifica Editrice, Napoli 1952, pp. 167 ff.). J. Guitton (*Pascal et Leibniz. Étude sur deux types de penseurs*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris 1951, pp. 120 f.) also seems tempted towards such an interpretation, although he refrains from explicitly making such an assertion. It is interesting that he sees the great priest Theodorus in the myth of Sextus Tarquinius in the *Theodicy* as representing "the first foreshadowing of the 'grand inquisitor' in the *Brothers Karamazov*" (p. 120). G. Deleuze (*op. cit.*, p. 91) would also seem to share this perspective: "the best is nothing if not a consequence. And, even as a consequence, it derives directly from the defeat of the good (let us save what we can of the good …)." Cf. also IDEM, *Su Leibniz*, in "aut-aut" March – June 1993, n. 254-255, p. 130. Taking a very different approach, which is more measured and dialectical and, therefore, also more interesting É. Boutroux (*op. cit.*, pp. 158 ff.) spots in Leibniz's "relative optimism" a "seed" (cf. p. 167) of the later pessimism of the German protestant thought. Cf. also LEMPP, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

[87] M. Serres (*op. cit.*, p. 616 and note) argues and demonstrates that the very notion of the "maximal" implies limitation and that "the theory of the maximal is equivalent to a theory of limitation."

[88] Cf. *T* 231/248.

[89] *GP IV* 428; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 37.

[90] Cf. *T* 364/489.

could not have done better than he has done, deeming also that to pass any other judgement upon his work in its entirety would be to wrong his goodness or his wisdom, I must say that to make something which surpasses in goodness the best itself, that indeed would imply contradiction. That would be as if someone maintained that God could draw from one point to another a line shorter than the straight line, and accused those who deny this of subverting the article of faith whereby we believe in God the Father Almighty.[91]

This passage would be highly problematic, were we to take it to affirm the absolute necessity of the divine choice of the best. In reality, however, this is not the sense intended. Leibniz is not here denying the freedom – i.e. the moral necessity – of God's choice, but is rather stating that the objection under examination (that a better world will always be possible) can only be overturned if we accept that the existent world is optimal in an absolute, not a relative sense, since the notion of a world better than such an absolute optimum would be contradictory. For Leibniz, it is therefore certain that the existent world is the best in an absolute sense, and this constitutes an *a priori* certainty:

Is it possible, said M. Bayle, that there is no better plan than that one which God carried out? One answers that it is very possible and indeed necessary, namely that there is none: otherwise God would have preferred it.[92]

To demonstrate however, *how* this world is optimal is impossible, as herein lies a mystery, the very same mystery which surrounds the existence of evil in the world and constitutes one of the central concerns of theodicy.[93]

3. *Evil*

The existence of evil in the world is one of the two key questions in theodicy. As Leibniz writes, together with the difficulties connected to the problem of free will and predestination, we also face those issues which

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[91] *T* 252/267.

[92] *T* 253/268.

[93] J. Ortega Y Gasset (*op. cit.*, p. 340) also underlines that Leibniz's optimism is an "*a priori* optimism" and, for this very reason, connects it to the precedent philosophical tradition, even if subsequently, for other reasons, he in fact unearths a pessimistic principle, which distances Leibniz from tradition. W. Hübener (*Sinn und Grenzen des Leibnizschen Optimismus*, in "Studia Leibnitiana", X [1978], 2, pp. 239) makes an interesting comparison between Leibniz's theory of the "best world" and its precedents in tradition (Saint Bonaventure and Aquinas). Hübener also notes (cfr. pp. 232 ff.) that the term "optimism" was first introduced into philosophy by the Jesuit editors of the "Mémoires de Trévoux", (probably by Pierre Bimet), in 1737, with the specific aim of referring derogatively to this Leibnizian theory.

concern the conduct of God, and seems to make him participate too much in the existence of evil, even though man be free and participate also therein. And this conduct appears contrary to the goodness, the holiness and the justice of God, since God co-operates in evil as well physical as moral, and co-operates in each of them both morally and physically.[94]

Leibniz presents the following hypothetical solution to these problems in his *Preface*:

Likewise concerning the origin of evil in its relation to God, I offer a vindication of his perfections that shall extol not less his holiness, his justice and his goodness than his greatness, his power and his independence. I show how it is possible for everything to depend upon God, for him to co-operate in all the actions of creatures, even, if you will, to create these creatures continually, and nevertheless not to be the author of sin. Here also it is demonstrated how the privative nature of evil should be understood. Much more than that, I explain how evil has a source other than the will of God, and that one is right therefore to say of moral evil that God wills it not, but simply permits it. Most important of all, however, I show that it has been possible for God to permit sin and misery, and even to co-operate therein and promote it, without detriment to his holiness and his supreme goodness: although, generally speaking, he could have avoided all these evils.[95]

Also in response to the mystery of evil, then, Leibniz founds his apologetics on the a priori certainty of the sanctity, goodness and justice of God. Nonetheless, here too, he cannot altogether abstain from demonstrating how God "could" permit evil without falling short of the attributes of his own divinity. It is on these arguments which I will now briefly dwell, seeking to clarify the Leibnizian notion of "evil." In approaching this matter, we should bear in mind that the greatest and most serious criticisms of the *Theodicy* refer to this point. I am referring to the accusations that Leibniz denies the existence of evil, that he strips it of its reality, treating it as a mere semblance. Voltaire's pitiless irony regarding the motto, "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds" (a statement which, in truth, never occurs in Leibniz and runs counter to his thinking),[96] launched a fierce assault against theodicy in general and against Leibniz, wrongly considered the father of all theodicies, in particular, with the result that today, for many, theodicy is considered as synonymous with an outrageous

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[94] *T* 102/123.

[95] *T* 37 f./61.

[96] Such a sentence may seem more appropriate with reference to the general thesis of Pope's *Essay on Man*, with its refrain "Whatever is, is right" (cfr. A. POPE, *An Essay on Man*, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. J. Butt, Methuen & Co., London 1963, pp. 515, 540, 547). It is widely held that Voltaire's critique of Leibniz is unfounded. W. Hübener (*op. cit.*, p. 225), for example, notes: "Now anyone with even a superficial knowledge of the Leibnizian system will recognise at a glance that Voltaire simply manipulates passages from Leibniz, which are as hollow shells void of their genuine meaning, and regularly fails to grasp the *status controversiae*."

optimism, utterly blinkered against evil. A brief examination of the notion of "evil" in the *Theodicy* should therefore put these accusations to the test.[97]

To the fact that Leibniz had no intention whatsoever of denying or trivialising the existence and the agony of evil,[98] the numerous statements to the effect already quoted above should bear ample witness.[99] To these we might add yet others, such as the following:

> one cannot deny that there is in the world physical evil (that is, suffering) and moral evil (that is, crime) and even that physical evil is not always distributed here on earth according to the proportion of moral evil, as it seems that justice demands.[100]

Similar statements can also be found elsewhere in Leibniz's *oeuvre*.[101] Yet the clearest indication of all would seem to lie in the strong ethical connotation which

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[97] A. Heinekamp (*Zu den Begriffen realitas, perfectio und bonum metaphysicum bei Leibniz*, cit.) rightly reacts to this criticism: "My thesis is that this criticism does not do justice to Leibniz, as it does not take into account the fact that the concept of 'realitas,' in Leibniz, has a different content from that which prevails today. When, for example, Leibniz denies the reality of 'malum,' he is using 'realitas' to refer to something other than 'effective existence' (*Wirklichkeit*). Hence it is evident that Leibniz's theory cannot mean that 'malum' is not something effectively existent, that it does not exist" (p. 210). Nonetheless, Heinekamp perceives a defect in Leibniz's reduction of the good-evil opposition to a logical level, which removes it from reality (cf. p. 222).

[98] The accusation of denying the reality of evil is brought against Leibniz by J. Guitton (*op. cit.*, p. 9), amongst others, although Guitton seems later to change his mind on the matter (cf. pp. 112 f., 120 f.).

[99] Cf. above, Chapter two, § 3.

[100] *T* 75/98.

[101] In *Von der Allmacht und Allwissenheit Gottes*, Leibniz writes: "Against their stubborness, the argument which, in part, the scholastics inherited from the Church Fathers and which has been welcomed with open arms by the priggish in the absence of a better alternative – i.e. the notion that sin is a nonentity and consists in the lack of the due perfection; that God is only the cause of the creatures and things located in a certain reality, but not of the imperfections which derive therefrom – cannot hold. It is as if one were the cause of the number three, but did not wish to acknowledge that three is an odd number and, having had three children, nonetheless grew angry when anyone told him that they cannot group into pairs. Certainly, in order to excuse God, they come up with arguments so weak that a legal counsel for the defence, standing before a competent judge, would be ashamed to present them. Thus, a bad musician is only the cause of the percussive blows or bow strokes which he administers, and not of the dissonance which follows. Who is guilty for the fact that those sounds do not want to strike up a harmony? Surely, the one who must make amends is the musician? Indeed, I do not see why the sinner himself is considered as the cause of sin. He performs the action (just as God brings into being all those elements from which the action follows), but who is guilty for the fact that it is not in harmony with God's will? Such an imperfection or dissonance is a *non ens*, a *negativum*, but no *concursus* or *influxus*, as they call it, is located therein. Such are the fine defenders of divine justice, who would make all sinners unpunishable. And I am amazed that even such a deep thinker as Descartes has fallen into the same trap" (*A VI/1* 544 f.).

Leibniz attributes to the true piety, which is essentially charity – i.e., an active striving to combat evil and bring about good which is antithetical to any form of quietism. In a letter to Morell of 4-14 May 1698, in which Leibniz openly acknowledges that "the corruption of the visible world" is "very great",[102] he concludes by insisting on this kind of ethical commitment:

> Our true zeal must be dedicated to relieving human suffering and to inducing our fellow men to do the same for the love of God.[103]

It remains necessary, however, to clarify the exact sense in which Leibniz acknowledges the true awfulness of the existence of evil.

Leibniz, famously, refers to evil in three senses:

> Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. *Metaphysical evil* consists in mere imperfection, *physical evil* in suffering, and *moral evil* in sin.[104]

Let us now consider these three notions separately, beginning with the physical.

Leibnizian theodicy doubtless displays a lesser preoccupation with physical suffering than with moral evil. This is highly problematic for our contemporary sensibility, which instead tends to dwell predominantly on the outrage of physical suffering.[105] We might consider this emphasis as being peculiar to the cultural sensibility which Leibniz shares with the Christian tradition in general. Or perhaps, we should consider as more peculiar our own contemporary sensibility, which considers physical suffering as a greater outrage than moral evil, being conditioned by the prevailing eudaimonistic ideal of the common ethical culture and sensibility which has held sway over European culture for the past three centuries.[106] It is certainly true that, upon approaching Leibniz's *Theodicy,* the contemporary reader becomes immediately aware of this difference and must bear it in mind, if not to justify it, at least for the purposes of comprehension. The most radical criticisms levelled against theodicy indeed spring from the accusation of insensitivity towards

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[102] Cf. *GRUA* 126.

[103] *GRUA* 128.

[104] *T* 115/136; cf. *GP VI* 443.

[105] Of the many examples of this approach, let us at least recall H. Bergson's famous consideration (*op. cit.*, p. 256): "In brief, it would be easy to add a few sections to Leibniz's *Theodicy*. But we have no desire to do so. The philosopher can please himself with speculations of this kind in the solitude of his study; but what would he think if confronted with a mother who had seen her child die? Suffering is a terrible reality, and to define evil, even reduced back to that which it effectively is, *a priori* as a decline in good reflects an unsustainable optimism." Of the more recent scholars of Leibniz, S. Semplici (*op. cit.*, p. 48), for example, carries forward this idea: "When we think of the pained disenchantment of Voltaire, we legitimately and inevitably come to ask ourselves whether one of the most garish limitations of the *Essais* is not that of failing to take pain seriously."

[106] Cfr. P. HAZARD, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 83 ff.

suffering. This is certainly true at least from Voltaire, who was moved above all by the Lisbon earthquake, to the present day, when we continue to be tormented by memories of the holocaust, of the massacres of war, of the ravages of poverty. Leibniz recognises suffering as a concrete, real problem, but the fact that it cannot be imputed to God finds a relatively simple conceptual justification in theodicy.

As early as 1677 Leibniz engaged in a strenuous defence of the positive existence of pain. In his correspondence with Arnold Eckhard, as part of a highly interesting discussion which, starting from the cartesian demonstration of the existence of God, examine the concept of existence and the fundamental principle of the prevalence of being over non-being, Leibniz brings up the theme of pain as an example in support of his objections. This discussion, although interwoven with the main body of the argument, is also developed to the extent that it can stand on its own, and it is from this point of view that I will here consider it.[107]

In opposition to the definition of pain as simple privation, Leibniz highlights its positively real character:

> I: Therefore pain, too, is a perfection? He: Pain is not something positive, but is rather the privation of tranquillity, like darkness is the privation of light. I: It seems to me that we cannot say that pain is the privation of pleasure any more than we can say that pleasure is the privation of pain. Instead, both pleasure and pain are positive. Moreover, the relationship of pain to pleasure is very different from that of darkness to light. Indeed, shadows cannot spread and melt away where light is excluded, and where light is absent there are not greater and lesser degrees of shadow. Pain, instead, does not exist solely where pleasure is eliminated and one pain may be stronger than another.[108]

There follows a debate during which important distinctions and specifications of ontological concepts serve, amongst other things, to improve on the definition of pain[109] and during which Leibniz also formulates an important definition of pain in reference to harmony ("the true and profound reason for pain would seem to consist in the awareness of something confused, perturbed and devoid of harmony").[110] Leibniz concludes the discussion in conciliatory tones but nonetheless standing firm with regard to the positive character of pain:

> It thus seems to follow that there is more perfection or, rather, more reality in the soul in pain than in the indifferent soul, who feels neither joy nor pain, and that, in fact, in metaphysical terms, pain too should be considered as a perfection. Yet since also pleasure is a metaphysical perfection, it seems that we should ask ourselves whether, in metaphysical terms, pleasure or

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[107] In the final chapter (cf. below, Chapter Six, § 4) I will return to this significant correspondence between Leibniz and Eckhard, in order to consider some other points which emerge therefrom.

[108] *GP I* 214.

[109] Cf. *GP I* 216, 221, 230 ff..

[110] *GP I* 232.

pain represents the greater perfection. And it seems that *pleasure* is the greater perfection, because it constitutes the awareness of a power, whereas *pain* is the awareness of a weakness. But pain, in metaphysical terms, is an imperfection. Hence the awareness of a metaphysical imperfection, always in metaphysical terms, is less perfect than the awareness of a metaphysical perfection. And thus pain implies some imperfection in the one who experiences it.[111]

Many years later, in the *Theodicy*, responding to a different question (whether there is more physical evil than physical good in the world) with a set of arguments which are also different, since here the "middle state" of the lack of pleasure and pain is considered as a physical good, "health",[112] Leibniz nonetheless reaffirms the positive character of suffering:

> all the sensations not unpleasing to us, all the exercises of our powers that do not incommode us, and whose prevention would incommode us, are physical goods, even when they cause us no pleasure; for privation of them is a physical evil.[113]

Leibniz's case against those who would ascribe physical evil to God is founded above all, if not exclusively, on his consideration of physical evil as a consequence of moral evil:

> God permitted physical evil by implication, in permitting moral evil which is its source.[114]

In this way, the notion of the existence of suffering as a "penalty"(*Malum Poenae*) not only does nothing to call into question against divine justice but actually stands as evidence thereof. It is certainly true that this notion of suffering as a penalty for sin is unsatisfactory, since it is undemonstrated and, indeed, in the case of the suffering of the just, it is plainly disproved. In truth, it would seem that on this point Leibniz, rather than basing his approach on rational arguments, rather adheres to scripture and its traditional interpretation, with particular reference to the doctrine of suffering as representing a consequence of original sin.[115] Leibniz is nonetheless aware of the

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[111] *GP I* 266.

[112] Cf. *T* 266/281.

[113] *Ibidem*. The accusation of not having recognised evil as positively real and of having reduced it to a mere privation has sometimes been connected, as a specific case, with the broader, more general criticism that Leibniz did not recognise negation as a real opposition. For example, this criticism was voiced, in the field of logic, by L. Couturat (*op. cit.*, pp. 219 note, 432). D. Mahnke (*op. cit.*, p. 42), however, contests this assertion. Analogically, M. Gueroult (*Leibniz. Dynamique et métaphysique*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris 1967, pp. 20, 165 ff.) asserts that Leibniz did not recognise negation as a real opposition, either on the physical or on the metaphysical level, and that his conception of evil as privation derives from this fact (cf. p. 168).

[114] *T* 340/352.

[115] Cf. *T* 104/125, 275/290, 410 f./415.

relative value of this explanation and seeks to rectify it with some significant additions. First of all, he specifies that

> this method, deriving the evil of punishment from the evil of guilt, cannot be open to censure, and serves especially to account for the greatest physical evil, which is damnation.[116]

For this very reason, he follows up his account of the principle of God's justice, which explains physical suffering as a penalty, with reference to God's goodness, which explains the sufferance of the just as a means to a greater happiness:

> *physical evil*, that is, sorrows, sufferings, miseries, will be less troublesome to explain, since these are results of moral evil [...].
>
> It is true that one often suffers through the evil actions of others; but when one has no part in the offence one must look upon it as a certainty that these sufferings prepare for us a greater happiness.[117]

More clearly yet, in the *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus*, Leibniz writes that

> In this sense [as guilt (*Malum Culpae*)] physical suffering usually derives from moral evil, even though it does not always fall on the same subjects. This latter fact, which may appear an aberration, is, however, compensate for by such a great reward that those very innocents themselves would not wish not to have suffered.[118]

Later he provides a further explanation of this latter point,[119] concluding:

> For this reason our afflictions will not only be richly recompensated, but they will serve to heighten felicity. Such evils are not only advantageous but are actually indispensable.[120]

The range of apologetic arguments deployed in the *Theodicy* with regard to suffering, as detailed above, confirm all of this.[121]

Moral evil is therefore the principal cause of physical evil and herein lies the main reason why it should be taken so seriously:

> moral evil is an evil so great only because it is a source of physical evils, a source existing in one of the most powerful of creatures, who is also most capable of causing those evils.[122]

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[116] *T* 275/290; cf. 186/205.

[117] *T* 261/276.

[118] *GP VI* 443.

[119] Cf. *GP VI* 446 f.

[120] *GP VI* 447.

[121] Cf. above, Chapter Three, § 3.

It is easily demonstrable that Leibniz also recognises the positive reality of guilt, not only because he attributes physical evil thereto as a consequence and effect, but also because he locates its cause in a positive act of the human will. Leibniz connects moral evil with human rationality. This is not, however, in the sense that reason itself is considered evil. On the contrary, reason constitutes a good. Leibniz's meaning is rather that moral evil derives from man's abuse of reason.[123] We already identified the nature of this abuse in our investigation of the will and human freedom. The cause of moral evil is human freedom, not because it is able to determine our acts, but rather inasmuch as we sometimes allow sensory motivations to dominate over the rational, the former perverting the latter. The cause of moral evil is then man, as a consequence of his evil will, his abuse of his freedom

> a wicked spirit being, in the sphere of its activity, what the evil principle of the Manichaeans would be in the universe.[124]

Leibniz also draws this doctrine from scripture and tradition[125] and it forms the basis for his reconciliation of the free will with the will in bondage:

> Fallen and unregenerate man is under the domination of sin and of Satan, because it pleases him so to be; he is a voluntary slave through his evil lust. Thus it is that free will and will in bondage are one and the same thing.[126]

If, then, sin is a privation of a human perfection, i.e. of reason and its practical use as free will, it is, nonetheless, a positive act of the will itself, the initiative of and therefore the responsibility for which is unique to human freedom or, more precisely, to the rational creature (since we must also consider the devil):

> the man who sins mortally instead knows that, to his judgement, what he is doing is against the public good and *cannot be reconciled therewith except through punishment*. Having despised the punishment and nonetheless willed the act, he must necessarily despise the public good and the government of the world. It is for this reason that he sins mortally.[127]

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[122] *T* 118/138; cf. 414/419.

[123] Cf. *T* 171/190, 435/440.

[124] *T* 414/419.

[125] Cf. *T* 282/296 f., 286/300 f.

[126] *T* 282/297.

[127] *CF* 76; cf. *T* 210/228, 274/289, 280/294 f., 281/295, 282/297, 286/300, 288/302, 346/358, 414/419 f., 416/421.

That the choice of evil represents positive act of will on the part of the intelligent creature is so clear in Leibniz that sometimes in his writings we also come across the designation of evil as an act of rebellion against God.[128]

With regard to moral evil, as with physical evil, Leibniz is faced with the issue of divine liability. Indeed, in the case of moral evil, this problem is yet more grave. Whereas, as we have seen, it is possible to conceive of God as being morally responsible, directly or indirectly, for physical suffering and to believe that this is nonetheless for the best (even if it is not always possible to understand it), God's responsibility for moral evil is unjustifiable:

> the greatest of these [difficulties] lies in maintaining that God co-operates morally in moral evil, that is, in sin, without being the originator of the sin, and even without being accessory thereto.[129]

Leibniz's response to this problem stands on two key tenets:

> He does this by *permitting* it justly, and by *directing* it wisely towards the good.[130]

To argue that God does not will sin, but simply permits it, is to make a substantial distinction. First of all, it means that sin is never a means to an end for God (since as such it would have to be positively willed), but is merely a *conditio sine qua non* included in the choice of the best of all possible worlds.[131] Secondly, it means that moral evil cannot be imputed to God, inasmuch as this would involve a positive act of the will, while

> to *permit* something is neither to will it nor not to will it, and nonetheless to know about it.[132]

This distinction between willing and permitting is important, but will not suffice to clear God of the moral and legal responsibility for the existence of sin. The problem remains that one permits only that which one is able to impede[133] and, being

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[128] Cf. *CF* 114. O. Saame, in a note to his edition of the *Confessio Philosophi* (cf. note 191, in *CF* 187), cites other passages from Leibniz's writings, in which sin is shown to represent a rebellion against God. This notion of sin as rebellion also emerges in Leibniz's consideration of the antagonist of theodicy (cf. above, Chapter Three, § 1). As P. Burgelin (*Commentaire du Discours de métaphysique de Leibniz*, cit., p. 110) writes: "Rebellion against God is sin itself. "

[129] *T* 162/182.

[130] *Ibidem*.

[131] Cf. *T* 204/222, 255/270, 314/327; GP *VI* 444.

[132] *CF* 64.

[133] Cf. *COUT* 472.

omnipotent, God is certainly capable of impeding sin.[134] It would therefore still be legitimate to hold God responsible for sin since he did not impede it, even though he was capable of doing so. Neither, as we have already stated, can God be cleared on the grounds that sin is sometimes a means to a good end. Although sin may prove to represent a means to a greater good, it may never be chosen as such. This means that an argument that God permits sin can not stand in his defence, unless it is qualified with reference to God's moral necessity of never himself committing evil, in accordance with the legal argument outlined above:

> Concerning sin or moral evil, although it happens very often that it may serve as a means of obtaining good or of preventing another evil, it is not this that renders it a sufficient object of the divine will or a legitimate object of a created will. It must only be admitted or *permitted* in so far as it is considered to be a certain consequence of an indispensable duty: as for instance if a man who was determined not to permit another's sin were to fail of his own duty.[135]

This is the situation in which God finds himself. Having evaluated all the possible worlds and observed that the best contained sin, God would have fallen short of his moral duty had he chosen to create a world which, although without sin, was inferior to this.[136]

The mystery naturally remains as to how a world containing evil can be the best possible. This will be the topic of our next section. Here, however, we might already consider the second point of Leibniz's argument – i.e. that God, when he permits moral evil, does so "directing it wisely towards the good." The existent world, then, is not solely a world marked by the presence of sin. It is rather a world in which sin is so located within the overall vision of universal good as to represent an integral part thereof. This is not necessary a consequence of any extraordinary miracles on God's part. The whole harmonious project for good was already written, both in its broader, more general characteristics and in the minute details of every event which are determined thereby, in the originary decree with which God chose this particular world. Once again, the notion of the divine choice resting on the single quantitative criterion of the conflict of the possibles proves inadequate. At the root of the divine project lies an act of love, a salvific final end, in the face of which the true believer may indeed raise his voice in praise, first and foremost because God's goodness and wisdom are such that a place and a role have been conceded to him, to the individual sinner, in this, the best of all possible worlds:

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[134] Cf. *T* 116/136.

[135] *T* 117/137; cf. 171/191, 208/315.

[136] Cf. *T* 183/202, 183/202, 204/222 f., 392 f./397.

Indeed, God does not will sin, he does not will to produce sin, but he does will your existence – the existence of a being who he knows will sin – because he knows that your sin will be converted into the best.[137]

Leibniz locates the "origin" of physical and moral evil in metaphysical evil.[138] This has led various scholars to claim that Leibniz reduces physical and moral evil to metaphysical evil.[139] This is not exactly the case. If it were, in fact, either Leibniz would be the most radical prophet of pessimism imaginable since, as we will see, metaphysical evil is innate in the essence of every creature and the world would therefore be radically, completely and insuperably evil (and such is certainly not Leibniz's position, nor that which most scholars would attribute to him); or Leibniz, asserting the metaphysical evil is not really evil, would also deny the other forms of evil, inasmuch as they are reduced into this. This second position has been attributed to Leibniz but, again, does not correspond to the real nature of his ideas.[140] The issue is, unfortunately, confused by Leibniz himself who, when he refers to evil as the "privation of good," does not adopt the fundamental distinction, established in Christian tradition by Saint Augustine and then reaffirmed by Saint Anselm in medieval theology and by Aquinas and the scholastics, between the *privatio boni* and the *privatio boni debiti* or, as the scholastics usually put it, *negatio perfectionis debitae*. If, indeed, in Plotinus (and to some extent also in Plato and Aristotle) we already come across the notion of good as being and evil as non-being (which, in Plotinus, is already intentionally set in opposition to gnostic dualism), Christian thought, from Augustine onwards, on the basis of the principle of the goodness of creation, has specified that the simple finite and imperfect character of the creature is not evil per se, if evil is instead defined as the privation of a good or a perfection (be it physical or moral) which the creature should, of its essence, have.

When Leibniz introduces the notion of "metaphysical evil,"[141] he is therefore locating himself within a tradition. He frequently cites the Church Fathers, and above

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[137] *GRUA* 313; cf. *T* 161/181; *FdCL* 179 ff.

[138] Cf. *T* 115/136, 288/302 f.

[139] Schelling already accused Leibniz of reducing evil to finiteness, i.e. to metaphysical evil, thereby denying it. Cf., on this point, W.G. JACOBS, *op. cit.*, p. 225; G. RICONDA, *Schelling storico della filosofia (1794-1820)*, Mursia, Milano 1990, pp. 183, 187. O. Lempp (*op. cit.*, pp. 43 s., 45, 49 s., 54, 58, 86), P. Ricoeur (*op. cit.*, pp. 26 f.) and X. Tilliette (*Aporétique du mal et de l'espérance*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., p. 432) also share this belief.

[140] B. Russell provides us with a clear example of a misunderstanding of Leibniz's theory of metaphysical evil (*A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz. With an Appendix of leading Passages*, George Allen & Unwin LTD, London 1951[2], pp. 197 ff.).

[141] This expression also occurs in Tommaso Campanella, although it is clearly distinct from the *privatio boni debiti* of moral evil: "We do not refer to evil, if not as respective evil in the physical domain, privative evil in the moral and negative evil in the metaphysical" (*Atheismus triumphatus*, Roma, 1631, cap. 6, cit. da G. GRUA, *Jurisprudence universelle et théodicée selon Leibniz*, cit., p. 354, note 72).

all Saint Augustine. However, he does not distinguish between the privation of being in general and the defect of a particular perfection innate to the individual entity.[142] Upon a general overview of his philosophy, we must conclude that for Leibniz metaphysical evil is the *privatio boni* in general, while physical and moral evil are the *privatio boni debiti*. Such is effectively Leibniz's viewpoint, even though, on occasion, we may come across passages which do not conform to this idea. In the *Theodicy*, for example, we find the following:

> Evil is therefore like darkness, and not only ignorance but also error and malice consist formally in a certain kind of privation.[143]

As examples of this, Leibniz cites an error in the judgement of perception (a square tower, which from afar is seen, and therefore described, as round) and a wrong choice on the part of the will (of pleasure instead of the true good). Leibniz concludes:

> In general perfection is positive, it is an absolute reality; defect is privative, it comes from limitation and tends towards new privations. This saying is therefore as true as it is ancient: *bonum ex causa integra, malum ex quolibet defectu*; as also that which states: *malum causam habet non efficientem, sed deficientem*.[144]

The abovementioned confusion is patently clear in this passage.

Another example of this conceptual confusion is to be found in Leibniz's correspondence with Bourguet. On 11 April 1710, Leibniz remarks:

> As regards the origin of evil – that it is born from the limited nature of creatures – there is no doubt.[145]

In a letter dated 8 September 1712, however, Bourguet objects:

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[142] P. Ricoeur (*Finitude et culpabilité*, I: *L'homme faillible*, Aubier, Paris 1960, p. 149) also seems to allude to the absence of this distinction in Leibniz: "A long philosophical tradition, which found its most perfect expression in Leibniz, would have it that the limitation of creatures is the grounds for moral evil. Inasmuch as it makes moral evil possible, this limitation deserves to be referred to as metaphysical evil. […]. The idea of limitation, taken as such, is not sufficient to bring us to the very root of moral evil. Not every limitation leads us to fall, but only *that* specific limitation, which consists, for human reality, in not coinciding with itself**."**

A. Heinekamp (*Zu den Begriffen realitas, perfectio und bonum metaphysicum bei Leibniz*, cit., pp. 217 ff.), too, seems to me to refer implicitly to this lack of distinction in Leibniz, a shortfalling which he traces back to the Leibnizian conception of the monads.

[143] *T* 121/142.

[144] *T* 122/142 f.

[145] *GP III* 550.

I would not dare to attribute the origin of evil to the limited nature of creatures. If this limitation were the origin of evil, it would follow that a certain necessity inheres in evil and that there could not possibly exist any intelligent creature exempt therefrom.[146]

Unfortunately, Leibniz's answer to this latter has not survived. However, in a later letter, in December 1714, Leibniz responds:

'As for metaphysical evil (you say) I do not consider it as evil.' But if you admit that there is metaphysical good, Sir, the privation of this good will be metaphysical evil. When an intelligent being loses his understanding without any pain and without sin – and therefore without any physical or moral evil – do you not consider this as an evil?[147]

In this case, too, there is an evident confusion, since the example suggests the privation of a quality innate to the intelligent being, while the principle simply indicates metaphysical evil as a privation of metaphysical good, i.e. of perfection in general. As Leibniz explains elsewhere:

Metaphysical [good or evil] consists, in general, in the perfection and imperfection of things, and may also refer to those things which are not intelligent.[148]

If, however, we give credit to the conception which is largely prevalent in Leibniz, we should define metaphysical evil as the simple limitation or imperfection or finiteness which is essentially innate in each creature due to the fact that, as a created being, the creature is not absolutely perfect like God but is rather contingent and limited. This "original limitation of creatures" or "limitation of the receptivity of the creature"[149] is often likened by Leibniz to the inertia of bodies which creates resistance against the force of motion. Inertia, in this sense, represents a particular case of metaphysical evil.[150] This originary limitation is not to be confused with original sin, to which it is anterior.[151] It represents a generic privation of perfection, a

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[146] *GP III* 554.

[147] *GP III* 574; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 662.

[148] *GP VI* 443.

[149] Cf. *T* 119 f./140 f.

[150] Cf. *T* 119 f./140 f., 314/327, 341/353, 383/384; *GP VI* 449 f.; *VII* 312; *GRUA* 316, 355, 447, 473; *COUT* 22.

[151] Cf. *GP IV* 455 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 62); *VII* 312; *GRUA* 318, 326 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 96 f.), 383 f.; *TS* 5. Hence it is incorrect to argue, with S. Semplici (*op*. *cit*., p. 51), that, for Leibniz, original sin is closer to metaphysical evil than to moral evil, or even to identify Leibniz's metaphysical evil with original sin, as, for example, does W. Totok (*Theodizee bei Leibniz und Lessing*, in AA.VV., *Beiträge zur Wirkungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, cit., p. 179). Neither, from this point of view, can theodicy be considered as standing in continuity with myth, as does H. Blumenberg (*op*. *cit*., p. 57). Metaphysical evil, i.e. the condition

fundamental limitation, in Leibniz's own words, a "non plus ultra".[152] This creatural limitation is *only evil in a metaphysical sense*, i.e. inasmuch as it is an imperfection, and, also in this sense, its negative quality is repressed by the fact that it represents a constituent part of a higher metaphysical good, i.e. of the best of all possible worlds.[153] Metaphysical evil is the origin of moral and physical evil only inasmuch as it constitutes the condition which makes them possible. Sin and suffering can in no way be reduced back to human finiteness. Man neither sins nor suffers because he is limited. However, it is because of his finiteness and imperfection that the creature *can* sin and *can* suffer. For that which creatural limits render possible – sin and suffering – to become actual, a positive circumstance is nonetheless required. In the case of sin, this is an act of the free will, in the case of suffering, an external event, which is often also an act of free will. For this reason, Leibniz's identification of metaphysical evil as the origin of moral and physical evil in no way contradicts his other identification of the free will of man or of intelligent creatures as the sole cause of evil. Leibniz clearly draws this distinction in the *Theodicy*, when he writes that

> evil comes from privation; the positive and action spring from it by accident.[154]

He also writes of evil that

> its source is in the original imperfection of creatures: that renders them capable of sinning.[155]

He follows Augustine in stating that "evil comes not from nature, but from evil will".[156] Elsewhere, too, Leibniz insists on this point. In his *Systema Theologicum,* Leibniz writes that their

> congenital and original limitation or imperfection, prior to any sin, […] means that [creatures] are fallible.[157]

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which makes moral and physical evil possible, is a limitation, an imperfection. In other words, it is a negative condition, not an active principle or positive condition, such as the "gift of curiosity" in the myth of Pandora.

[152] Cf. T 383/384; GRUA 126, 147, 364 (Eng. trans. Phil. Ess. 114), 486. This may shed some interesting light on the title – *Plus ultra* – which Leibniz originally intended for his *Scientia Generalis* (cf. *COUT* 217).

[153] It seems to me that there is an interesting connection between "metaphysical evil" in Leibniz and what Vittorio Mathieu calls "the nocturnal side" of Leibniz's philosophy (cf. V. MATHIEU, *Il lato notturno della filosofia di Leibniz*, in "aut-aut", marzo-giugno 1993, n. 254-255, pp. 73-76).

[154] *T* 201/220.

[155] *T* 203/221.

[156] *T* 286/300.

[157] *TS* 5.

In a letter to Molanus he specifies:

> It is undeniable that every creature is essentially limited; and were this not the case, evil would clearly never have emerged. Nonetheless, limitation contributes towards sin, not in the manner of determination, but rather in the manner of an inevitable condition. It is indeed true that, if the free creature who falls into temptation were not lacking to some degree in perfection, he would not succumb and not abuse of his freedom. But it would be absurd to infer from this *that Adam was inevitably determined to the imperfection of disobedience, therefore he could not have been otherwise than disobedient.*[158]

And again, in the *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus*, he writes:

> In this way, the foundation of evil is necessary, but its emergence is not necessary but contingent. And this means that evils are possible by necessity, but actual by contingency.[159]

Metaphysical evil is not, therefore, per se a true evil and moral and physical evil cannot be reduced back thereto. Metaphysical evil is rather the originary limitation of each creature, which constitutes the condition which makes evil possible. Why, then, does Leibniz afford such a prominent role to metaphysical evil in his overall discussion of evil? The answer to this question brings us back to one of the fundamental issues of theodicy, i.e. to the issue of the origin of evil, an issue raised by God's accusers, be it in the form of the Manichean dualism of principles or in the form of accusations of responsibility for evil levelled against God himself. For Leibniz, the idea of metaphysical evil provides the answer to both these objections:

> Similarly, I do not see how anyone can call into doubt the origin of evil in privation, i.e. in the limitation of things, unless they wish to blame it on God, author of all that is positive, of all perfection, or to join the Manicheans in establishing two primary causes, the one of good, the other of evil.[160]

Leibniz presents the idea of the origin of evil in privation as an argument against the explanation of evil as a metaphysical principle in the pages of the *Theodicy* dedicated to the confutation of manicheanism:

> The explanation of the cause of evil by a particular principle, *per principium maleficum*, is of the same nature. Evil needs no such explanation, any more than do cold and darkness: there is neither *primum frigidum* nor principle of darkness. Evil itself comes only from privation; the positive enters therein only by concomitance, as the active enters by concomitance into cold.[161]

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[158] *S* 83.

[159] *GP VI* 449; cf. *GP IV* 455 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 61); *GRUA* 316, 365 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 113), 368 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 117), 412; *FdCNL* 182 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 96 f.).

[160] *GRUA* 413.

[161] *T* 201/219.

With this, however, Leibniz also refutes the theory, widespread in antiquity, which he attributes above all to Plato and the platonic tradition, of matter as the principle of evil.[162] *Leibnizian metaphysical evil*, in sum, inasmuch as it represents a mere lack of perfection and of being, *constitutes the denial of any metaphysical principle of evil,* beyond that of the cause and moral author of evil, i.e, the intelligent creature.[163] The concept of metaphysical evil thus clears God of the creation of and responsibility for evil, since it locates the origin of evil not in God, but in the nothingness which inevitably enters into the essence of the creature. In the *Theodicy,* Leibniz writes:

<div align="center">OBJECTION V</div>

Whoever produces all that is real in a thing is its cause.

God produces all that is real in sin.

Therefore God is the cause of sin.

<div align="center">ANSWER</div>

I might content myself with denying the major or the minor, because the term 'real' admits of interpretations capable of rendering these propositions false. But in order to give a better explanation I will make a distinction. 'Real' either signifies that which is positive only, or else it includes also privative beings: in the first case, I deny the major and I admit the minor; in the second case, I do the opposite.[164]

Leibniz, at times, presents "nothingness" as the origin of creatural limitation, thus denying that God is the cause of imperfection and, at the same time, refuting the manichean thesis of a positive metaphysical principle of evil.[165] It is well known that Leibniz also developed this thesis of creation by God and from nothing in connection with his studies on binary calculus.[166] It might appear that in this way Leibniz contradicts the truth of God as sole foundation of creation and thus falls into a kind of

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[162] Cf. *T* 114/135, 313/326, 340/352 f.

[163] A. Pichler (*Die Theologie des Leibniz aus sämtlichen gedruckten und vielen noch ungedruckten Quellen,* 2 vols.,facsimile edition Georg Olms, Hildesheim 1965, vol. I, p. 272) writes: "Yet no positive principle of evil (*Übel*) exists, just as there is no principle of darkness. In fact, evil derives from privation alone. The positive element is only added through concomitance, as in the case of cold. But it would not be legitimate to conclude from this that evil, being only a privation, cannot exercise any power."

[164] *T* 383/384.

[165] Cf., for example, *GRUA* 364 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 113).

[166] Cf., for example, *GRUA* 126; *FdCNL* 166.

dualism. However, this is not the case, since Leibniz specifies that, even if God is not the *cause* or *author* of limitation and privation, which are instead innate in the nature of the creature, these essences, as possibles, are nonetheless present in the divine intellect. Creatural limitation is thus independent of God's will, since God is not its author, whereas it is not independent of his intellect:

> we, who derive all being from God, where shall we find the source of evil? The answer is, that it must be sought in the ideal nature of the creature, in so far as this nature is contained in the eternal verities which are in the understanding of God, independently of his will.[167]

> God, then, is not the author of the imperfection of creatures, since he

> is […] not the author of essences in so far as they are only possibilities.[168]

He has rather simply permitted that these essences pass into existence, inasmuch as they are necessarily connected to the existence of the creatures which he has chosen.[169] Nonetheless, ontological limitation still has its foundation in God. This lies not in God's will, but in his thought:

> since God made all positive reality that is not eternal, he would have made the source of evil, if that did not rather lie in the possibility of things or forms, that which alone God did not make, since he is not the author of his own understanding.[170]

4.   *Evil in the Best of all Possible Worlds*

In the *Theodicy,* the issue of evil is usually presented in the form of the question: how can God permit evil? or: how could God create a world in which there is evil?[171] In reality, however, Leibniz ultimately passes from this question to another: how can evil be part of the best of all possible worlds?[172] The answer to the first question in fact depends on the answer to the second: God can, indeed must, in accordance with his goodness, wisdom and justice, permit evil, because it is an integral and constituent part of the best of all possible worlds. However, this latter thesis is not demonstrable but can only be upheld *a priori,* as it is a mystery.[173] The shift of

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[167] *T* 114 f./135.

[168] *T* 314/327.

[169] Cf. *ibidem.*

[170] *T* 341/353.

[171] Cf., for example, *T* 37 f./61, 102/123, 168/188.

[172] Cf. *T* 196/214.

[173] Cf. *ibidem.*

perspective from the first to the second question becomes particularly evident, in the *Theodicy*, in Leibniz's debate with Malebranche, an author who, instead, had continued to dwell on the former issue.

Leibniz had already expressed his divergence from Malebranche on this point many years before the publication of the *Theodicy*:[174]

> Father Malebranche, in his *Traité de la nature et de la grace*, p. 31, states that God could have made a more perfect world than this, but would have had to alter the simplicity of his ways. Yet we must rather state that we do not know the particular ends of everything.[175]

In the *Theodicy* this divergence is argued out in more detail. Although the discussion is still not particularly long, it nonetheless brings out various interesting points.[176]

As is well-known, Malebranche, too, sought to tackle the glaring problem of evil's irreducible reality. He sought to respond thereto by considering evil as an "irregularity," which can be justified by setting the perfection of divine laws above that of their outcomes. The existence of certain irregularities would thus be the negative but inevitable consequence of the perfection, i.e. the simplicity, of the laws with which God orders and governs the world. This approach to theodicy implies a break with cartesian arbitrarism and the primacy of divine wisdom over divine power. On this point, Leibniz naturally agrees with and admires Malebranche. Nonetheless, various noteworthy divergences of approach remain between these two famous contemporaries.[177]

Although he does acknowledge the existence of evil, Leibniz, unlike Malebranche, refuses to consider evil as an "irregularity:"

> one must believe that even sufferings and monstrosities are part of order; and it is well to bear in mind not only that it was better to admit these defects and these monstrosities than to violate general laws, as Father Malebranche sometimes argues, but also that these very monstrosities are in the rules, and are in conformity with general acts of will, though we be not capable of discerning this conformity.[178]

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[174] Grua gives "after 1685?" as the presumed date for this note on Malebranche (*GRUA* 230); A. Robinet (*op. cit.*, p. 225) dates it at 1685.

[175] *GRUA* 230.

[176] Both for a general overview and for a detailed account of the relationship between Leibniz and Malebranche, A. ROBINET, *op. cit.* is still invaluable. On the same theme, cf. also G. STIELER, *Leibniz und Malebranche und das Theodizeeproblem* [Abhandlungen der Leibniz-Gesellschaft, ed. P. Ritter, n. III], Otto Reichl Verlag, Darmstadt 1930.

[177] I cannot, therefore, agree with S. Landucci (*op. cit.*, p. 42 note 40), who maintains that these differences are only apparent.

[178] *T* 261/276 f.

Leibniz certainly held a precise and rigorous conception of this hypothesis, even though he recognised the fact that he was ultimately treating of a mystery. In fact, in the lines which follow the above cited passage, he presents, as an analogy, the example of mathematical questions to which there is an exact or, at least, rigorously rational solution – numerical series and curves which, however irregular they may seem, are always such that

> one can give its equation and construction, wherein a geometrician would find the reason and the fittingness of all these so-called irregularities.[179]

In §§ 203 ff., Leibniz approaches this point of divergence between his own position and that of Malebranche. He summarises Malebranche's theory on this theme, quoting Bayle:

> This thought has something dazzling about it: Father Malebranche has placed it in the best possible light; and he has persuaded some of his readers that a system which is simple and very productive is more consistent with God's wisdom than a system more composite and less productive in proportion, but more capable of averting irregularities.[180]

This would explain why God does not always deploy miracles – i.e. particular events which do not adhere to the general rules – to correct the "irregularities" which inevitably occur within the order of the world as a consequence of the "simplicity" of its laws. Yet Leibniz cannot agree with Malebranche on this point if he is to be coherent with his own philosophical thought as a whole:

> I agree with Father Malebranche that God does things in the way most worthy of him. But I go a little further than he, with regard to 'general and particular acts of will'.[181]

Nothing, for Leibniz – not even a miracle – represents a departure from general laws. God only ever departs from one law in order to apply another:

> I would not say, with this Father, that God departs from general laws whenever order requires it: he departs from one law only for another law more applicable, and what order requires cannot fail to be in conformity with the rule of order, which is one of the general laws.[182]

For Leibniz, no event, including those which are unique and unrepeatable, such as miracles, is ever particularly and arbitrarily willed by God. Instead, every event is

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[179] *T* 262/277. Cf. Leibniz's annotations to Arnauld's letters to Malebranche, cit. in A. ROBINET, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

[180] *T* 243 f./259.

[181] *T* 240/256.

[182] *T* 241/257.

the result of a law.[183] Every particular is governed by a general law, which remains as such, even if it is only exercised on a single occasion:

> Thus I would say that God never has a *particular will* such as this Father implies, that is to say, *a particular primitive will*.[184]

It is clear that, on this basis, evil cannot be considered as an "irregularity." It is equally clear that Malebranche's solution – his justification of the imperfection of the results on the basis of the simplicity of the laws – is not acceptable for Leibniz. Leibniz, too, recognises order and harmony as a propotion between the "simplicity" and "productivity" of rules, and proclaims himself in agreement with Malebranche (or, rather, proclaims that Malebranche is in agreement with him!) on this point:

> thus Father Malebranche's system in this point amounts to the same as mine.[185]

However, in reality, his understanding of the terms "simplicity" and "productivity" is very different:

> One may, indeed, reduce these two conditions, simplicity and productivity, to a single advantage, which is to produce as much perfection as is possible [...]. Even if the effect were assumed to be greater, but the process less simple, I think one might say that, when all is said and done, the effect itself would be less great, taking into account not only the final effect but also the mediate effect. For the wisest mind so acts, as far as it is possible, that the *means* are also in a sense *ends*, that is, they are desirable not only on account of what they do, but on account of what they are.[186]

In the sense in which it is understood by Leibniz, the proportion between simplicity and productivity of rules cannot permit irregularities. This is because Leibniz conceives of the simplicity of rules in a manner very different from that of Malebranche:

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[183] It would be very interesting to examine the treatment of miracles in Leibniz's works as a whole, tracing his approach thereto in all its originality and complexity, but once again, in the interests of brevity and coherence, we will have to refrain from doing so at this time.

[184] *T* 240/256.

[185] *T* 241/257.

[186] *Ibidem*. Cf. also a note by Leibniz to Malebranche's *Entretien d'un Philosophe Chrétien et d'un Philosophe Chinois sur l'Existence et la Nature de Dieu* di Malebranche: "Bearing everything in mind, ways and effects, [the world] is absolutely the most excellent. The ways are a part of the overall work" (cit. in A. ROBINET, *op. cit.*, p. 488). A. Robinet (*ibi*, p. 138) writes: "Going beyond Malebranche, he [Leibniz] integrates miracles into the general order, including in the definition of the wisdom of God, in addition to the simplicity and productivity of the means, also the consideration of these means, for God is not indifferent to anything."

Yet I am not altogether pleased with M. Bayle's manner of expression here on this subject, and I am not of the opinion 'that a more composite and less productive plan might be more capable of averting irregularities'. Rules are the expression of general will: the more one observes rules, the more regularity there is; simplicity and productivity are the aim of rules. I shall be met with the objection that a uniform system will be free from irregularities. I answer that it would be an irregularity to be too uniform, that would offend against the rules of harmony. *Et citharoedus ridetur chorda qui semper oberrat eadem.*[187]

The order of the world, for Leibniz, as we have already seen above, is harmony, "unity in variety." His conception of the relationship between simplicity of the laws and the rich variety of phenomena must be understood in the light of this notion. The simplicity of laws and the rich variety of phenomena are not two different principles of the best, between which we have to seek out an optimal compromise (a compromise which, according to Malebranche, would justify the existence of "irregularities"). They are rather two aspects of the same principle, i.e. of the "form," which is, at the same time, the principle of determination and variety and the principle of order and intelligibility of phenomena[188] This is the conception of harmonic order, as opposed to indifferent uniformity, of non-necessary determination, as opposed to geometric necessity. Ultimately, it is a vision of an order founded on the reason principle, as opposed to an identification founded purely on the principle of non-contradiction. The contrast between these two models of order and the primacy of the harmonic order emerge clearly, for example, in the *Tentamen Anagogicum*,[189] of which they constitute the main theme. And it is no coincidence that, in this text, Leibniz explicitly identifies "the *simplest*" with "the *most determined*".[190]

For these reasons, Leibniz found himself faced with a difficulty which did not arise for Malebranche, stemming, as it did, from the radical position of Leibnizian theodicy which acknowledges the existence of evil but refuses to justify it as a mere malfunction, an inevitable consequence of the beauty and simplicity of the order of the world. He must, then at once justify the order of the world as the best possible, in

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[187] *T* 244/260.

[188] This aspect of the Leibnizian notion of "harmony" has recently been highlighted by F. Piro (*op. cit.*, p. 101), amongst others. For an overview of the recent debate on the question of the relationship between the rich diversity of phenomena and the simplicity of the laws of the Leibnizian conception of perfection, cf. G. RONCAGLIA, *Cum Deus Calculat – God's Evaluation of Possible Worlds and Logical Calculus*, in "Topoi", IX (1990), 1, pp. 83-90. Roncaglia argues, to my mind rightly, that Leibniz conceives of perfection as the complementary integration of, and not as a proportional medium between, these two criteria (cf. pp. 84 f.). However, he seeks to illustrate this position only in the quantitative sense of perfection as a "quantitas realitatis," whilst I consider (as I demonstrated in the first section of this chapter) this to represent only one of the various criteria for perfection, of which the criterion of form and harmony is of particular and prevalent importance.

[189] Cf. *GP VII* 270 ff. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 477 ff.).

[190] Cf. *GP VII* 274; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 479.

the sense of perfect regularity, and the presence of evil therein as an integral and constituent part of that order. Leibniz knowingly upholds the truth of this mystery *a priori*. Moreover, he is faithful that the reasonableness of this truth can be upheld on the basis of an analogy with the mathematical rationality of the specific application of infinitesimal calculus which would later be termed the calculus of variations (the "method of *optimal forms* [la Methode *de Formis Optimis*], that is to say, of forms *which provide a maximum or minimum* [*maximum et minimum praestantibus*]", to which he refers in the *Tentamen Anagogicum*).[191] The very characteristic with which we are here concerned emerges in this analogy – i.e. that

> the best of these forms or figures is not to be found only in the whole, but also in every single part, and it would not be sufficient in the whole if it were not to be found in the parts.[192]

We can go no further than this, however. Mystery impedes us from understanding *how*, also in the case of the order of the world, the good of the whole is also the good of the part – i.e. how evil plays an integral role in the best of all possible worlds. We cannot understand this but, on the basis of rational motives of credibility, we can and must believe in it and uphold it against objections.[193] This is exactly the position adopted by Leibniz in the *Theodicy*:

> I believe therefore that God can follow a simple, productive, regular plan; but I do not believe that the best and the most regular is always opportune (*commode*) for all creatures simultaneously; and I judge *a posteriori*, for the plan chosen by God is not so. I have, however, also shown this *a priori* in examples taken from mathematics.[194]

In the pages which immediately follow, Leibniz refers in detail to the mathematical property whereby the best of the whole is also the best of the part, nonetheless indicating the insufficiency of this analogy to explain the mystery of evil in the world

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[191] Cf. *GP VII* 272; Eng. trans, *PhPL* 478.

[192] *Ibidem*.

[193] P. Burgelin (*Commentaire du Discours de métaphysique de Leibniz,* cit., p. 5) writes: "The best in itself must also be the best for us. How can these two characteristics be linked together? How can our sufferings, which represent part of the physical order necessary for harmony, ultimately serve our own best interests? How can moral evil, which we introduce into creation, agree with the overall harmony of the whole? This must remain a mystery for us, which we will be unable to penetrate until everything is fully revealed to us – i.e. until we fully transcend the egocentric point of view of our present condition. The role of faith is not hereby cancelled out, since it is highly reasonable to believe."

[194] *T* 244 f./260. Bear in mind my inversion of Leibniz's use of the expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori*. Cf. above, Chapter Two, § 4.

which stems from the impossibility of transferring this property from the consideration of quantity to that of quality.[195]

The existence of evil, then, renders mysterious the justice and goodness of God, since, as an appearance, it is opposed to truth. We must be mindful, however, of the fact that mystery is not constituted by the fact that appearance contradicts truth but, on the contrary, by the fact that truth contradicts appearance. Herein lies the difference between a mystery and an enigma. Herein lies the richness of mystery, since, in mystery, the truth is the foundation for and source of critical judgement on appearance – the exact antithesis of scepticism. Evil, then, certainly is appearance, but not in the sense of a mere inexistent phantasm. On the contrary, the very existence of evil constitutes an appearance, a concretely present, dramatically operative phenomenon. Truth is inevitably concealed behind this shadow, eclipsed by this opaque mass. But the relationship between pure reason and truth permits not only faith in truth, but also the critical exercise of this faith, the critical judgement of appearance in the light of truth.

In § 1 of the *Theodicy,* in which Leibniz outlines the two main issues, the very terms used suggest this vision of appearance as being judged by faith: human freedom "*appears* incompatible with the divine nature"; the difficulty which emerges "*seem(s)* to make him [God] participate too much in the existence of evil"; such conduct "*appears* contrary to the goodness, the holiness and the justice of God"; "*it seems* that these evils are manifested in the order of nature as well as in that of grace [...]"; but all of these appearances must be illuminated by "the *light* of nature and the *light* of revelation".[196] Soon after, Leibniz writes that, as a consequence of original sin,

> wickedness will even hold sway and virtue will be oppressed on earth, so that *it will scarce appear* (*il ne paroitra presque point*) that a providence governs affairs.[197]

This is the opinion of those who make statements based on appearances ("it will be said"),[198] which, incidentally, suggests that when Leibniz presents the fact that there is a greater quantity of good than of evil in the world as an apologetic argument, he is not basing his assumption on appearance, but rather on faith.[199] Indeed, in the *De*

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[195] Cf. *T* 245 f./260 f.

[196] Cf. *T* 102/123; *italics mine*.

[197] *T* 104/125; *italics mine*.

[198] *Ibidem*.

[199] Indeed, as he presents this argument, Leibniz writes "let us [...] by our reflexion supply what is lacking in our perception" (*T* 109/130); adding that we must remove our attention from evil in order "to be turned towards the good" (*T* 110/131); that we must "speak properly" (*le bien prendre*) (*T* 249/264); that "one of the greatest sources of fallacy in the objections is the confusion of the apparent with the real" (*T* 250/266). Finally, also the reference to the over-limited perspective of

rerum originatione radicali, Leibniz deploys the image of Plato's cave in order to describe our experience of the prevalence of evil over good in the world:

> From such meagre experience we rashly make judgments about the immense and the eternal, like people born and raised in prison or, if you prefer, in the subterranean saltmines of the Sarmatians, people who think that there is no light in the world but the dim light of their torches, light scarcely sufficient to guide their steps.[200]

Evil, then, is the appearance, in the sense of effective existence, which we continuously experience. Instead truth, as the object of faith founded on reason, is the critical faculty which judges of these appearances. Just as the accuser of God, on the basis of his own experience of the existence of evil, denies God's justice and goodness, so the defender of God, on the basis of his *a priori* certainty of God's justice and goodness, denies that evil has an antagonistic principle and meaning, that it can oppose itself to or even prevail over the divine principle which guarantees the positive meaning of the world. Only such an approach, which is that of the *Fatum Christianum*, can provide the basis for man's ethical commitment, for his faith that he is thereby cooperating in a divine project for the world, which is effectively coming into realisation. It can, moreover, console individuals experiencing evil, making them joyful, "content" even "happy by anticipation." This is because to contemplate the mystery of divine justice and goodness, which permits that evil, too, can enter into and play a part in the best of all possible worlds, is above all to praise God, who has also made room in his world for us sinners. Indeed,

> Were there no sin, we ourselves would not be. There would be other creatures in our stead.[201]

The praise and recognition of the believer toward God is therefore justified because

> men are chosen and ranged not so much according to their excellence as according to their conformity with God's plan. Even so it may occur that a stone of lesser quality is made use of in a building or in a group because it proves to be the particular one for filling a certain gap.[202]

All of this, however, is not an evident but a mysterious truth. Only with the eyes of true piety, i.e in active collaboration with the divine plan and in the light of reason, can we believe in it, even without understanding it:

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man, who worries only about his own fate (cf., for example, *T* 273/288) represents an invitation to judge on the basis of truth, not appearance.

[200] *GP VII* 307; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 153.

[201] *FdCL* 180; cf. *GRUA* 313.

[202] *T* 161/181.

It belongs to the great order that there should be some small disorder. One may even say that this small disorder is apparent only in the whole, and it is not even apparent when one considers the happiness of those who walk in the ways of order.[203]

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[203] *T* 262/277. That in this passage the "disorder" is referrred to as "small" is not to be taken as a superficial underestimation of evil on Leibniz's part. It is "small" in relation to the "great" order in which we believe as a consequence of our faith, not in relation to our experience.

CHAPTER SIX

GOD AND THE REASON PRINCIPLE

Our journey through the arguments presented in the *Theodicy* at this point brings us to the consideration of Leibniz's theology. We began with the apologetic arguments, in the full awareness that these may only play a role if they are founded on other genuinely foundational arguments and that even then their role may only be relative and non-definitive. We then moved back, so to speak, towards this foundation, through the metaphysical arguments, in order to finally come to the theological arguments. Here our expectations may indeed be high. We may, in fact, assume that herein lies the ultimate foundation of *a priori* theodicy. Leibniz himself justifies such an expectation. First of all, Leibniz's entire *a priori* theodicy is ultimately based on a single argument: because I know *a priori* that God the creator and provider exists, I can uphold the truth of the argument that the existent world is the best possible, notwithstanding the existence of evil. Secondly, as we observed in Chapter One,[1] God's existence is not a mystery for Leibniz, but one of the fundamental truths of faith (the other being the immortality of the soul), which can be demonstrated rationally and on which our belief in mysteries is based. We can and must, then, expect Leibniz to demonstrate God's existence, as he himself promises to do so. We can and must assume that all of the "motives of credibility" of faith, examined in the previous chapters, depend on this demonstration, since Leibniz himself asserts that such is the case.

As we will see in this chapter, Leibniz, however, is not able to fully satisfy these expectations, and much less to do so in a direct and simple manner. This may, at first sight, lead us to declare Leibnizian theodicy, and perhaps every other *a priori* theodicy, a failure (taking it as granted that any *a posteriori* theodicy not based on a valid *a priori* theodicy would also fail). However, as is often the case when we muse on the thought of great and ingenious philosophers and as, in the case of Leibniz, also occurs regarding other aspects of his thought, to consider the less than satisfactory results of an argument does not definitively close our discussion or limit our perspective but, on the contrary, opens up a new horizon which is broader and richer than that which preceded it.[2] To open ourselves up to this broader vision, there is no need to distance ourselves from Leibnizian philosophy, nor, much less, to reject it.

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[1] Cf. above, Chapter One, § 2.

[2] With regards to other aspects of Leibniz's thought, V. Mathieu (*Saggio introduttivo. La conciliazione di ragione e fede punto culminante della riflessione leibniziana*, in G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Saggi di teodicea sulla bontà di Dio, sulla libertà dell'uomo, sull'origine del male*, cit., p. 67) refers to "happy incoherences." Cf. also IDEM, *Il lato notturno della filosofia di Leibniz*, cit.

This richer truth constitutes the very soul and the most intimate inspiration for Leibniz's own philosophy. To bring this facet to light is not to pass beyond Leibnizian thought, but rather to engage in its faithful interpretation. In other words, Leibniz does not succeed in providing a thorough demonstration of the existence of God, i.e. in demonstrating the existence of God the creator and provider without recourse to any non-demonstrated premise. However, instead of causing the whole edifice of *a priori* theodicy to collapse, this failure instead reveals its true foundation, a foundation which goes deeper than any demonstration of the existence of God, which is non-demonstrable but not irrational, which is, indeed, the very foundation of reason itself.

In the present chapter, I will seek to expand upon and account for the points I have here briefly outlined. I will begin by examining Leibniz's crucially important theology of the attributes of God, and then go on to discuss his arguments in demonstration of the existence of God. I will then conclude by putting forward various considerations regarding God and the reason principle.

1. *Divine Attributes: Faculties and Values*

God's attributes play a primary role in Leibniz's philosophical theology, as, indeed, is they do in any theology. The consideration of arguments in demonstration of the existence of God, which usually attracts, and sometimes monopolises the attention of scholars concerned with philosophical theodicies, including that of Leibniz, must not obscure the importance of the theology of attributes which, at least in Leibniz's case, is without a doubt essential if we are to frame these arguments.

At first sight, Leibniz's theology of divine attributes presents us with various problems. In the *Theodicy*, and in general throughout his oeuvre, Leibniz considers numerous attributes of God, to many of which passing reference has already been made in the previous pages. Of these, nonetheless, two systems of divine attributes are of particular importance and therefore merit particular attention. These two systems overlap and interweave in Leibniz's philosophy, but cannot be satisfactorily reconciled. On the one hand, Leibniz refers to two divine attributes, intellect and will, which I (not Leibniz) will here refer to as *faculty attributes*. On the other, Leibniz devotes a great deal of attention to another system of divine attributes, which I will refer to as *value attributes*, the most significant of which are goodness, wisdom and power. Leibniz in fact also considers other value attributes, such as justice, sanctity, etc., which I will nonetheless not consider specifically here, both because the essential structure of Leibnizian discourse on this matter revolves around the three essential values already mentioned, and because all the other value attributes can be traced back, more or less directly, to goodness, wisdom and power.

Both of these systems rest on a solid theological tradition and Leibniz has good reasons for excluding neither. We should bear this last point in mind, above all with regard to faculty attributes, since they give rise to the greatest difficulty. Leibniz himself uses them with less conviction, even though he cannot do without them

entirely. This is not only due to the fact that the divine intellect and will were absolutely common concepts in traditional and contemporary theology, but above all because they serve a key function in several theses which are of fundamental importance to his theodicy. We only recall the need to distinguish between divine intellect and will in order to absolve God's will of the imputation of evil and thereby clear the divine of any responsibility.[3] The notion of the faculty attributes again proved essential for Leibniz in his polemics against the theory of divine arbitrarism espoused by Descartes and the cartesians, in order to affirm and reinforce the anterior and normative relation of the divine intellect to the divine will.[4]

It would appear that Leibniz presents us with precise definitions of intellect and will,[5] which also applies where the terms refer to God:

Its [of God] understanding is the source of *essences*, and its will is the origin of existences.[6]

Nonetheless, it is no wonder – indeed it is predictable[7] – that, beyond their definition, Leibniz runs into significant difficulties when he comes to consider divine faculty attributes. We have already observed[8] how problematic any attempt to define and distinguish between intellect and will as human faculties in the psychological anthropology of Leibniz and how Leibniz here already aspires to pass beyond the psychology of faculties. It is hardly surprising, then, that he encounters the same difficulties when approaching the theological psychology of faculties (pardon the expression). In the glosses to a letter sent him by Eckhard in May 1677 – i.e. in a context in which Leibniz was engaged in insisting on the importance of the distinction between divine will and intellect and of the primacy of the latter, in refutation of cartesian arbitrarism – he could nonetheless not refrain from expressing a certain degree of reservation on his part regarding the definition of these faculties:

I am not yet sure whether we have a perfect understanding of intellect and will.[9]

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[3] Cf., for example, *CF* 48.

[4] For E. Boutroux (*op. cit.*) this position which, although it does not identify identity with will, nonetheless affirms their conciliation and continuity, is such a fundamental aspect of Leibniz's thought that he adopts it as a key for interpreting and unitarily comprehending, not only Leibniz's theology, but his entire system (cf. p. 145).

[5] Cf. *T* 106/127.

[6] *T* 107/128.

[7] P. Burgelin (*Commentaire du Discours de métaphysique de Leibniz,* cit., p. 95) also notes "a certain ambiguity" in the Leibnizian consideration of divine faculty attributes.

[8] Cf. above, Chapter Four, § 3.

[9] *GP I* 261.

The problematic nature of the definition of intellect and will emerges above all when these divine faculties are put to the test of application and when they encounter the other value attributes.[10] In the above quoted definition,[11] for example, the divine act of choice (which in the system of value attributes falls within the jurisdiction of wisdom) is attributed to the will. However, in another passage in the *Theodicy* this attribution is called into question, as the choice is instead attributed to the will, inasmuch as it represents goodness and, immediately afterwards, to the intellect, inasmuch as it represents wisdom:

> With God, it is plain that his understanding contains the ideas of all possible things, and that is how everything is in him in a transcendent manner. These ideas represent to him the good and evil, the perfection and imperfection, the order and disorder, the congruity and incongruity of possibles; and his superabundant goodness makes him choose the most advantageous. God therefore determines himself by himself; his will acts by virtue of his goodness, but it is particularized and directed in action by understanding filled with wisdom.[12]

Leibniz himself affirms, later on in the *Theodicy,* that the

> romance of human life, which makes the universal history of the human race, lay fully devised in the divine understanding, with innumerable others, and that the will of God only decreed its existence.[13]

Here, too, he attributes the wisdom of God's choice to his intellect and relegates the will to a purely executive function. The attribution of divine choice to the intellect would, indeed, appear coherent with the thesis that the limitation of the human will derives from the influence of the inclinations of the senses on the judgement of the "practical understanding".[14] In God's case, in fact, this influence does not exist. The choice is determined by the intellecr alone and is therefore absolutely free.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that if the intellect tends to invade the territory and functional roles of the will in Leibniz, we sometimes come across quite the opposite tendency just as well. Leibniz himself acknowledges that the term will is "equivocal".[15] We must distinguish between the "antecedent will," "inclined [...] to all good," and the "decretory will," which "produces the best that can be

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[10] B. Russell, too (*op*. *cit*., pp. 184 f.), although in a different context and to serve other aims, observes the difficulties which arise in Leibniz from the attempt to compare attributes of faculty with those of value.

[11] Cf. *T* 106/127.

[12] *T* 423/428.

[13] *T* 198/217.

[14] Cf. *T* 130/151.

[15] *T* 284/299.

achieved".[16] More subtle, Leibniz draws a further distinction between the "primitive antecedent will," the "mediate will" and the "final and decisive will:"

> The *primitive antecedent will* has as its object each good and each evil in itself, detached from all combination, and tends to advance the good and prevent the evil. The *mediate will* relates to combinations, as when one attaches a good to an evil: then the will have some tendency towards this combination when the good exceeds the evil therein. But the *final and decisive will* results from consideration of all the goods and all the evils that enter into our deliberation, it results from a total combination.[17]

The contemplation of pure possibles, before any combination and choice, which, in Leibniz, is generally considered an activity of the divine intellect, is here instead attributed to the divine will as pure goodness, i.e. as antecedent will. We are not, then, concerned only with the problem of locating divine wisdom in the domain of the intellect or in that of the will (or as being entirely distinct from both, as Leibniz sometimes suggests),[18] but with the broader issue that when faculty attributes are combined with value attributes, the distinctions between the former no longer stand.

This is clearly apparent in the impossibility, for Leibniz, of univocally distributing and associating faculty and value attributes in the general summary of the divine attributes formulated in the 1710 *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus*:[19] an overview which he had already outlined elsewhere.[20] The system envisaged, which distinguishes between the greatness (*magnitudo*) and the goodness (*bonitas*) of God, sub-dividing the attribute of greatness into omnipotence and omniscience, is similar to the campanellian doctrine of the three primalities. Yet more interesting, however, is Leibniz's explicit engagement with the Campanellan system. This is also because it is here that the dual significance of the power attribute which, depending on the way and the sense in which it is assumed, may be either a faculty or a value attribute, becomes manifest.

It is, in fact, evident that Campanella's system refers to faculty attributes, as confirmed by the parallel relationship in which they stand to the faculties of the soul. Leibniz adopts this same system, with the same implications, for example in a letter to Morell on 29 September 1698.[21] This relationship emerges yet more clearly in the *Principes de la nature et de la grace*[22] and in the *Monadology*,[23] where the same

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[16] Cf. *T* 284 f./299; cf. also 115 f./136 f., 145/165 f.

[17] *T* 170/189 f.

[18] Cf. *T* 144/164.

[19] Cf. *GP VI* 439 ff.

[20] Cf. *GRUA* 474 f.; *GP III* 29 ff.

[21] Cf. *GRUA* 139.

[22] Cf. *GP VI* 602 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 210).

system applies both for created monads and for God (to whom it applies eminentially). In the *Theodicy*, too, Leibniz refers to the campanellan system,[24] in a passage immediately preceded by an interesting consideration:

> There are in truth two principles, but they are both in God, to wit, his understanding and his will. The understanding furnishes the principle of evil, without being sullied by it, without being evil; it represents natures as they exist in the eternal verities; it contains within it the reason wherefore evil is permitted: but the will tends only towards good. Let us add a third principle, namely power; it precedes even understanding and will, but it operates as the one displays it and as the other requires it.[25]

It is noteworthy, in this passage, that Leibniz treats of the intellect and will as faculties and, at the same time, locates them in the sphere of values, considering their final ends to lie in truth and the good, respectively. In the order of attributes, power is hence located in first place when, in accordance with the traditional campanellan doctrine, Leibniz considers the mere faculties. Yet, it is located last when he is concerned with the economy of values. In evidence of this, we can observe how in another passage, in which Leibniz adopts a terminology clearly suggestive of value attributes, power occupies the last place in the order of attributes:

> that his [of God] GOODNESS prompted him *antecedently* to create and to produce all possible good; but […] his WISDOM made the choice and caused him to select the best *consequently*; and finally […] his POWER gave him the means to carry out *actually* the great design which he had formed.[26]

We might continue at length to trace Leibniz's difficulties regarding faculty attributes, but we will leave it as this, since we have already been able to demonstrate the most important points. Firstly, the system of faculty attributes has a prominent role in both the justification of God regarding responsibility for evil and the polemic against the thesis of divine arbitrarism. It is therefore indispensable. Secondly, nonetheless, this system is problematic and fragile when compared to the more important and solid system of value attributes.

Let us then consider the value attributes, which play a fundamental role in Leibnizian discourse. As we have already stated, the principles are goodness, wisdom and power. An exemplary explanation of their significance and the relationship between them is to be found in the passage from the *Theodicy* quoted above. When

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[23] Cf. *GP VI* 615 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 219).

[24] Cf. *T* 199/217.

[25] *T* 198 f./217.

[26] *T* 167/187. In the *Theodicy* we also come across passages which, from a purely literal point of view, are vaguer and stray from this vision (cf., for example, *T* 107/128). This, it seems to me, confirms Leibniz's difficulty in linking the system of faculty attributes with that of value attributes.

we consider these divine "perfections," we should always bear in mind that, as attributes,

a) they must be considered as united and mutually complementary within the person of the one God and, for this reason, every separation of one attribute from the others and from the unity of God (with the exception, obviously, of merely methodological distinctions in analytical consideration) will lead to error;

b) they must be understood on the basis of their significance in the anthropological field, even though they are to be attributed to God eminentially.

Departure from these two conditions is, according to Leibniz, one of the main founts of theological errors and, above all, of objections against theodicy.

The uniformity of human and divine reason has already been considered above. Point b), therefore, requires no further analysis, since, for Leibniz, the concept of reason includes the attributes here considered.[27] We should yet note that Leibniz explicitly connects the abandonment of true piety with a forgetting of the continuity between divine attributes and their human image:

> It is the same with our notions of the justice and the goodness of God, which are spoken of sometimes as if we had neither any idea nor any definition of their nature. But in that case we should have no ground for ascribing these attributes to him, or lauding him for them. His goodness and his justice as well as his wisdom differ from ours only because they are infinitely more perfect.[28]

Condition a) plays a yet more important role in Leibnizian apologetics. Its non-observance, indeed, is the origin of all the errors and objections of theodicy's antagonists, be they libertines, manicheans or cartesians:[29]

> There are divers persons who speak much of piety, of devotion, of religion, who are even busied with the teaching of such things, and who yet prove to be by no means versed in the divine perfections. They ill understand the goodness and the justice of the Sovereign of the universe; they imagine a God who deserves neither to be imitated nor to be loved. This indeed seemed to me dangerous in its effect, since it is of serious moment that the very source of piety should be preserved from infection. The old errors of those who arraigned the Divinity or who made thereof an evil principle have been renewed sometimes in our own days: people have pleaded the irresistible power of God when it was a question rather of presenting his supreme goodness; and they have assumed a despotic power when they should rather have conceived of a power ordered by the most perfect wisdom.[30]

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[27] Cf. *T* 107/128.

[28] *T* 51/75 f.

[29] P. Burgelin (*Commentaire du Discours de métaphysique de Leibniz,* cit., pp. 92 f.) attributes to the eroneous separation of the divine attributes the criticism, levelled against Leibniz by numerous scholars, of submitting God's will to his intellect, thus denying its freedom.

[30] *T* 29/53. Leibniz also considers the separation of the divine attributes as a source of error in Bayle's case (cf. *T* 200/218).

Errors and accusations against God, then, arise from the separation of divine attributes. To go a step further, we can also at this point specify that errors arise from opposing God's goodness to his power. This is the very artificial opposition which emerges in Bayle's thesis[31] and Leibniz locates it at the very foundation of accusations against God in general:

> All these objections depend almost on the same sophism; they change and mutilate the fact, they only half record things: God has care for men, he loves the human race, he wishes it well, nothing so true. Yet he allows men to fall, he often allows them to perish, he gives them goods that tend towards their destruction; and when he makes someone happy, it is after many sufferings: where is his affection, where is his goodness or again where is his power?[32]

What is interesting is that, for Leibniz, this false opposition of God's goodness and power, the source of a great deal of error, is, in turn, produced by a deeper and more hidden error – that is to say, by the scarce consideration, ultimately the rejection, of the divine attribute of wisdom. Herein lies the ultimate cause of the short-circuit, so to speak, between divine power and goodness.[33] Hence the harmony between divine power and goodness can only be re-established by restoring divine wisdom to its central role and therefore also restoring to each of these attributes its authentic positive meaning, freeing them from the deformations of unilateralism.

On the basis of all this we must conclude, first of all, that the obligation to consider all the divine attributes in the light of God's unity is closely linked to the other obligation to consider all the divine attributes in continuity with the human. God's accusers fail to meet the first obligation, considering power and goodness in absolute terms whilst disregarding wisdom (which is, by nature, a mediating quality) – indeed, rather, considering them in opposition to wisdom. This entails nothing other than a conception of divine reason (if we can still refer to it as such) as being radically different from the human. At least, they certainly distinguish divine reason from human reason *as it should be* – i.e. from true reason, capable of clear knowledge and wise choice. It comes, instead, to resemble human reason as it unfortunately often turns out – i.e. absolutely focused on certain specific objects which it only

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[31] Cf., for example, Leibniz's citation thereof in *T* 328/340. Cf. O. LEMPP, *op. cit.*, pp. 15 ff.

[32] *T* 176/196.

[33] It seems to me that E. Boutroux (*op. cit.*, p. 162) foregrounds the same indication in Leibniz, even though he does so in the language of the faculty attributes: "According to Leibniz, his system stands alone in providing a satisfactory explanation of freedom and evil. The opposite system to that of Leibniz is cartesianism, which separates the divine intellect from the divine will. If the common opinion of men is also incapable of explaining evil and freedom, it is because we consider will and intellect separately. Leibniz' philosophy is designed to react against their tendency, which consists in isolating the wisdom of divine goodness."

knows on the basis of appearance, and prone to the influence of the passions. In this sense, Leibniz accuses theodicy's antagonists of anthropomorphism.[34]

Secondly, we conclude that the central role of wisdom in relation to the other divine attributes comes to the fore, as only wisdom prevents the attributes from coming into conflict, keeping them harmoniously united, in a correct perception of their roles and meanings.[35]

2. *The Central Role of Wisdom*

We have already noted how, for Leibniz, to overlook the divine attribute of wisdom is to provoke a short-circuit and an insurmountable contradiction between God's goodness and his power. Clearly, at this point, we find ourselves confronted with the classic riddle of Epicurus: "Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to." Lactantius reviewed the implications of this argument, in order to subsequently refute it, in his *De ira Dei:* "Why has God not eliminated evil? Either he does not wish to do so, meaning that he is not saintly, just and good; or he cannot, meaning that he is not omnipotent."[36] This is a standard argument, reiterated on innumerable occasions, in letter or in spirit, by God's accusers and discussed, on innumerable occasions by apologists. Leibniz considers both of these alternative accusations which, in his *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus,* he refers to respectively as "despotism" and "anthropomorphism:"

> The error of those who underestimate God's greatness may be called *anthropomorphism* and that of those who deny his goodness *despotism*.[37]

In the *Theodicy,* Leibniz seeks to refute these errors, and the divine attribute of wisdom emerges constantly as the supporting argument.

a) *The "Evil God" Hypothesis (Despotism).* This is a hypothesis which Leibniz continuously addresses throughout the *Theodicy*, partly because it more or less

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[34] Cf., in the *Theodicy, T* 177/196, 180/199. The sense in which Leibniz here uses the term "anthropomorphism" is only partly related to that in which he deploys the same term in the *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus* (cf. *GP VI* 439). Cf. also the following pages of the present study.

[35] E. Cione (*op. cit.,* pp. 357 f.) opportunely draws our attention to the family relationship between the Leibnizian notion of "wisdom" and the "*equitas*" of Roman law, the "prudence" of the French and English moralists of the 1600s and Pascal's "*esprit de finesse*." Leibnizian "wisdom," however, also participates in scientific "judgement" and "calculation."

[36] The argument is attributed to Epicurus (cf. Usener, fr. 374) by LACTANTIUS, *De ira Dei,* 13, 19-21. Interestingly, in his *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus,* Leibniz attributes this argument to both the epicureans and the manicheans (cf. *GP VI* 448).

[37] *GP VI* 439.

implicitly underlies many of the issues raised by Bayle. Note, for example, how Leibniz outlines and discusses this thesis in § 194.[38] This accusation against God is particularly significant, because it represents a common ground between all of the antagonists of theodicy, whatever their persuasion. The evil God hypothesis may be adopted in an affirmative sense, i.e. to accuse God, or in a negative sense, as a *reductio ad absurdum*, ultimately denying the homogeneity of divine design with human reason and therefore its comprehensibility. This is an argument, then, which brings together libertine scepticism, cartesian arbitrarism and Baylean fideism. As we have already observed,[39] we can also add gnosis to this list, since the essential nucleus of its heresy is not divine dualism but the evil God hypothesis.

Whether God's omnipotence be determined absolutely by geometric necessity, or whether it be absolutely indeterminate, absolutely arbitrary, the logical outcome is the same: the evil God hypothesis. This point already emerged, in our discussion of the ultimate convergence of the *Fatum Stoicum* with the *Fatum Mahometanum*.[40] The theological solution which Leibniz opposes to this hypothesis lies, naturally enough, in locating wisdom in the system of divine attributes:

> It is true that God is infinitely powerful; but his power is indeterminate, goodness and wisdom combined determine him to produce the best.[41]

For "goodness and wisdom," we should read "goodness *through* wisdom," since, according to the passage already quoted above, God's goodness aims to create the best possible while his wisdom chooses the best:

> wisdom only shows God the best possible exercise of his goodness.[42]

God's wisdom, then, mediates between his goodness and his power, precluding any conflict, indeed bringing them into harmony. Wisdom, indeed, is the very attribute distinguishing God as the good monarch (combining goodness with power) from God as the tyrant.

b) *The Impotent God Hypothesis (Anthropomorphism)*. This hypothesis is certainly, no less important than the other in the history of religious thought. Indeed, it is sometimes even employed as a theodical argument, inasmuch as apologists seek to defend God against accusations of evil by asserting his impotence. This position has become particularly prominent in the Judaeo-Christian reflections of our own time. It

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[38] Cf. *T* 231 f./248.

[39] Cf. above, Chapter Three, § 4, and § 177 of the *Theodicy* (*T* 220/237 f.) there quoted.

[40] Cf. above, Chapter One, § 5.

[41] *T* 183/202.

[42] *T* 175/195.

is considered as a facet of divine respect for human free will or of divine self-limitation (in Jewish thought) or as pertaining to the mystery of the incarnation, passion and death of Jesus Christ (in Christian thought). These various arguments doubtless stand on serious exegetical, dogmatic and religious foundations. However, if they are carried through to their extreme logical conclusions, and, above all, if they are not counterbalanced by those other considerations without which they are incomplete, they are ultimately identical with the second argument in the epicurean riddle.[43]

In Leibniz's own time, this argument was less widespread, and for this reason he pays it less heed. In the *Theodicy,* Leibniz cites Arnauld's outrage upon being presented with this hypothesis, in a passage which reveals the extent to which such an assertion appeared absurd, improbable and unworthy of discussion to the contemporary Christian consciousness of his time, or at least to one of its more authoritative representatives:

> M. Arnauld and M. Bayle appear to maintain that this method [i.e. the distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will] of explaining things and of establishing a best among all the plans for the universe, one such as may not be surpassed by any other, sets a limit to God's power. 'Have you considered', says M. Arnauld to Father Malebranche (in his *Reflexions on the New System of Nature and Grace*, vol. II, p. 385), 'that in making such assumptions you take it upon yourself to subvert the first article of the creed, whereby we make profession of believing in God the Father Almighty?'.[44]

In the *Theodicy,* Leibniz tackles the error of "anthropomorphism" above all in §§ 223 ff., and his refutation thereof coincides with his defence of the theory of the best of all possible worlds, and in particular of the possibility of such a world, i.e. of the identification of the best with absolute perfection. This argument has already been considered above.[45] I will here limit myself to outlining the argument for the impotent God hypothesis and the significance of Leibniz's response thereto.

The objection in question can be briefly summarised as follows. a) Since there is an infinite number of possible worlds and b) since there is evil in the world realised in existence, then c) a better world is possible (considering the finite character of the world and the infinite number of possible worlds, these three points can be summarised up in a sole premise: there can always be a better world). However, d) since we concede that this is the world which God has chosen, and e) we also recognise God's goodness, then f) we conclude that God is impotent. In Bayle's *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial,* quoted by Leibniz, the argument sounds like this:

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[43] A brief summary of positions of this kind in contemporary German philosophy can be found in O. MARQUARD, *Ende des Schicksals? Einige Bemerkungen über die Unvermeidlichkeit des Unverfügbaren,* in IDEM, *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen,* Reclam, Stuttgart 1981, pp. 72 ff.

[44] *T* 251/266.

[45] Cf. above, Chapter Five, § 2.

If one adopts such explanations [...] one sees oneself constrained to renounce the most obvious notions on the nature of the supremely perfect Being. These teach us that all things not implying contradiction are possible for him, that consequently it is possible for him to save people whom he does not save: for what contradiction would result supposing the number of the elect were greater than it is? They teach us besides that, since he is supremely happy, he has no will which he cannot carry out. How, then, shall we understand that he wills to save all men and that he cannot do so?[46]

In this case, too, Leibniz's response is focused on the fundamental role played by divin wisdom:[47]

The wisdom of God, not content with embracing all the possibles, penetrates them, compares them, weighs them one against the other, [...] distributes all the possibles it had already contemplated separately, into so many universal systems which it further compares the one with the other. The result of all these comparisons and deliberations is the choice of the best from among all these possible systems, which wisdom makes in order to satisfy goodness completely; and such is precisely the plan of the universe as it is.[48]

In sum, as Leibniz writes elsewhere in the *Theodicy*, divine wisdom "effects the connexion of things".[49] It determines the laws which constitute reality, and without laws there is no reality. Herein lies the Leibnizian antithesis to cartesian arbitrarism: not only does God always establish reality on the basis of laws, but, more radically, God could not possibly behave otherwise. God's omnipotence is, in and of itself, undetermined, and it cannot act, does not even constitute a power, without the determination of wisdom. This underminds the premise on which the impotent God hypothesis rests – i.e. the hypothesis that a better world than this could be created:

Is it possible, said M. Bayle, that there is no better plan than that one which God carried out? One answers that it is very possible and indeed necessary, namely that there is none: otherwise God would have preferred it.[50]

This response, appears to unduly overlook the impotent God hypothesis but is, instead, posited by Leibniz as the conclusion of his discussion of this theory. It in fact implies that, to overcome this objection to God, we must demonstrate that it is wrongly stated, because it places an indeterminate notion of God's goodness in conflict with an indeterminate notion of his power. The consideration of God's wisdom lends determination to both of these notions and, also in this case, resolves the conflict. The existence of evil in the world does not cease to constitute an

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[46] *T* 251/266 f.

[47] Cf. *T* 252/267 f.

[48] *Ibidem.*

[49] *T* 347/358 f.

[50] *T* 253/268.

important issue, but, instead of feeling outrage at divine impotence we can, instead, at this point, engage in faithful prayer before the mystery of divine wisdom. Herein, it seems to me, lies, and has always lain, the difference between the authentic religious question regarding evil and the absence of an immediate divine intervention to impede it (a question which can and must also be faced regarding the most extreme of cases, such as the suffering of the innocent and even Christ's *kénosis*) and the impious accusation of divine impotence.

The inextricable connection which thus emerges between divine goodness, wisdom and power brings us back to the first condition for a correct theology of divine attributes: their consideration as a single unit. The two-pronged epicurean argument derives from an illegitimate separation of divine goodness and power − a separation which inevitably generates conflict. Only by introducing the concept of wisdom into the system can we reconcile goodness and power and restore these three perfections to their correct significance as attributes of the one God.

This also appears clearly in the myth of Sextus Tarquinius, with which Leibniz concludes his *Theodicy*. Lorenzo Valla had already remarked that the metaphor of polytheism is nothing more than a useful rhetorical ploy aimed at considering the divine attributes separately:

> LORENZO − [...] The usefulness of this myth consists in the fact that, while we cannot separate God's wisdom from his will and power, with this image of Apollo and Jupiter, I have done just that, obtaining that which could not be obtained with a single God by referring to two gods, each with their own nature.[51]

At the conclusion of the Leibniz's original development of Valla's dialogue, however, the attributes reunited. At the end of § 413, Jupiter refers the priest Theodorus, who opposes Jupiter's wisdom to his goodness, to Pallas, goddess of wisdom, who informs him that there exists no such conflict and that any such impression is simply a reflection of the inadequacy of Theodorus' own knowledge.[52] Theodorus thus realises the ineffable greatness of divine wisdom and this is sufficient to banish all his doubts regarding the attributes. Finally, at the conclusion of the dialogue, Leibniz is able to reunite all the divine attributes, which have now been reconciled, in a moving expression of faith, figuring forth the very truth we have been discussing: that only by giving thanks to divine wisdom do we do any justice to his goodness or submit ourselves to his power, thus exercising true Christian piety:

> At this moment Theodorus wakes up, he gives thanks to the Goddess, he owns the justice of Jupiter. His spirit pervaded by what he has seen and heard, he carries on the office of High Priest

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[51] L. VALLA, *op. cit.*, p. 272; cf. *T* 360/368. It is interesting to note that, soon after, Valla quotes the very passage from *Rom* 11:33 to which Leibniz makes frequent reference. This is followed by an indication that the solution to the problem of predestination, although remaining a mystery, is to be considered in relation to God's wisdom, not to his will (cf. L. VALLA, *op. cit.*, p. 275).

[52] Cf. *T* 362/370.

(*grand Sacrificateur*), with all the zeal of a true servant of his God, and with all the joy whereof a mortal is capable.[53]

3.   *The Existence of God*

The existence of an "all-good, all-wise and all-powerful" God[54] is not, for Leibniz, the conclusion of the *Theodicy* but rather its premise. As we have alreay stated, Leibniz's work is fundamentally an *a priori*, not an *a posteriori* theodicy. *A posteriori* theodicy, in which Leibniz also engages, only has any sense in apologetics and then only if it rests upon the premise of the validity of *a priori* theodicy. Leibniz does not seek to demonstrate the existence of a good wise and powerful God on the basis of the consideration of our world as the best of all possible worlds. This would be impossible, as it would involve a degree of "comprehension" which, for now, is not granted us in the face of mystery. It is in the nature of mystery to remain insurmountably mysterious. Truth, in other words, is contrary to appearance. Herein lies the overwhelming gravity of evil, which cannot in any way be removed. He seeks, rather, to "uphold" the truth that ours is the best of all possible worlds despite the existence of evil, on the basis of the premise that a good, wise and powerful God exists who freely willed and created it. Yet how can philosophy legitimately assume such a premise? Or must philosophy, perhaps, on this point, deny itself and bow down before revealed faith? Leibniz is unreserved in asserting that philosophy is capable of demonstrating God's existence:

> Now we have no need of revealed faith to know that there is such a sole Principle of all things, entirely good and wise. Reason teaches us this by infallible proofs; and in consequence all the objections taken from the course of things, in which we observe imperfections, are only based on false appearances.[55]

In the *Theodicy*, however, Leibniz dedicates very little space to such demonstration. Only in § 7[56] does he draft a proof of the existence of God on the basis of the contingency of the world. In addition to this brief passage, we might also count several others, which are even briefer, in which he mentions arguments, without expounding upon them. In § 44, Leibniz states that without the reason principle ("this great principle"), "we could never prove the existence of God".[57] In § 184, he refers to the argument for God's existence as the foundation of all possibles:

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[53] *T* 365/373.

[54] *T* 75/98.

[55] *Ibidem*.

[56] Cf. *T* 106 f./127 f.

[57] Cf. *T* 127/148.

without God, not only would there be nothing existent, but there would be nothing possible.[58]

Finally, in § 6 of the *Appendix* on King's book, Leibniz cites the ontological proof:

> He [King] remarks upon this privilege of God, that as soon as it is assumed that he exists it must be admitted that he exists of necessity. This is a corollary to a remark which I made in the little discourse mentioned above, namely that as soon as one admits that God is possible, one must admit that he exists of necessity. Now, as soon as one admits that God exists, one admits that he is possible. Therefore as soon as one admits that God exists, one must admit that he exists of necessity.[59]

It does not seem to me that we need attribute any particular relevance or significance to the scarcity of passages dedicated to demonstrating the existence of God in the *Theodicy*. This simply reflects the fact that Leibniz had already written so extensively on the matter, discussing the arguments of other authors and suggesting new arguments of his own, that he felt able to in the *Theodicy* to take the discussion as read, referring his readers to his other works (as he in fact does in the passage quoted above). I do not here intend to sumarise, even briefly, the arguments accepted or developed *ex novo* by Leibniz regarding this matter. This task has already been undertaken by others on many occasions, and an abundant, clear and exhaustive body of scholarship is already available on this theme. I therefore refer my readers to these works,[60] and of course to Leibniz's own writings, now turning immediately to their discussion and problematisation.

The query in relation to which I will discuss Leibniz's arguments regarding the existence of God is the following: does the demonstration of God's existence really constitute the last step in our journey back to the absolute foundation of Leibniz's *a priori* theodicy? Is Leibniz able to found, apodictically, the "motives of credibility" of faith and therefore theodicy itself on the demonstration of the existence of God? As I already suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the result will not be absolutely positive and satisfying but, at the same time, the very weaknesses in Leibniz's arguments will reveal a still more interesting perspective, a more complex, but richer foundation for Leibnizian discourse.

Here, too, we can draw to some extent on the findings of previous scholarship, standing on the shoulders of giants and thus saving ourselves the useless fatigue of a steep and lonely ascent towards a more far-reaching vision. I am here referring, in particular, to Susanna del Boca's perceptive study,[61] which clearly brought to light

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[58] *T* 226 f./243.

[59] *T* 405/410.

[60] Although a wealth of studies have been published on this theme, I will here limit myself to referring to the already cited text by J. Iwanicki, which still retains a particular significance today as a consequence of is completeness, clearness and precision.

[61] S. DEL BOCA, *Finalismo e necessità in Leibniz*, Sansoni, Firenze 1936. Cf. in particular Chapter Four: *Dimostrazione dell'esistenza di Dio,* pp. 99-123, to which I will here make ample reference.

one issue arising from the problematics pertaining to Leibniz's arguments which is of particular importance for our present interests. Del Boca's thesis is that, in Leibniz, there exists a sort of logical (not necessarily vicious) circle between *a priori* and *a posteriori* argumentation.[62]

A posteriori arguments, which can, together, be considered as arguments *a contingentia mundi*, are in fact founded on the *a priori* assumption of the reason principle. All of Leibniz's *a posteriori* arguments, whether they take the statement of movement, figure, extension, or harmony, etc. as their starting point, ultimately lead back to the necessity that the contingent be founded in a necessary Being, i.e. in God. Del Boca rightly notes that this argument is only valid if it presupposes contingency and, with it, the requirement for a necessary foundation, i.e., we would suppose, the reason principle. Hence none of these Leibnizian arguments effectively infer *a posteriori* the existence of the necessary being from experience of the contingent. Rather, on the basis of the *a priori* presupposition of the reason principle, they institute an essential ontological relationship between the necessary and the contingent which, as such, cannot in itself serve as a demonstration, as it constitutes a presupposition.[63]

An argument moving from the contingent to the necessary Being is not, therefore, an *a posteriori* argument. Indeed, it cannot even really be considered a demonstrative argument. To this, I will add just a few considerations regarding the definition of contingency, which to me appear not irrelevant. In accordance with tradition, Leibniz, too, certainly uses the word "contingent" to refer to matters whose *raison d'être* is external to themselves. Leibnz also employs the term in this sense in his arguments on God's existence. Notwithstanding this, however, this definition is not exhaustive in explicating the Leibnizian notion of "contingency." It is worth recalling, at this point, one other significance in particular. Of the many possible examples in Leibniz which I might quote in this regard, I have here chosen, for its clarity, the already quoted *De libertate* as an example. Leibniz starts from the sole criterion of truth:

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[62] A. Görland (*op. cit.*, p. 65) also refers to a "circle" between *a posteriori* and *a priori* demonstrations of God's existence in Leibniz. M. Serres (*op. cit.*, p. 796 note) also uses the term "circle" in this regard and deploys the circle image in arguing for the interesting distinction which he draws between the three significances of the reason principle: between the principles of weak, medium and strong reason (cf. pp. 795 f. note).

[63] "For this reason the Leibnizian argument which deduces the existence of God from the contingency of things is no more *a posteriori* than it is *a priori*. It is neither the one nor the other, because it is not the inference of one thing to another but rather the statement of a relationship in which both terms, which condition one another, are affirmed reciprocally [...]. The 'contingency – necessary being' relationship is posited by Leibniz together with his conception of the principle of sufficient reason. This is a requirement of thought which cannot find expression in a form other than this: whose logical demands we know that Leibniz places in correspondence with a metaphysical reality, as a reflection of an identity which is never called into doubt" (S. DEL BOCA, *op. cit.*, p. 103).

that the notion of the predicate is involved *somehow* (*aliqua ratione*) in the notion of the subject».[64]

He then specifies that this principle

> is common to every true affirmative proposition, universal and particular, *necessary or contingent*.[65]

Leibniz then locates the difference between necessary and contingent propositions in *ratio*, i.e. in the law governing the resolution of the predicate in the subject, which is finite in the former but infinite in the latter case:

> Derivative truths are, in turn, of two sorts, for some can be resolved into basic truths, and others, in their resolution, give rise to a series of steps that go to infinity. The former are necessary, the latter contingent.[66]

This aspect of contingency is important, because it means that contingency, for Leibniz, does not refer back to the reason principle simply for its causal connection to the necessary, but does so rather for the very principle whereby it is constituted and generated. The *ratio*, for Leibniz, is neither just the plan nor just the cause. It is rathe the very law in accordance with which the real is generated (and, on a logical level, which connects the terms of any judgement). This has some significant implications for the present study. First of all, a demonstration of God's existence starting from worldly contingency does not, in Leibniz, rest on the classical argument of the impossibility of regression *ad infinitum*, deployed in tradition, by Aristotle and Aquinas. Leibniz, instead, considers possible – indeed, considers as a truth – the conception of the world as an infinite totality, in which every part can trace its cause back to another *ad infinitum* (here, too, of the many examples available on this point, I will limit myself to citing § 36 of the *Monadology*.[67] The problem, for Leibniz, is not the contingency of the parts of the world, but rather the contingency of the whole:

> For we cannot find in any of the individual things, or even in the entire collection and series of things, a sufficient reason for why they exist.[68]

This means that the world (as a whole) is an infinite and therefore contingent series (rather, a series of series) and that it is nonetheless governed by a rule, a *ratio*. The

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[64] *FdCNL* 179; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 95; *italics mine*.

[65] *Ibidem; italics mine*.

[66] *FdCNL* 181; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 96.

[67] Cf. *GP VI* 612 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 217).

[68] *GP VII* 302; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 149.

principle behind this rule, God, is located outside the series,[69] not at its beginning, just as, in mathematics, the law which generates a numerical series is not a value occurring in the series itself. God, then, in the terms of the *Dissertatio de Arte combinatoria,* is a substance "of infinite power (*virtus*)," not in the sense that he has an infinite capacity to move others, but in the sense that he has the capacity "to move the infinite".[70] He produces the reason (or rule or law) for the world, understood as "the whole assemblage of *contingent* things".[71] This aspect of contingency had already emerged above, in our discussion of the distinction and complementarity between hypothetical and moral necessity.[72]

Secondly, as we have already observed, contingency is not, for Leibniz, identifiable with existence but rather with possibility as opposed to necessity. An *a posteriori* argument must necessary take the existent as its starting point, inasmuch as this is the only form of contingency to constitute a "fact." However, those possibles which are not realised in existence are also contingent. Hence Leibniz also formulates an argument concluding with the existence of God as the foundation of possibles, on the basis of the same reason principle. The reason principle is the principle which determines contingencies, i.e., not only the existent but all that which is possible (in a metaphysical sense). It explains, not only why the existent contingent exists, but also why the non-existent contingent does not, together with the rule governing, not only the former but also the latter (although, in this case the order is less satisfactory and therefore has not been chosen for realisation).

From all of this we can conclude, then, that the Leibnizian arguments affirming God's existence from the starting point of contingency do not simply rest on a surreptitious *a priori* presupposition of God. The true premise is the reason principle and this, for Leibniz, is not surreptitious and does not invalidate the argument, since this constitutes the very dimension of reason which no rational argument can evade and without which neither existent reality nor possibility has any meaning. As Del Boca concludes:

> it seems that Leibniz's argument does not constitute a demonstration, inferring the existence of God from the principle of sufficient reason. It is rather a representation of the real as having God, wise Providence, as its principle and sufficient reason: an intuition, the ostensible demonstration of which, taking the principle of sufficient reason as its starting point, is actually a simple formulation or expression which does not demonstrate but rather enunciates an approach to the metaphysical constitution of reality.[73]

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[69] Cf., for example, *GP VI* 613 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 218); *VII* 302 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 149).

[70] Cf. *GP IV* 32; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 73.

[71] *T* 106/127.

[72] Cf. above, Chapter Four, § 2.

[73] S. DEL BOCA, *op. cit.,* p. 106.

In a note, the author adds that this approach is not arbitrary, but responds to "a fundamental requirement of thought."[74]

Analogously, the ontological proof, too, in the correct and integrated form in which it is deployed by Leibniz, loses its purely *a priori* character.[75] Indeed, in Leibniz, the condition upon which the ontological argument depends for its validity, i.e. the idea of God's possibility, is satisfied through recourse to the consideration of the contingent. This not only means that an *a priori* argument depends on an *a posteriori* means for validation, but it also absorbes the former into the latter, since the argument *a contingentia mundi* already in and of itself concludes, not only, as Leibniz declares, with the possibility of the idea of God, but also with his existence, and it thus renders pointless the subsequent inference *a priori* of the idea of existence. Hence, as Del Boca concludes:

> Notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, in his attempt to perfect the ontological argument Leibniz has ended up representing his favourite argument regarding sufficient reason, whereby, starting from the contingent, as a consequence of the need for a reason in justification thereof, we ascend to the necessary Being.[76]

Leibniz's arguments regarding the existence of God, then, are effectively rather weak.[77] That is to say, they are not perfectly demonstrative, inasmuch as they presuppose the reason principle, which is not demonstrated but posited *a priori* as the foundation of any demonstration. Are we to take it, then, that Leibniz reognises a principle more originary than God himself, on which God's own existence depends? This is surely not the case. We can assume that Leibniz simply recognises that all our reasonings, and therefore also all the possible demonstrations of God's existence, cannot but presuppose the reason principle – reason as the origin and as the horizon beyond which we cannot see. The reason principle is certainly not more originary than God, but it is more originary than any demonstration of God's existence, and must therefore stand as a non-deducible premise. For this reason, Leibnizian demonstrations fail to completely live up to their promises, because they imply a non-demonstrated premise. Nonetheless, in so doing they shed a certain light on this premise, on the reason principle, which, as we shall see, is closely connected to the rational faith in God and therefore also with theodicy itself.

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[74] Cf. *ibidem*.

[75] I am here, again, following the thesis of S. Del Boca (*op. cit*., pp. 111 f.).

[76] *Ibi*, p. 112.

[77] G.M. Tortolone (*La trattazione dell'argomento ontologico nel carteggio Leibniz - Jaquelot (1702-1704)*, in "Filosofia", XLI [1990], 1, pp. 89 ff.) is adamant that Leibniz's arguments for the existence of God are inadequate and asserts that Leibniz himself was aware of their inconclusiveness. This leads Tortolone to a different conclusion to that which we will reach in the present study, asserting that Leibniz ultimately implicitly accepts the "pascalian perspective of the '*Dieu caché*'" (p. 90).

4. *The Necessary Being and the Supremely Perfect Being*

The reason principle, then, is the premise on the basis of which Leibniz ascends from the contingent to God as necessary Being (both in his so-called *a posteriori* argument and in his so-called *a priori* argument). However, although this logical process is valid when we move in this direction, i.e. from the contingent to the necessary Being, this does not per se mean that it is also valid in the opposite way, since the necessary Being does not, as such, entail the creation of the contingent. The necessary Being, in and of himself, has no essential need to move outside of itself, to be productive. God, as necessary Being, then, does not in himself provide an explanation for the origin of contingent beings in the world. An immediate relationship between God as necessary Being and the world can only be established in Spinoza's immanentistic sense, i.e. also considering the world necessary and thus implying a relationship of identity between God and the world. But Leibniz is far from espousing such a vision. How, then, does Leibniz resolve this problem? As an issue it is indeed significant: doesn't it, ultimately, constitute a facet of the accusation, often levelled at philosophers, of not understanding the God of faith?

Let us dwell a little longer on the amendments to the classical ontological proof which Leibniz puts forward. Indeed, Leibniz's adjustment to the ontological proof is not limited to adding the demonstration of the supremely perfect Being's possibilitty, discussed in the previous section. He also makes another correction, to which, unjustly, less attention is usually paid. I am referring to the passage from the consideration of God as supremely perfect Being to the consideration of God as necessary Being. It is true that, in the *Quod Ens Perfectissimum existit*,[78] which constituted the basis for Leibniz's discussion with Spinoza at the Hague, Leibniz's argument is focused on the notion of the supremely perfect Being and aspires to demonstrate that all perfections are compatible in a sole being. Yet successively, without ever renouncing this earlier argument, Leibniz proposes an abandonment, in expounding the ontological proof, of the notion of the supremely perfect Being, in favour of that of the necessary Being, as to do so is in no way detrimental to the proof itself and eschews the thorny question regarding the possibility of considering existence as a perfection.[79]

This amendment, even though it raises a question of great importance and difficulty, which has generated fraught ontological debite since antiquity, might, from a certain point of view, prove relatively unimportant with regard to our present undertaking. In a narrow sense, indeed, it only regards the question as to whether existence is a perfection in its own right, distinct from the others or whether it is a

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[78] Cf. *GP VII* 261 f. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 167 f.).

[79] Cf., for example, *GP I* 212, 220, 223; *IV* 359 [Eng. trans. *PhPL* 386], 402, 405. On this change in the Leibnizian argument, cf. S. DEL BOCA, *op. cit.*, pp. 109 ff.

degree of every perfection. As we know, perfection for Leibniz is the "quantity of reality" or essence, which implies a tendency to existence. It therefore clearly emerges that, even if we leave aside the notion of the supremely perfect Being in the ontological argument, the necessary Being on whom the question at this point centres is nonetheless still, as a consequence of his necessity, supremely real and therefore supremely perfect. The issue assumes a yet more interesting guise if we consider it from another point of view, which we find discussed in Leibniz's fascinating and profound correspondence with Arnold Eckhard, in which a number of crucial issues for philosophy and theodicy are debated.[80] The correspondence in question took place in 1677, just one year after the publication of *Quod Ens Perfectissimum existit*. This permits us to assume that, if also in the years which followed, Leibniz continued to endorse the abandonment of the notion of the supremely perfect Being in the ontological argument, solely on the basis of the opportunity of steering clear of the issue of existence as ontological perfection, this choice was also made, and least implicitly, upon consideration of the other issues discussed with Eckhard. We will here seek to briefly trace the debate between Leibniz and Eckhard (naturally, only focusing on the topic with which we are here concerned).

From the synopsis which Leibniz himself provides of the discussion which took place at Hannover between himself and Eckhard, in the presence of the brother of the abbot Molanus (and, subsequently, also of others),[81] it emerges that, right from the very start, Leibniz proposed to modify the Cartesian proof, substituting the definition of God as a Being of absolute perfection with one of God as a necessary Being:

> [I said] that it seemed to me that this argument could be made briefer if we were to eliminate the definition of the perfections, that is to say if we were to argue as follows: the being of whose essence existence forms a part necessarily exists. God is the being of whose essence existence forms a part. Therefore God necessarily exists.[82]

Leibniz's proposal does not, however, appear to have been welcomed. Rather, the discussion which followed maintained a Cartesian perspective and terminology. When the debate reopened in the afternoon, with the addition of several new

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[80] On the treatment of the relationships between the notions of "being," "reality" and "perfection" in Leibniz's correspondence with Eckhard, cf. A. HEINEKAMP, *Zu den Begriffen realitas, perfectio und bonum metaphysicum bei Leibniz*, cit., pp. 211 ff. Leibniz's correspondence with Eckhard is also dwelt upon by A. Bausola (*Die Möglichkeit des vollkommensten Wesens und der ontologische Gottesbeweis. Die Position von Leibniz*, in "Studia Leibnitiana", XIII [1981], Heft 1), who recognises the importance of Leibniz's contestation of the exclusively metaphysical sense of the supremely perfect Being, with the intention, above all, of foregrounding Leibniz's search for a real, not merely nominal, definition of God. On the same topic, see also Bausola's earlier article, *A proposito del perfezionamento leibniziano dell'argomento ontologico: il carteggio Leibniz-Eckhard*, in "Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica", LIII (1961).

[81] Cf. *GP I* 212-215.

[82] *GP I* 212.

interlocutors, including the abbot Molanus, Leibniz resumed his attack, this time in a more direct manner, questioning the assumption that existence is a perfection: "whether existence is to be counted amongst the perfections".[83] Eckhard responded along traditional lines, i.e. founding his argument on the identification of being with the good: "that every attribute, or rather every reality, is a perfection".[84] At this point, Leibniz raised the objection that, if such an identification were true, then suffering would be a perfection, since its existence would signify that it were something positive. It would, indeed, be more perfect than the absence of pleasure and pain

> and from there it would follow that the absolutely perfect Being would also experience suffering.[85]

The brother of abbot Molanus responded at this juncture, making explicit what was surely the very point that Leibniz was trying to get across – which lay at the very heart of his misgivings:

> Molanus' brother [said] that if it were permitted to use the definition of moral perfection, assuming, specifically, that perfection is *congruence with reason*, then it would appear quite straightforward that suffering should be excluded. Nonethetless he acknowledged that here we were treating of the metaphysical definition, from which it follows that existence is a perfection.[86]

Here, the discussion shifted to other matters:

> Then we drifted, unawares, to other issues.[87]

Leibniz and Eckhard continued their discussion on all the difficulties surrounding the Cartesian ontological argument, including this matter, through an intense exchange of letters.[88] Eckhard insisted on the fundamental principle: "that there is no difference between being and perfection":[89]

> *Being*, *the real*, *the positive*, that is to say, *to posit something in reality* and *to be able to exist*, have exactly the same meaning.[90]

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[83] *GP I* 214.

[84] *Ibidem*.

[85] *Ibidem*.

[86] *Ibidem, italics mine*.

[87] *Ibidem*.

[88] Cf. *GP I* 215-270 (partial Eng. trans. *PhPL* 177-180).

[89] *GP I* 217.

[90] *GP I* 226.

He argued, expounded and clarified this principle, making recourse, also, to the authority of tradition, whereby this had always stood as one of the cornerstones of ontological thought.

Leibniz, however, remained unwavering. Returning to the objection on the grounds of the implied positive value of suffering, he sustained and developed his argument:

> Thus not being, but wellbeing would be a perfection […] You answer in your letter: suffering is a perfection inasmuch as it implies the sensibility and thought […] but an imperfection inasmuch as it implies the negation of something which, if we had it, would leave us in a better situation than that in which we find ourselves when we experience suffering. Why a better situation, if not because more pleasurable? Granted! I would therefore concede that in this sense pain is not a perfection, *but I still do not see why existence is a perfection*. It seems that we should hold as better or more perfect lies that which, *per se*, all other conditions remaining unaltered, is better or more perfect. Such would seem, in any case, to be existence. Indeed, even if there were any doubt as to *whether it might be better not to exist at all than to exist in a state of utter unhappiness*, one should nonetheless acknowledge that it is better to exist in an indifferent state, devoid of happiness or unhappiness (if such a state can be considered possible in a being capable of choice), than not to exist at all. I, however, do not consider that such is the case for stones, for example. I would rather argue that the existence of stones is better for us, on the grounds of their utility, and not for the stones themselves.[91]

Leibniz's objection, as the brother of Abbot Molanus had rightly noted, finds the "metaphysical" conception of perfection and the good inadequate and necessitates, not an outright denial of the identification between being and the good, but rather a reformulation of its terms, making reference to a "moral" conception of perfection and the good. As Leibniz concludes:

> It would therefore seem that existence is not, *per se*, better than inexistence. And, on these terms, I would concede that existence is a perfection: that is to say that, without any consideration of the other circumstances of life, it is better to exist than not to exist. *Better*, however, I use with the sense of being *more desirable by reason (cum ratione optabilius)*.[92]

This substitution of meaning, however, has important repercussions for the definition of God and the ontological argument. To define God as the absolutely perfect Being no longer implies that He has to be conceived of as the absolutely real Being. At the very least, such a conception becomes inadequate. God is

> the Being who contains all perfections (that is to say, in this sense, the Being most absolutely desirable by reason [*cum ratione optabilissimum*]).[93]

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[91] *GP I* 221; *italics mine*.

[92] *GP I* 222; *second italics mine*.

[93] *Ibidem*.

Yet the Cartesian ontological proof does not appear sufficient to demonstrate the existence of this Being, whose conception far exceeds that of the necessary Being.

In the letter with which he concludes this discussion, Leibniz, in his conciliatory style and also on the basis of his effective convictions, met his interlocutor halfway. Providing that Eckhard limit himself to such notions and significations as he was prepared to accept, Leibniz declared himself willing to concede to his arguments:

> Several of my objections have ended since you have explained that in your usage, perfection is being (*Entitas*) insofar as it is understood to differ from nonbeing (*a non Entitate*), or, as I should prefer to define, *perfection* is degree or quantity of reality or essence.[94]

Nonetheless, Leibniz does not omit to express a certain dissatisfaction at this reductive solution:

> But it still seems to follow from this that there is more perfection or reality in a mind which suffers than in an indifferent one [...]. But there remain certain scruples even here, which I pass over for now.[95]

It is clear that the reasons behind Leibniz's dissatisfaction are deep-rooted. He understands that "the Good, in the metaphysical sense"[96] is a reductive signification of the good and of perfection, which served traditional philosophy well enough in tying off its loose ends, but was insufficient to meet the real requirements of man. For Leibniz, this is no cause for scepticism. It is not his intention to refute the proof of the existence of God on this basis:

> This is so far from being wrung from me against my will, whilst I would intend to state the opposite, that, on the contrary, I would instead declare that I present this argument in favour of the opposition.[97]

Yet neither can Leibniz fall short of truth and loyalty in response to the real problems faced by man. He cannot accept a simple affirmation, as does Eckhard, that "existence in itself and precisely considered is more desirable by reason than inexistence",[98] without then adding that "the reason for this is that existence *per se* is lovable (*jucunda*)".[99] In sum, out of a sense of duty to truthfulness, Leibniz must proclaim that

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[94] *GP I* 266; Eng trans. *PhPL* 177.

[95] *Ibidem.*

[96] *GP I* 228.

[97] *GP I* 233.

[98] *Ibidem.*

it is not existence which is desirable *per se*, but rather its meaning.[100]

Yet this requires that this conviction may be founded upon the certainty of the existence of a God, who is not only the necessary Being or the absolutely real Being, but is also and above all "the Being supremely desirable by reason."

We here bear witness to an important event in the history of thought. One of the pillars on which it had rested for centuries, namely the principle of identification between being and the good, is here called into question by Leibniz, who emerges, here as elsewhere, as a great figurehead for modern thought. Yet unlike other modern thinkers, Leibniz immediately reconstructs the unity which he has shattered. It is significant that, in the discussion of this fundamental ontological identification, Leibniz makes recourse to suffering as an example. In reality, suffering is much more than an example. It is the "stimulus" for the objection, the inescapable circumstance which obliges philosophy to call its certainty into question. As we can now see, this critical instance represents nothing other than the motive behind theodicy itself. It is also revealing that, just as the instance which undermines the entire ontological and theological edifice is of a practical nature, so are the foundations laid for its reconstruction, which is the good as the meaning of existence, founded on the certainty of God as "the Being supremely desirable by reason" or, in the terminology of the *Theodicy*, the object of "our fear and veneration [...] of our love and devotion (*de nostre amour et de nostre tendresse*)".[101] Finally, and above all, we should underline the way in which the new bases for the reconstituted unity of being and the good are offered by the principle of reason, which in various ways and under various guises emerges as its veritable cornerstone. Indeed, perfection, in the moral sense, comes to be defined as "congruence with reason";[102] the "best" what is "most desirable by reason";[103] God "the Being supremely desirable by reason".[104] The unity of being and the good is thus reconstituted by Leibniz not at the expense of reason, which might almost have been expected to collapse together with the ancient postulate, but rather thanks to reason itself. Just as this decisive step forward in modern thinking can not, at least in Leibniz, be considered to shatter the ancient alliance between philosophy and faith under the hammer of reason, neither does his ultimate conservation and renovation of the motives of credibility for faith lead Leibniz to forsake philosophical reason and seek refuge in fideism and mysticism.

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[99] *Ibidem.*

[100] *GP I* 234.

[101] *T* 27/51.

[102] *GP I* 214.

[103] *GP I* 222.

[104] *Ibidem.*

Leibniz is a great modern philosopher because he is a staunch champion of the critical reasoning faculty, inasmuch as it serves both to problematise and to edify. Anyone who wishes to narrow the achievement of modern rationalism down to the former of these functions does not, to my mind, fully recognise the true meaning of critical reasoning and the inspiration driving its philosophical proponents. At the very least, they have surely been lacking in attention to Leibniz's thought.[105]

In the next section we will seek to better understand the sense in which the reason principle hereby assumes its above-mentioned centrality, in what way it makes it possible to justify the meaning of existence on the basis of God's existence, and how it enables us to unite the God of faith with the so-called God of the philosophers. Before commencing with this new line of enquiry, however, one of the Leibnizian

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[105] This is a point of crucial importance, not only of the interpretation of Leibniz, but also for our perspective on modern philosophy. I am here maintaining that, in criticising the unity of being and the good and then reconstituting it on a new basis, Leibniz opens up a pathway for modern rationalism which is alternative to the immanentistic, secularising and atheistic line of development. Others, in the light of the historiographical *topos* whereby this latter position, if not the only approach, is at least the only stance of any significance for modernity – constitutes, almost, its fate, its destiny – are obliged to overlook Leibniz's critical discussion of the unity of being with the good, attributing an acritical assumption thereof to Leibniz (who is hence considered the last epigon of the middle ages). Such is the case, for example, of W. Schmidt-Biggemann (*Theodizee und Tatsachen. Das philosophische Profil der deutschen Aufklärung*, cit., p. 13): "But [for Leibniz] optimism was more than an edifying consideration of creation, since optimistic argumentation depends on the conviction that truths were divine predicates and not voluntary decisions of God: hence the notion that the true was also the good was already implicit in the concept of God. In the *Theodicy*, for the last time in monotheistic western tradition, the transcendentals, 'true' and 'good,' were linked together in the concept of God [...]. This optimism in the *Theodicy* persists beyond Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), and it is only called into question by nihilism. Also if a great deal of time has passed since then, the story of the enlightenment is the story of the gradual destruction of optimism. It is the path along which we see the destruction of the theological foundations of enlightenment. It leads from Leibniz's *Theodicy*, past Voltaire's *Candide*, carrying us right up to the unbearable truth of Nietzsche." As we can see, between this position and that proposed here there is an alternative, in which the understanding of modern philosophy also comes into play. Those who opt for the thesis of the fatal secularization of the modern must nonetheless judge Leibniz, at least on this one point of primary importance, as an epigon of the middle ages, must espunge him altogether from the modern philosophical canon and with it, most significantly of all, the critical idealism which originated in Leibniz and was perpetuated and developed by Kant and Cohen. To my mind, moreover, this Leibnizian stance can also be seen as an interesting response *ante litteram* to the problem, to which M.M. Olivetti rightly draws our attention (*Théodicée aujourd'hui?*, cit., p. 17), of the hiatus between the *perfectissimum* and the *causa sui*. It is a response which eschews aporia – a response which tends towards kantian practical reason, of which Olivetti also makes mention (cf. pp. 16 f.). It is certainly true that Leibniz's argument implies a premise, on which the reciprocity of the One and the Good is founded, as S. Breton points out *(Voies vers Dieu et Discours de raison*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 522 ff.), but this premise is much more than a "fundamental seduction" (cf. p. 523). It also implies the principle of reason (taking into account the double, subjective and objective, meaning of the genitive). Hence, in the fact of the awful experience of evil, it will not simply melt away like a dream, but, on the contrary, assume the task of producing moral action.

arguments for the existence of God still requires discussion: the argument starting from harmony. This argument might be considered to represent one of the many variations of the proof *a contingentia mundi*[106] and therefore not to merit any particular attention. However, this would not explain the particular consideration and admiration which Leibniz displays for this argument, the novelty value he recognises therein and the pride with which he always claims its original conception as his own. Joseph Iwanicki has gathered together all the passages in which Leibniz expresses admiration for the harmony argument. I can, therefore, avoid pointlessly repeating the task of collating passages, which has already been performed and, instead, simply quote Iwanicki himself:

> Leibniz is aware that, in this way, he has developed "a new proof," "unknown until now," or "a new way … of proving God's existence." He attributes the highest possible value to this argument. From 1686 to his death, he did not cease to refer to it as "one of the finest," "one of the strongest," "one of the most incontestable," "the most evident" and "invincible" demonstration of God's existence.[107]

In effect, this argument differs from all of the other arguments starting from contingency in at least one, decisive point. Leibniz makes frequent reference to this characteristic of the new argument. We will here consider a brief passage from a comment by Leibniz dated 30 November 1702 on Father François Lami's *Connaissance de soy-même*, which I think provides a particularly clear illustration:

> since there is more effective than my system in demonstrating the need and necessity for the existence of an infinitely powerful and wise author, as soon as such an author becomes necessary for pre-establishing harmonies: this is a new and invincibile proof of the existence of God.[108]

Herein lies the originality of this argument: it concludes not only with the existence of the necessary or absolutely real Being, but also with that of the Being perfect in a moral sense, "infinitely powerful and wise." In other words, it concludes with the existence of God with all his value attributes, of that God who is the object of faith and love ("the Being supremely desirable by the reason").[109] For this reason,

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[106] As, for example, does, S. Del Boca (*op. cit.*, p. 123).

[107] J. IWANICKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 300 f. Iwanicki indicates the following passages: "a new proof:" *GP III* 464; *IV* 486 [Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 145]; "hitherto unknown:" *GP VI* 541 [Eng. trans. *PhPL* 587]; "a new way [...] to prove God's existence": *GP IV* 578; "one of the finest:" *GP II* 75 [Engl. trans. *L-A* 92]; *VII* 411 [Eng. trans. *L-C* 83]; "one of the strongest:" *GP II* 115; Engl. trans. *L-A* 148; "one of the […] most undeniable:" *GP VII* 411 [Eng. trans. *L-C* 83]; "the most evident:" *COUT* 13; "invincible:" *GP IV* 578.

[108] *GP IV* 578.

[109] Kant, famously, perfectly grasped the peculiar dignity of this proof, which he considered worthy of "always (…) to be mentioned with respect" (I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Venunft. Zweite Auflage 1787*, Akademie Ausgabe, vol. III, p. 415; Eng. trans. by N. K. Smith, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2003, p. 520) for its theoretical and moral fruitfulness. He perceives equally clearly that this

the harmony argument is the most important and valid of all. And, once again, the reason principle proves to represent the crux of the argument, since the existence of a good wise and powerful God is recognised as necessary in order to justify universal harmony, i.e. as the foundation of the rational consideration of the contingent, since herein, and not elsewhere, resides harmony. As we have already stated, the world is not determined by a geometric or metaphysical necessity, but rather by a hypothetical necessity founded on a moral necessity. As we have already observed, the criteria for the best, for perfection, cannot be reduced to the calculation of the "quantity of reality," but must also be defined on the basis of the criteria of "form," which produces variety, determination and order, i.e. "harmony" or "convenience," in which the moral aspect, the "best governor of the spirits" is also at play. Indeed, if we accept as valid the hypothesis proposed above regarding the prevalence of the teleological principle in the formation of compossibles,[110] the harmony principle prevails over the mere calculation of "quantity of reality." For all of these reasons, Leibniz's God is above all a good, wise and powerful God, the radical origin of all things, in the sense that He is the origin of "reason," which brings them into existence and connects them harmoniously.

5. *God and the Reason Principle*

In considering the reason principle, the true foundation of and the the driving force behind Leibniz's philosophy, I will here rigorously limit myself, as a consequence of the usual constraints of conciseness and linearity, to its ontological dimension. I remain well aware, nonetheless, that the ontological dimension is inseparable from the logical, into regarding so many studies have already been carried out to such a

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proof concludes with a definition of God which is very different from the notion of the necessary Being. Indeed, this difference constitutes, for Kant, the principal problem of the argument – the fact that, if it is followed through to its conclusion, the argument must make an unjustified transition into the ontological argument. It would be inappropriate to enter into an analysis of Kant's thought on this matter. We should nonetheless note that, for Kant, too, there is a clear connection between this idea of God, this demonstration of his existence and theodicy (cf., for example, I. KANT, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, Akademie Ausgabe, vol. V, Anmerkung to the § 88, pp. 458 f.; Eng. trans. by J. C. Meredith, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1952, pp. 128 ff., and IDEM, *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee*, cit.). I would observe, finally, that in the above-quoted pages of the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant declares that this argument "is not in any sense a newly discovered argument […]. For its germ was lying in the mind of man when his reason first quickened into life" (p. 458; Eng. trans. cit., p. 128). In the light of the arguments I will present in the final section of this chapter, this kantian declaration of the originary nature of the argument in question and its affinity with reason is a valid argument (to which many others might be added) for recognising a noteworthy continuity from Leibniz to Kant in the conception of reason and critical rationalism. Yet I am constrained to make no more than a brief mention of this crucial issue at this time.

[110] Cf. above, Chapter Five, § 2.

high standard, above all over the last century, that a new and fruitful approach to Leibniz's philosophy has emerged on this basis. These are matters which would merit further study, above all, to my mind, with regard to the non-reducibility of the principle of reason to that of identity and Leibniz's innovations in mathematical analysis which transformed the concept of analysis, establishing an important model which he sought to apply in the field of logic, attempting, not to reduce synthetic to analytic propositions, but rather to make it possible to demonstrate synthetic truths *a priori*. All of this, in my opinion, would reveal a harmonic (although not entirely unproblematic) confluence between the logical dimension of the reason principle and and its ontological dimension, which I will here consider.[111]

It is well known that the significance of Leibniz's reason principle is complex and elaborate. It is manifest in its fullest form, for example, in the untitled work from which we have already drawn:

> There is a *reason,* in nature, why something exists instead of nothing. This follows from that great principle that nothing happens without a reason; and, in the same way, there must also be a reason why this exists instead of that.[112]

In this formulation of the principle (other analogous versions are to be found elsewhere in Leibniz's *oeuvre*,[113] there are two easily distinguishable components. Let us here refer to thes as the *first significance* of the reason principle ("There is a *reason* […] why something exists instead of nothing") and the *second* ("there must also be a reason why this exists instead of that").[114]

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[111] Regarding the absence of such further discussion of this matter as would be required, I can offer no other justification than that of brevity. For the time being, I would refer my readers to several authoritative studies which have already, in their various ways, explored this territory: cf., for example, E. CASSIRER, *op. cit.*, pp. 494 ff.; O. SAAME, *Der Satz vom Grund bei Leibniz. Ein konstitutives Element seiner Philosophie und ihrer Einheit*, Hanns Krach, Mainz 1961.

[112] *GP VII* 289.

[113] Cf., for example, *GP VI* 602; *VII* 302, 304 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess*. 149, 151); *GRUA* 16, 17; COUT 25; *CF* 38.

[114] B. Russell (*op. cit.,* pp. 30 ff.) also distinguishes between two significances of the reason principle, but in a very different manner from that which I here intend to adopt. He famously defines the first significance as a "form of the law of causality, asserting all possibile causes to be desires or appetites", and the second as the "assertion that all *actual* causation is determined by desire for the good." The first significance would represent "a principle of possibles contingents," the second "a principle of actual contingents only" (p. 68). Of the various aspects of this interpretation which I deem inadequate, I would here foreground, beyond the total disinterest in the significance of the reason principle as the principle for the prevalence of being over non-being (of which Russell, as one of the passages which he cites demonstrates, is certainly not ignorant, but which he resolutely overlooks), the opinion that there is only a connection to the good if the reason principle is applied to contingencies actually realised in existence. In the following pages, instead, I will argue that, for Leibniz, there exists an originary and unseverable connection between the reason principle, in the totality of its significance, and the good: the foundation of the reason principle is located in God's goodness.

The second significance evidently follows from the first and has its foundation therein. Indeed, the principle according to which "that which exists [..] is that which has the greatest degree of perfection",[115] is only valid if we presuppose that "there is […] a reason why existence prevails over non-existence".[116] In addition to being obvious, this point is also clearly made by Leibniz in the *De rerum originatione radicali*:

> assuming that at some time being is to prevail over nonbeing, or that there is a reason why something rather then nothing is to exist, or that something is to pass from possibility to actuality, although nothing beyond this is determined, it follows that there would be as much as there possibly can be, given the capacity of time and space (that is, the capacity of the order of possible existence).[117]

The second significance of the reason principle is therefore substantially resolved into the principle of the best, through which the divine wisdom chooses the best of all possible worlds. It has, then, already been examined above. The first significance, instead, requires further discussion.

If the existence of the best series of compossibles (i.e. the best world) is founded *a priori* on the second significance of the reason principle, the first significance represents the foundation for existent contingencies but also, in a more originary sense, possible contingencies. Leibniz also makes this point in the *Theodicy*:

> without God, not only would there be nothing existent, but there would be nothing possible.[118]

Elsewhere, however, he is yet clearer. Thus in points 4-6 of the untitled work already cited:

> 4. There is, then, a reason why existence prevails over non-existence: *the necessary Being is "existent-ifying*."
> 5. Yet the very cause that makes something exist, or that makes possibility be realised in existence, also has the effect that every possible tends towards existence, since no reason for restricting certain possibles is to be found in the universal.
> 6. For this reason, every possible can be said to "*existiturire*", inasmuch as it is founded on the actual existent, necessary Being, without whom there would be no way for the possible to be actually realised.[119]

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[115] *GP VII* 290.

[116] GP *VII* 289.

[117] *GP VII* 304; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 151; cf. *GRUA* 17. I will here refrain altogether from discussing the criterion for the best which appears in this passage, as such a discussion had already been undertaken in the previous chapter.

[118] *T* 226 f./243.

We must, then, assume that, according to Leibniz, "essences" themselves are already "possibles" and therefore have a degree of reality, a tendency towards existence.[120] We are not here referring to essences in their merely logical sense, as eternal truths, but with regard to their ontological status (from which the logical dimension cannot be considered independently). In other words, as such, in Leibnizian language, essences are located in the intellect of God. This expression, although necessarily metaphorical, nonetheless plays an important role, if not in explaining, at least in indicating the passage from the logical dimension of the eternal truths to the logical dimension of the essences.[121] Indeed, since the eternal truths are located in the divine intellect, i.e. are thought of by God, they acquire a dimension of reality and cease to be purely nominal. In other words, they become "possibles." Their reality and their real definition in fact lies in their very requirement of or inclination towards existence. As we read in a brief but significant undated text by Leibniz:

> This proposition, "every possible requires existence," can be proved *a posteriori*, if we posit that something exists. Indeed, either everything exists, and at this point every possible would, without a doubt, require existence, to the extent that every possible would also effectively exist, or some things do not exist, and at this point we must seek to understand why some things are preferred for existence over others. But we cannot reasonably understand this if not on these general basis of essence or possibility, supposing that the possible requires existence by nature, and that this requirement is always in proportion to its possibility or at the level of its essence. If, in the very nature of the essence, there were not some inclination to exist, nothing would exist. Indeed, to state that some essences have this inclination and others do not is utterly unreasonable, if we consider that existence is generally always referred to essence in the same way.[122]

For Leibniz, then, God is the principle, not only of existence and of the contingent, but also of the very essence of the contingent, i.e. of the contingent as possible. To the passages already cited on this point we might add many more. In the *De rerum originatione radicali*, for example, Leibniz writes:

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[119] *GP VII* 289; cf. *GP VII* 310.

[120] J. Jalabert (*Les Notions d'Essence et d'Existence dans la Philosophie de Leibniz*, in AA.VV., *Akten des Internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses*, Hannover, 14.-19. November 1966, vol. I: *Metaphysik - Monadenlehre*, cit., p. 13) writes: "We might note a certain identity between essence and existence. *In God this identity is absolute: his essence is existence*. In contingent beings, essence is virtual existence and tendency to exist in action. The *dynamic of the essences* is the fount of existences. If essence were not, in some sense, existence, it would not be 'the radical origin of things'."

[121] Although he does maintain the difference between "essences" and created "things:" cf. F. PIRO, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

[122] *GP VII* 194 f.

And so, the ultimate reason for the reality of both essences and existences lies in one thing [*in uno*], which must of necessity be greater than the world, higher than the world, and must have existed before the world did, since through it not only existing things, which make up the world, but also possibiles have their reality.[123]

And in § 43 of the *Monadology* we find:

It is also true that God is not only the source of existences, but also that of essences insofar as they are real, that is, or the source of that which is real in possibility. This is because God's understanding is realm of eternal truths or that of ideas on which they depend; without him there would be nothing real in possibles, and not only would nothing exist, but also nothing would be possible.[124]

In the *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus* we read:

7. *The dependence of things on God* extends both to all the possibles, ie. to all that which does not imply contradiction, and to all actual things.
8. The very *possibility* of things, even if they do not exist in actuality, is really founded in divine existence, since if God did not exist nothing would even be possible, whilst possibles are as ideas in the intellect of God for all eternity.
9. *Actual things* depend on God in both their existence and their action, and depend not only on his intellect, but also on his will.[125]

We might go on to cite many more passages by Leibniz on this point. However, it will be more opportune, at this point, to seek to clarify a further element which emerges from the passages already quoted. The ultimate reason for both possible essences and things actually in existence is located in God, but not in quite the same way. This is what Leibniz is trying to indicate when he refers to God as an "existifying" Being in relation to existence, but states that "every possible can be said to '*existiturire*' from the necessary Being".[126] The distinction between the possible essences' dependence on the divine "intellect" alone compared to the dependence of things actually existing on the divine "will" as well has the same sense.[127]

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[123] *GP VII* 305; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 152.

[124] *GP VI* 614; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 218.

[125] *GP VI* 439 f.; cf. *CF* 50.

[126] Cf. *GP VII* 289. Elsewhere, Leibniz uses the future participle *extiturus,a,um* (cfr. *COUT* 21, 24, 405), which, however, indicates the passage from possiblity into existence.

[127] J. Jalabert (*Les Notions d'Essence et d'Existence dans la Philosophie de Leibniz,* cit., p. 17) writes: "An essence is *real* inasmuch as it is a *virtual existence,* since God conceives of it as possibile. As a pure logical possibility, an essence depends to an equal extent on God, but does not depend on his existence. The essence of contingent things is implicated in the essence of the necessary Being, i.e. in his possibility. If God were not possible, nothing would be possible. Thus, despite the logical priority of essences, everything is dependent on the Absolute. The fact that there is an infinite number of possible creatures results from the logical possibility of the divine essence. Finite beings become existent possibles because God exists and possibles exist in his mind. It is the

We thus find ourselves concerned once more with divine faculty attributes: intellect and will. Leibniz returns, on several occasions in the *Theodicy* to this point that possible essences only depend on the divine intellect, whilst things actually existing depend on both God's intellect and his will:

> Its [of God] understanding is the source of *essences*, and its will is the origin of existences.[128]

On occasion, the divine intellect, as source of all essences, is identified with the "essence" or "nature" of God.[129] Nonetheless, this in no way alters the significance of the distinction. Rather, it only serves to accentuate the non-voluntary, and therefore non-discriminatory, character of the divine foundation of essences.[130]

In this case, too, the distinction between God's intellect and will is necessary to ensure the coherence of the thesis of God as source of the essences with a number of the key points of Leibniz's philosophy. Only in this manner can Leibniz conserve the transcendence of God over the world, since the act whereby the world was created is mediated and deliberate. He thus avoids spinozan immanentism and necessitarianism, distinguishing the reality of possibile entities, as ideas in the divine intellect, from

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will of God that confers their real existence." Jalabert here makes the debatable abstraction of God's essence from his existence for the sole reason of foregrounding the difference between the logical and ontological meanings of essences.

[128] *T* 107/128; cf. 114 f./135, 129/149, 198 f./217, 226/243, 230/246, 236/253, 313 f./327, 341/353, 423/428.

[129] Cf. *T* 230/247; *GP V* 141/*A VI/6* 155; *GRUA* 324. In *CF* 50 the essences are founded on the simple "existence" of God. Nonetheless, it does not seem to me that this changes the meaning of Leibniz's unwavering position on this matter.

[130] This aspect of Leibniz's thought has perplexed various scholars, who have seen it as a hint of emanationism and spinozanism. E. Rolland (*Le déterminisme monadique et le problème de Dieu dans la philosophie de Leibniz*, J. Vrin, Paris 1935, p. 8), for example, expresses this concern with regard to § 14 of the *Discours de métaphysique*. P. Burgelin expresses a similar perplexity with regard to the same passage (*Commentaire du Discours de métaphysique de Leibniz*, cit., pp. 184 ff.). The passage in question is the following: "Now, first of all, it is very evident that created substances depend upon God, who preserves them and who even produces them continually by a kind of emanation, just as we produce our thoughts. For God, so to speak, turns on all sides and in all ways the general system of phenomena which he finds it good to produce in order to manifest his glory, and he views all the faces of the world in all ways possible, since there is no relation that escapes his omniscience. The result of each view of the universe, as seen from a certain position, is a substance which espresses the universe in conformity with this view, should God see fit to render his thought actual and to produce this substance" (*GP IV* 439; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 46 f.). It is certainly true that Leibniz expresses himself in an ambiguous manner, which might easily lead to misunderstandings, here. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the last sentence ("should God...") is enlightening and marks the passage from the previous discussion of possibile substances to that of substances realised in existence by introducing the choice and the free creative decree, thus absolving this argument from the suggestion of any merely emanationist process.

their actual existence, the outcome of a decree and creative act on God's part. Furthermore, this distinction enables him to declare God innocent of evil:

> Evil springs rather from the Forms themselves in their detached state, that is, from the *ideas that God has not produced by an act of his will*, any more than he thus produced numbers and figures, and all possible essences which one must regard as eternal and necessary; for they are in the ideal region of the possibles, that is, in the divine understanding. *God is therefore not the author of essences in so far as they are only possibilities*. But there is nothing actual to which he has not decreed and given existence.[131]

This argument is repeated at § 380,[132] together with the affirmation that the "possibility of things or forms" is the one thing

> which alone God did not make, since he is not the author of his own understanding.

The distinction between the two divine faculty attributes should also prove useful in refuting the thesis of divine arbitrarism. With regard to the second significance of the reason principle, i.e. the choice of the best of all possibles, this distinction, as we have already seen, may effectively prove useful in this sense, although it implies a certain degree of imprecision, which means that, here, too, the results obtained through recourse to the value attributes are more satisfying. With regard to the first significance of the reason principle, whereby there is a reason why something exists instead of nothing, recourse to the faculty attributes proves yet more problematic. Leibniz seeks to deploy these arguments in the *Theodicy*. Agreeing, for once, with Bayle,[133] Leibniz notes that

> the divine understanding which gives reality to the eternal verities, albeit God's will have no part therein.[134]

Later on he repeats that God did not produce ideas through an act of will.[135] Nonethtless, these assertions are more problematic than they might, at first sight, appear. Indeed, if we conceive of the intellect as the region of ideas or eternal truths, in a merely logical sense, of possibles only inasmuch as they are not contradictory, without any ontological connotation, i.e. astracted away from the concept of possibility as tending towards existence, then it is certaintly true that the intellect is absolutely prior to any act or decree of the divine will. However, first of all, it is unclear how such an intellect could perform a critical and normative function in

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[131] *T* 313 f./326 f.; *italics mine*.

[132] Cf. *T* 341/353.

[133] Cf. *T* 224 ff./241 ff.

[134] *T* 226/243.

[135] Cf. *T* 313/327, 341/353, 423/428; cf. also *GP VII* 311.

relation to the choices of the divine will, since it would only know the eternal truths in their simple valence as logical truths, without any value connotation which might constitute the object of moral discrimination. Secondly, it does not seem that Leibniz himself wished to reduce the notion of ideas in the divine intellect to such a level. In the passages already quoted, or in their context, in fact, Leibniz considers, not only those identical truths of logic or mathematics, but also moral principles and possible essences, as eternal ideas in the divine intellect.[136]

The alternative, then, is to conceive of the divine intellect as the seat of the essences, inasmuch as they are already possible in an ontological sense – i.e. inasmuch as they tend towards existence. Such, in fact, is the position espoused by Leibniz, who effectively conceives of eternal truths in the thoughts of the divine intellect as possibles (in the ontological sense).[137] Leibniz in fact defines the "knowledge of mere intelligence" of God as "the knowledge of possibilities".[138] Yet in this case it is impossible to maintain the distinction between intellect and will, since the tendency towards existence of possibles already derives from the reason principle, which "assumes [*ponit*]" that "being is to prevail over nonbeing".[139] Indeed, in the *Theodicy*, Leibniz combines the doctrine of the degrees of divine science with a parallel doctrine of the degrees of divine will, according to which there is an originary will, or "primitive antecedent," of God which

> has as its object each good and each evil in itself, detached from all combination, and tends to advance the good and prevent the evil.[140]

The reader cannot fail to notice that this definition of the antecedent will of God is nearly identical with that of his goodness, which

> prompted him *antecedently* to create and to produce all possible good.[141]

The already cited passage in which Leiniz refers to the conflict of the possibles in the divine intellect thus assumes a particular significance, since, on the basis of this passage, the conflict mechanism of the possibles, even though it occurs within the intellect of God, is put into motion by originary decree (and a decree is an act of the will), which precedes not only every "existifying" or creative decree but also, it would appear, the very activity of the intellect:

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[136] Cf. *T* 225/242, 313 f./327, 341/353, 423/428.

[137] Cf. *T* 229/246, 236/253, 314/327, 341/353, 423/428.

[138] *T* 124/145.

[139] *GP VII* 304; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 151.

[140] *T* 170/189.

[141] *T* 167/187. The definition is specifically explicated in *T* 397/402.

One may say that *as soon as God has decreed to create something* there is a struggle between all the possibles, all of them laying claim to existence [...]. It is true that all this struggle can only be ideal, that is to say, it can only be *a conflict of reasons in the most perfect understanding*, which cannot fail to act in the most perfect way, and consequently to choose the best.[142]

In an unpublished text containing reflections on Bellarmino, dated by Grua at approximately 1680-1682, Leibniz displays once again a tendency to transcend distinctions between the two faculties, in this case with regard to God and to the very issue with which we are not concerned:

God established that he would bring about his own glory creating, that his wisdom might be recognised by others, or creating creatures in his own image and establishing all things in the most perfect possibile way from the point of view of rational creatures [...]. This was the first decree of God, from which all others follow as a necessary consequence. This creative decree of God is not a proposition whose contrary implies contradiction. In other words, the existence of other things beside God is not necessary, but free.

As to why God chose that which is the most perfect, we can present no answer, except that he willed it so, or rather that to choose the most perfect is the first tendency of the divine will. In other words, this is not a consequence of the things themselves, but rather derives purely from God's will. And God wills it absolutely freely, since no reason for his will exists without his will itself: therefore we are not referring to something without a reason, but rather implying that reason is intrinsic to his will.[143]

All of these difficulties can be overcome, once more, if we refer the discussion to value attributes instead of faculty attributes. At this point God s goodness, or, better, his "holiness," which is "the highest degree of goodness"[144] or justice,[145] is the originary foundation of the reason principle, in its first significance. It is the reason why something exists instead of nothing, not only as a condition of the second and consequent significance, whereby the actual world exists instead of another, but also, from a more originary point of view, with regard to the prevalence of being over non-being, whereby the very eternal ideas acuire an ontological possibility, i.e. a tendency towards existence. God's goodness is the basis for the prevalence of being over non-being, the ultimate reason why something exists instead of nothing. United with wisdom, then, it is the basis for the prevalence of the best, the ultimate reason for the existence of the best of all possible worlds. Leibniz himself declares as much, in a chiasmus, in a letter to Pierre Coste dated 19 December 1707:

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[142] *T* 236/253; *italics mine*. Cf., in this regard, H. POSER, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[143] *GRUA* 300 f.

[144] *T* 200/218.

[145] Cf. *GP VI* 446.

since the contrary does not imply any contradiction, it was neither necessary nor essential that God created, nor that he created this world in particular, even though his wisdom and goodness led him to it.[146]

Yet the existence of a God who is good, then wise, just and powerful, i.e. of God as the absolutely (morally) perfect Being, is not demonstrated by Leibniz, nor is it demonstrable through rational deduction. As we have observed, God's goodness and justice cannot be demonstrated *a posteriori*, since the relationship between these truths and appearance is a mystery. At most we might have recourse to apologetic arguments, which constitute motives of credibility. Neither can God's goodness and justice be demonstrated *a priori,* since this path can only take us as far as the demonstration of God's existence as necessary Being. A demonstration might be forced in both cases, extending the argument until it concludes with the existence of the absolutely perfect Being, but only by introducing the reason principle, with all the ontological and moral implications thereof discussed above, as a non-demonstrated principle, therefore compromising the rigour of the deduction.[147] Must we, then, conclude that the affirmation of God's goodness and perfection is not entirely philosophical? The answer is definitely yes, if we only consider demonstrated statements as philosophical and rational. In this sense, the passage from the necessary Being, demonstrated with the proofs of the existence of God, to the good, wise and powerful God, constitutes a passage which is neither demonstrated nor demonstrable.[148] In this regard, the argument at §§ 7-9 of the *Principles of Nature*

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[146] *GP III* 402; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 195. G. Carlotti (*op*. *cit*.), who, famously, insists on the authentically religious character of Leibniz's philosophy and his conception of God, also notes: "Creation, then, is an act of goodness, for which we owe God our gratitude and love, since He called us out of nothing to existence and surrounded us with many other beings, who, less conscious or even unconscious, as they express and celebrate his glory, serve, as it were, to frame man, the favoured creature, and make his life happier overall" (p. 68; cf. p. 73).

[147] This also, it seems to me, goes beyond Martial Gueroult's considerations, in his long note on freedom and free will in Leibniz (cf. M. GUEROULT, *op*. *cit*., pp. 182 ff.). In the note in question, Gueroult maintains that it would be logically impossibile for God to choose something other than the best in reality, since it would run counter to the definition of God, and on this basis he proposes an effective identity between Leibnizian and Spinozan determinism. This would be true if God could be defined as the supremely perfect being solely on the basis of the principle of identity and non-contradiction. However, on the basis of my discussion so far it has emerged that God can only be defined as necessary Being in this manner. God, instead, can be defined as the supremely perfect Being only to the extent to which he is placed at the origin and foundation of the reason principle. God's "wisdom" is connected with this meaning and, for this reason, a choice other than the "best" is impossible for him, not because it is contradictory, but because it runs counter to the reason principle of which God himself is the foundation. This is also a fundamental difference between Leibniz and Spinoza, since Spinoza's determinism is founded on God as necessary Being, whilst that of Leibniz rests on God as supremely perfect Being.

[148] Leibniz himself was aware of the problematic nature of this passage, although he was convinced as to its legitimacy at least if considered in one direction: "we can state that the existence of the absolutely perfect Being follows from the existence of the necessary Being (supposing that both are

and Grace is particularly relevant. This argument follows a parabolic structure. In the ascending curve of the parabola, after having introduced the reason principle (§ 7), Leibniz ascends, in his usual fashion, from the contingent to God, as necessary Being (§ 8) ard concludes "this ultimate reason for things is called *God*".[149] Here, at the apex of the parabola, occurs the non-argued transition from God as necessary Being to the wise, good and powerful God, a metamorphosis which might most appropriately be termed a revelation. After this, at § 9, the parabola completes its descending trajectory, again by means of the reason principle, back down from God to things:

> This simple primitive substance must eminently include the perfections contained in the derivative substances which are its effects. Thus it will have perfect power, knowledge, and will, that is, it will have omnipotence, omniscience, and supreme goodness […]. The reason that made things exist through him, makes them still depend on him while they exist and bring about effects; and they continually receive from him that which causes them to have any perfection at all.[150]

Leibniz thus unites the God of the philosophers with the God of faith. Philosophy and faith are not mutually exclusive, but complete each other. Philosophy brings us to "comprehend" the existence of the necessary Being, while faith leads me to believe in the existence of the perfectly good, wise and powerful Being. These two conceptions of God are not in contradiction, but rather ultimately merge. Faith and reason unite to tell me that the necessary Being "must eminently include the perfections." The necessary Being, *per se*, is not yet a sufficient explanation for the existence of something instead of nothing, and for the fact that things are one way

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possibile) *sed non vice versa*, not the other way round, because we have no proof that the existence of the necessary Being follows from the existence of the absolutely perfect Being" (*GP III* 446). Similarly, in a letter to Christian Wolff of 8 December 1705, he writes: "It is true that the Being in himself exists necessarily and that, if he did not exist, neither would the contingent beings exist (*extitura*). However, it is not so easy to provide a rigorous demonstration that the Being in himself is God, i.e. that he is omniscient, omnipotent and unique. Lucretius might argue that all his atoms are beings in themselves. We must, then, add other considerations which, indeed, are available in abundance" (*Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Christian Wolff*, cit., p. 50). A. Bausola (*Die Möglichkeit des vollkommensten Wesens und der ontologische Gottesbeweis*, cit., p. 16) notes and discusses this clarification. B. Russell (*op. cit.*, pp. 189 f.) maintains that it is illegitimate. He accuses Leibniz of an undue superficiality in adhering uncritically to the metaphysical notion of perfection. I would argue that this criticism is unfounded. For example, Russell's reference to the positivity of evil in this objection demonstrates that he does not take into account Leibniz's correspondence with Eckhard, discussed above. E. Boutroux (*op. cit.*, pp. 132 ff.) also points to the problematic nature of the transition from the one significance of God to the other and sees in the "metaphysics of activity" the theory whereby Leibniz mediates between these two meanings, finally attaining to the formulation of an idea of God which comprehends and reconciles them, which, although superior, is not contrary to reason.

[149] *GP VI* 602; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 210.

[150] *GP VI* 602 f.; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 210.

instead of another. The explanation only emerges when the necessary Being is identified with the perfectly good, wise and powerful Being.[151]

Nonetheless, this still does not suffice. So far we have still only considered a transcendence of reason by faith – at heart, a form of fideism. If the passage from the necessary Being to the good, wise and powerful God lay utterly beyond philosophy, and therefore beyond reason, we might yet agree with Bayle, since "to believe" not only would not mean "to understand," but would in fact be an utterly irrational act, counter to all of Leibniz's assertions in the *Preliminary Dissertation*.

This is not, in reality, the case. Although faith in the good, wise and just God is not demonstrable by reason (and this is perhaps counter to what Leibniz may have led us to expect), it is nonetheless not extraneous to reason. Indeed its relation to reason is closer than that of demonstration. God is "the ultimate reason for things",[152] as Leibniz often repears. This is not only in the sense that the divine intellect is the region of the eternal truths, but also in the sense that God is the origin of their realisation:

> it is necessary that eternal truths have their existence […] in God, through whom those things which would otherwise be imaginary are realized.[153]

For this reason

> We can trace […] the ultimate reason for reality, as much for the essences as for the exitence, in One who is necessarily without paragon, superior and anterior to the world itself, given that for him not only the existence which embraces the world has reality, but also all the possibles.[154]

Yet even this is still not sufficient. Godi s the ultimate reason for reality, not only as its origin, its "ultimate round [*ultima radix*]"[155] and "source of every essence and of

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[151] I can therefore evidently not agree with G.E. Barié's assessment (*op. cit.*). Barié denies any religious sensibility to Leibniz (cf. pp. 109 ff.) and is highly negative in his judgement of the *Theodicy* (cf. pp. 111, 289 ff., 333 ff.). Bariés argument rests, firstly, on the presumed lack of attention to the moral dimension in Leiniz's rationalism, a charge which I believe has been effectively disproved in the discussion of "true piety" above (cf. *supra*, Chapter One). Secondly there is the presumption that Leibniz conceives of God in an intellectual manner, and is thus insensitive when it comes to evil. As Barié writes, "the central problem is […] the problem […] of reconciling evil with divine creation. This issue is in no way identifiable, as Leibniz, together with patristic and scholastic tradition would have it, with Augustine's famous question: 'Si Deus est unde malum? Si Deus non est unde bonum?', since evil can be reconciled with God, but not with the divine creation of the world" (p. 294). The issues discussed in this chapter should serve as sufficient demonstration of the importance in Leibniz, not only of the existence of God as necessary Being, but also and to an even greater extent of his goodness, wisdom and power, as a consequence of which he creates.

[152] *GP VII* 302 *passim*; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 149.

[153] *GP VII* 305; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 152.

[154] *Ibidem*.

the existence of the rest [*essentiae omnis existentiaeque caeterorum fon(s)*]",[156] but also as the *transcendent principle of law*, of the harmonious order of the combination of the possibles and their realisation in the existent world and of the moral order of the realm of the spirits. He is the *end* to which all things tend. As Leibniz writes, for example, at the conclusion of his *Animadversiones* on Descartes:

> God is, at the same times, the eminent form and first effective cause, the end and the ultimate reason of all things.[157]

If, at this point, we recall Leibniz's definition of reason in the *Nouveaux Essais*[158] as a "concatenation of truths" – in other words, as origin, principle of causal connection and end – it should by now be clear that reason has its originary and perfect reality in God. And since, in God, it is productive and creative, it cannot be separated from God's goodness, with which it is identical. The notion of identity between being and good, which Leibniz himself, as we have seen, with the courage and fervour of critical reason, calls into discussion, is hereby reconstituted in a more solid form than ever, since it has been tried and tested. It is reconstituted by means of reason itself: in God, as the ultimate reason for things, being and the good are united and, proceeding from God, this unity also constitutes the foundation of the essences and of those things realised in existence, *the reason principle*.

For this reason, returning to the question which was left unanswered above, God's goodness, although it cannot be demonstrated by the reason, is a truth of a profoundly rational nature, since reason itself originates therefrom. The reason principle is as originary as the identity principle or rather, given its ontological implications, more so:[159] reason cannot demonstrate its own supreme principles,

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[155] *GP VII* 303; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 150.

[156] *GP VII* 305; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 151 f.

[157] *GP IV* 392.

[158] Cf. *GP V* 457/*A VI/6* 475, cit. above, Chapter Two, § 2.

[159] The idea of the reason principle as being originary in relation to the principle of identity and non-identity, although understood in a logical – gnoseological, and not in an ontological sense, underlines a number of the main theses regarding Leibniz's philosophy propounded by E. Cassirer (*op. cit.*). This idea is, in fact, the premise behind the cassirerian interpretation of Leibnizian logic as being more a logic of judgement than a logic of concept and definition, which is synthetic and real, is originary and foundational in relation to the axiom (cf., for example, pp. 100 f., 318 f.). According to Y. Bélaval (*op. cit.*, pp. 387 f.) the reason principle analytically contains the principle of identity and non-contradiction, inasmuch as the former is the basis for the logic of individual substances which tend towards existence, i.e. of compossibles, of which the essences or general ideas are nothing more than abstractions. That the reason principle is the "constitutional element" for Leibniz's philosophy as a whole and stands in a precedent and originary relation to the identity principle is the central thesis of O. Saame (*op. cit.*). In this important study, Saame argues his case on the basis of a recognition, in the Leibnizian formula "omne praedicatum inest subjecto," of a determinant reason principle, wherefrom both the identity principle and the principle of sufficient

because they are already implicit in every demonstration. Much less can it demonstrate the transcendent foundation of the reason principle, divine reason. Yet it retains an *a priori* certainty thereof, not by means of a demonstration, but more fundamentally, because it is concerned with its own foundation, whereby it is capable of demonstrating, doubting and criticising. Faith in the good, wise and powerful God, then, is not simply added on to the rational demonstration of the necessary Being. It is in itself profoundly rational and philosophical, since reason recognises in God its own origin and end and those of the principle behind its own proceedings. In a fragment presumably dating to 1710 (the same year as the *Theodicy*), we find a profoundly truthful and enlightening confession on Leibniz's part:

> I cannot always explain myself fully, but I always seek to speak justly. I begin as a philosopher but I end up as a theologian. One of my greatest principles is that nothing happens without a reason. This is a principle of philosophy. Nonetheless, ultimately, it is nothing more than the recognition (*aveu*) of divine wisdom, even if I do not refer to this in the beginning.[160]

Here, then, Leibniz's already cited use of the verb "communicating himself" to indicate God's relationship with man is finally explained. In the *Theodicy*, Leibniz repeatedly, sometimes autonomously, sometimes with direct reference to King's thought, refers to God as communicating himself to the world, and this "communicating himself" is an act which always has as its origin and object the goodness of God:

> it is goodness which prompts God to create with the purpose of communicating himself.[161]

God, then, communicates himself to creation, and this means that he communicates his own perfections and, first of all, his own goodness. But, as far as mankind is concerned, what is communicated is above all God's own reason. Goodness and reason, united in God, are also united in man, who possesses them in a finite manner,

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reason proceed. L. Couturat (*La logique de Leibniz*, cit., p. X) had already identified the reason principle with this formula, immediately resolving it, however, into the identity principle. D. Mahnke (*op. cit.*, p. 241), with reference to Couturat, is critical of this interpretation of this formula as expressing the reason principle. P. Faggiotto (*Il problema della metafisica nel pensiero moderno. Parte II: Leibniz-Berkeley-Hume*, CEDAM, Padova 1975) also highlights the originary character of the Leibnizian reason principle (cf. p. 9), which he recognises as the basis for possibility, in metaphysics, of "analytical propositions of an existential value" (cf. p. 8). Later on, however (cf. p. 43), and on this point I cannot agree, he considers the Leibnizian principle *praedicatum inest subjecto* as the basis for the *geometric* derivation of events related to a substance from its essence, thus endorsing an interpretation of Leibniz's thought as being absolutely deterministic, denying free will and treating evil in a reductive manner (cf. pp. 43 ff., 48 ff.).

[160] Cit. in A. ROBINET, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

[161] *T* 253/269; cf. 144/164, 407/412, 424/428, 425/430. In *CP VII* 111, Leibniz adds "freedom" to "perfection" as the object of communication: "God has communicated to us a degree of his perfection and his freedom".

because God communicates himself to him. § 28 of *Discours de métaphysique* opens with the statement that God "communicates himself to us immediately".[162] In the remainder of the paragraph, this is explained through recourse to the light metaphor (with reference to the *Prologue* to the Gospel of Saint John), with which we are already familiar:

> God is the sun and the light of souls, *lumen illuminans omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum*.[163]

As we can see, this is the starting point for Leibniz's *Theodicy:* "true piety," consisting in "light" and "virtue".[164] God is the ultimate reason for things. This also means that, with regard to mankind, the reason which we posses is a trace (partial and finite, but authentic) of God's communicating himself to us, of his goodness. Leibniz refers explicitly to Saint Augustine:

> God is, indeed, the light which illuminates every man who comes into the world. It is the truth which speaks within us, when we understand theorems of eternal certainty. It is the voice of God himself, as St. Augustine also notes.[165]

The divine light which communicates itself to us is reason itself, both in its theoretical and in its practical use. It is reason, as both the enlightenment of the mind and freedom: the two conditions of virtue and true piety. In his *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus*, Leibniz writes:

> These traces (*reliquiae*) of the divine image consist both in the innate light of the intellect and in the congenital freedom of the will.[166]

Reason, which represents the very goodness of God, is then, for Leibniz, also the foundation of the morality and "true piety" of mankind. God's goodness cannot be demonstrated by the reason, but the fact that latter is rooted in the former renders our faith in God's goodness every bit as solid as if it were demonstrated and rationality is in no way compromised, since reason itself acknowledges that it cannot demonstrate the original foundation of and ultimate reason for its own demonstrative faculty. Divine goodness and reason are not always openly manifest in the appearances of creation. The existence of evil makes it impossible to demonstrate them *a posteriori*. However, they can be upheld *a priori* as mystery, and to do so is not irrational and fideistic, not only because, on a theoretical level, not even the

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[162] *GP IV* 453; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 59.

[163] *Ibidem*.

[164] *T* 25/49.

[165] *E* 82.

[166] *GP VI* 453; see also the discussion which follows at pp. 453 ff.

antagonist can demonstrate his own theses, but also and above all because, on a practical level, moral reason teaches us, from inside our soul, the true love of God:

true piety and even true felicity consist in the love of God, but a love so enlightened that its fervour is attended by insight. This kind of love begets that pleasure in good actions which gives relief to virtue, and, relating all to God as to the centre, transports the human to the divine. For in doing one' s duty, in obeying reason, one carries out the orders of Supreme Reason.[167]

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[167] *T* 27/51 f.

CONCLUSION

1. *The Theodicy of Leibniz*

The reason principle, then, lies at the centre of Leibniz's philosophy. It also constitutes the foundation and source of coherence for his theodicy. It is the ultimate principle, not demonstrated because it is the basis for all demonstrations. It is not a simple postulate, introduced by reason to make the world intelligible, but the principle behind reason itself. And as "the linking together of truths," the reason principle is authorised to play its critical role. Moreover, the reason principle originates in God. God's reason lies in his choice of being over non-being and his creative intention to bring into being the best of all possible worlds. Herein lies the reason for the universe and for mankind. This conception of a "founded" reason in no way represents a pre-modern characteristic of Leibniz's philosophy, a limitation to his thought. On the contrary, giving the lie to certain overly reductive interpretations, which would have it that modern reason is detached from any transcendent principle, from any religious inspiration, Leibniz's philosophy shows us that in modernity there is also a rationalist thought which, whilst participating in the most radical and bold innovations, nonetheless maintains a continuity with tradition. Leibnizian reason is modern because it is a form of critical reason. It does not in any way forsake critical rigour. Indeed, it is, in some ways, far more profoundly rigorous than cartesian reason, at least in its rejection of evidence as the ultimate criterion for truth. There is no subject which Leibniz is afraid to approach critically, not out of some fervent iconoclasm, but rather as a consequence of his faith in his own approach and the validity of his own methods. As we have seen, Leibniz even calls into discussion the great philosophical dogma of the identity of being with good, not so as to dismantle it, but rather that it might be re-established on new bases. Neither does the fact that Leibnizian reason is "founded" in God in no way limits its autonomy. Rather, the full theoretical and practical autonomy of Leibnizian reason is legitimised through its correlation with its ontological foundation in God, to the extent that it can be seen to act as a filter for faith.

Hence, Leibniz's theodicy is built up on these foundations essentially as an *a priori theodicy*. This does not mean that reason is able to justify the existence of evil *a priori*, nor because it is capable of demostrating the existence of a good, wise and powerful God apodictically (even though it is able to proceed a fair way in this direction). Its apriority runs deeper. It lies in the fact that reason finds its guarantee of the sense of the world in its own meaning and validity: in that One, who is the "root of all things" and "communicates himself" to man in reason. Kant's conviction that to defend God is to defend reason finds a notable precedent in Leibniz. To justify reason with reference to God and to justify God through recourse to reason are both useful

exercises which we are duty-bound to pursue as a consequence of this profound relationship between the case for God and the case for reason.

This by no means implies an identification of God with reason. God's transcendence is guaranteed, in Leibniz, not so much by his "difference" or "alterity" as by his "communication of himself," which is the free and disinterested action of God. His transcendence consists in his "gift" to us. Besides, this difference is also preserved by "mystery." Theodicy cannot subsist without enduring mystery. The *critical* role of reason, which, on the basis of its *pure* comprehension of truths *judges* appearances, is possible and always actual because appearances, in the economy of the finite world, do not coincide with truth. Since appearances are not always faithful images of truth, *mystery* is the truth which belies appearances and *reason* is the comprehension of the truth which judges appearances.

Thus the reason principle illuminates and governs the metaphysical foundations on which theodicy rests. It lies behind the principle of the best, on the basis of which it is possible to uphold the order of the world and deny, not evil, but rather any assertion that evil constitutes an antagonistic principle opposed to, or even stronger than this order. It dictates the principle of hypothetical and moral necessity, whereby, in the interpretation of the cosmos and history, it is possible to avoid falling into the deadly quandary between absolute necessity and casual arbitrarism, upholding instead the rational determination, certain yet free, not only of individual contingencies through hypothetical necessity, but also of the contingency of the whole, through moral necessity, and of possibles.

On these foundations, and on them alone, does *a posteriori theodicy* also find a place and a certain legitimacy in Leibnizian thought. Traditional philosophical apologetics also find in Leibniz, neither an acritical embrace nor a drastic refutation, but rather a critical mode of adoption. This becomes manifest, not so much in the discussion of the single arguments (hence, the fact that, in the *Theodicy*, Leibniz places himself in direct dialogue with Bayle, at the same time as giving voice to all his objections to the traditional arguments, also results in this discussion), as, above all, in the framing of these apologetic arguments within the more fundamental arguments of *a priori theodicy*, which bring to light both their superfluous character and their argumentative inadequacy.

2.   *Philosophical Theodicy*

This brings us back to the theme of mystery. Apologetic arguments may prove relatively useful in the discussion of objections against God's justice, but they cannot, in themselves, constitute a convincing theodicy. This is because appearance is often contrary to truth and, as a consequence, in interpreting appearances it is necessary that truth is never fully reconciled with appearance but rather stands in a critical relation thereto. Herein lies the rational acknowledgement of mystery.

The real distinction between Leibniz's sincerely religious theodicy and the secularised theodicies lies in this very acknowledgement of mystery. At a first and

superficial glimpse, it might appear that the thesis of the impossibility and necessity of theodicy developed in the present study concludes in a manner identical with the sceptical stance of Odo Marquard, as quoted in the *Introduction*.[1] Indeed, in conclusion to and justification of his scrutiny of theodicy, Marquard writes:

> It is only an apparent paradox that a sceptic such as myself should refer to theodicy, to an exemplary metaphysical onus. Metaphysics is that branch of knowledge which faces problems which it can never fully resolve. Theodicy is a perfect example of metaphysics in this sense […]. For them [the sceptics], incapability to resolve a given problem is not to be conceived of as a kind of enemy, but rather as an element proper to our humanity […]. With regard to certain problems, it would be anti-human, and thus an error in the art of living, to do without them, whilst it would be ultra-human, and thus an error in the art of living, to resolve them. Metaphysics is the sceptical art of not incurring these errors.[2]

Are we, then, to assume that Marquard and I draw the same conclusions regarding the impossibility and necessity of theodicy? From a certain point of view, this is certainly true, but with opposite outcomes, stemming from the fact that the one does not recognise mystery, whilst the other does. While, in the former case, the lack of exhaustive and definitive responses results in scepticism, in the other, the same lack results in faith. In the former case, there is a sense of enigma, a doubt that there is no truth, no meaning, behind appearances. In the latter, there is a sense of mystery, a certainty of the existence of truth, even where it is not fully transparent, a certainty of which the reason's judgement of appearances is at once a consequence and a guarantee, and a faithful hope in the sense of things, even in the face of events which seem to make a mockery of any such idea. In the former case, inability to justify appearances leads to an abandonment of faith in truth, whilst in the other, it leads to the critical judgement of appearances in the light of truth. The difference – indeed, the true antithesis – between the two positions, which, at a first glance, may be concealed on the theoretical plane, is instead most immediately evident in its practical consequences, in the "art of living" to which Marquard refers. The former road, thus, also leads to scepticism on a practical level, the other to "true piety," in which the "light" is guide to "virtue," i.e. to that art of living whereby "one is content with what comes to pass" and commit ourselves to bringing about God's will "by doing that which appears most in accord with his commands".[3] It is interesting to note that the renowned concluding words of Voltaire's *Candide* – "let us cultivate our garden,"[4] had already been written by Leibniz! Yet the context and significance of the phrase in the two cases could not be further removed or more different. In Voltaire's case, they

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[1] Cf. above, *Introduction*, § 2.

[2] O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., pp. 28 f.

[3] Cf. *T* 28/52.

[4] Cf. VOLTAIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

mark the final surrender of Candide to scepticism and detachment.[5] In the case of Leibniz, instead, they represent the motto which encapsulates the serene faith and full-fledged endeavour of hope – the "true piety" itself. In the *Systema Theologicum,* he writes:

> Indeed, those who harbour such sentiments, rooted in the depths of their souls, and express them in their lives, never murmur against the divine will, as they know that things must turn out well for those who love God. And just as they are content for their past, so they seek, for the future, to act in a manner congruent with what they presume to be the will of God. This, then, with its promise of rewards and punishments, requires that each individual look well to that which is down to him (*ut quisque Spartam suam ornet*), that, like the first men, we "each cultivate the garden in which we are collocated" (*hortum in quo collocatus est, colat*). In imitation of divine goodness, we must spread our goodness all around us and, above all, to every individual who crosses our path, inasmuch as he is our neighbour, without violating just proportions (*proportione justitiae servata*), since, of all the creatures we come across, none is more important than man, and no perfection is more loved by God than that of man.[6]

True theodicy, by which I mean philosophical theodicy, may have a role to play on the theoretical plane, but its most significant role, the context to which it must make its most immediate reference, is the practical. From this point of view, Kant takes a decisive step forward from theodicy when, in the already-cited essay with the despairing title, *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*, he suggests the path of practical reason as the "authentic theodicy." After Kant, the same project is again taken up by Hermann Cohen, developing the idea of practical

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[5] That this is the meaning of the closing phrase in *Candide* is made abundantly clear by the arguments of the dervish and the old man which lead up to it. Famously, just before Candide and Pangloss' final dialogue, which concludes with Candide's bitter maxim, they encounter a Dervish:

"'With what meddlest thou?' said the Dervish; 'is it thy business?'

'But, reverend father,' said Candide, 'there is horrible evil in this world.'

'What signifies it,' said the Dervish, 'whether there be evil or good? When his highness sends a ship to Egypt, does he trouble his head whether the mice on board are at their ease or not?'

'What, then, must we do?' said Pangloss.

'Hold your tongue,' answered the Dervish.

'I was in hopes, said Pangloss, 'that I should reason with you a little about causes and effects, about the best of possible worlds, the origin of evil, the nature of the soul, and the pre-established harmony.'

At these words, the Dervish shut the door in their faces." (*ibi*, pp. 164 f.).

After the Dervish, they meet a "good old man" who, among other things, remarks: "I presume in general that they who meddle with the administration of public affairs die sometimes miserably, and that they deserve it; but I never trouble my head about what is transacting at Constantinople; I content myself with sending there for sale the fruits of the garden which I cultivate" (*ibi*, pp. 165 f.).

[6] *TS* 5; *italics mine*.

theodicy as historical theodicy, founded on the vicarious value of suffering.[7] That such developments might be possible, it was necessary that there be first developed, on the transcendental plane, the analytics and dialectics of pure practical reason. Before Kant, then, we cannot find mature developments of philosophical theodicy in this sense. Nonetheless Leibniz in some important ways foreshadows, certainly not the transcendental method, since Leibniz's thought is still entirely referred to ontology, but the clear and decisive orientation of theodicy towards the practical dimension. The importance attributed to virtue as a component of true piety, the polemics against quietism, the greater attention paid to human volition than to the will as a psychological faculty, and the pre-eminence attributed to goodness and wisdom amongst the divine attributes are all signs of this orientation. But what is more important than all these themes and lies at the foundation of them all is the originary nature and the primacy which Leibniz attributes to the reason principle. From this primacy derives his interpretation of reality and of the meaning of the cosmos and history, not as resulting from a blind analytical calculation (in the modern day sense of the term), reducible to the sole principle of identity and non-contradiction, but rather as the result of a teleologically oriented calculation, founded first of all on the free choice on God's part of being over nothing and, secondly, of the best. Divine goodness and wisdom are the principle (i.e. the origin, end and method) of the rational order. Reason, in God, is his essence oriented towards reality, understood as intrinsically connected to the good. In this sense, God's reason is at once theoretical and practical. And in "communicating" his own reason to mankind, God thereby also communicated his goodness. In this sense, also human reason, although different from divine reason as a consequence of its finite nature, combines theory and practice in such a way that they are unseverable.

## 3.	Theodicy

Philosophical theodicy, then, is unable, as is any other kind of theodicy, to justify evil, explaining its meaning. From this point of view, philosophical theodicy, like every theodicy, is *impossible*. This is not because of any contingent defect on its part, due to its as yet undeveloped state (in which case impossibility might be overcome with the future evolution of philosophy), nor is it due to any methodological inadequacy (in which case impossibility might be avoided trough recourse to non-philosophical methods). It is impossible because, effectively, evil is senseless and unjustifiable. Thus philosophical theodicy, not only cannot justify evil, but were it to try to do so would itself become illegitimate and false, both from the point of view of faith and from that of philosophy.

Nonetheless, philosophical theodicy is also *necessary*, just like all other legitimate theodicies. This is because, first of all, as I wrote in the *Introduction*, as

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[7] Cf. my article, entitled *Teodicea autentica e teodicea storica. Kant e Cohen*, in "Studi Kantiani", V (1992), pp. 71-89.

long as there are those who level accusations against God's justice, believers will find themselves duty-bound to respond to these accusations, out of loyalty to God, to mankind and to the accusers themselves. This is true for any kind of theodicy, irrespective of its level and of the methods adopted by the prosecution and the defence. Secondly, it is because, of the accusations levelled against God's justice, a number are of a rational and philosophical character and, consequently, the counsel for the defence must be prepared to engage the prosecution on this plane: hence, the necessity for a philosophical theodicy.

There is, however, also a third and even more important reason why theodicy must necessarily also be philosophical. According to Ricoeur, who also acknowledges the same necessity, although, to his mind, philosophy must respond thereto in a manner diverse to Leibniz's ontological-systematic method, asserts that only thought can clearly bring out the non-sense of evil, uncovering the aporetical nature of thought on evil:

> Does not wisdom perhaps consist in acknowledging the *aporetic* character of thought on evil, an aporetic character overcome through the very endeavour to think more intensely and do otherwise?[8]

On a similar note, Melchiorre also insists on the contradictory character of evil[9] and in the function of thought on evil in revealing this contradiction in its own *aporia*.[10] To my mind, Leibniz's theodicy puts forward a subtle but significant correction to this approach – a correction which attributes an irreplaceable value to philosophical theodicy. It demonstrates how the contradictory nature of evil with regard to good, its non-sense, the fact that it is "inconvenient" (in kantian terms "*zweckwidrig*"), mean that it is not on the same plane as good, with its truth and meaning. Once again, the notion ot "mystery" *as a philosophical category* proves crucially important. The distinction between *truth* and *appearance* permits a *rational* consideration of evil at the level of appearance, since evil does not stem from an *a priori* principle, and therefore makes possible an *a priori* critique of evil, rather than just an "empirical description."[11] Philosophical thought on evil, then, is not aporetic, if it constitutes the rational acceptance of mystery, i.e. of the critical judgement of truth over appearance. It seems to me that, in a certain sense, Melchiorre, too, recognises this critical primacy of truth and the good:

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[8] P. RICOEUR, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

[9] V. MELCHIORRE, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

[10] *Ibi*, p. 119.

[11] Cf. P. RICOEUR, *Philosophie de la volonté. Le volontaire et l'involontaire*, Aubier, Paris 1950, p. 27.

> The impossibility of inscribing the reality of evil into the absoluteness of the Being leads to an insurmountable ontological difference[12]

What we need to add to this is that this "ontological difference" is beyond reason but not counter to it and that, indeed, reason is itself able to indicate and uphold it: herein lies the aim of *a priori* theodicy.

At this point, and only at this point, can theodicy fully realise itself as practical theodicy, in the direction called for by Ricoeur and Melchiorre.[13] In so doing, it does not, however, open an insurmountable rift between rational *aporia* and the practical response (thereby running the risk of slipping into a new form of fideism). Instead, it presents moral commitment to the struggle against evil as the coherent continuation of faith in mystery, i.e. in the judgement of truth over appearance, through the reflection of pure practical reason.

In this way, theodicy will not overcome the impossibility of "comprehending" evil, but it does make it possible to actively "uphold" good. It thus bears witness to faith and hope. Hence, like the theodicy of Job (another *a priori* theodicy, although not of a philosophical character)[14] and unlike the theodicies of Job's friends (which are illegitimate because they depend on *a posteriori* arguments alone), it does not in itself resolve the enigmas faced, but may be recognised and assumed by God, who

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[12] V. MELCHIORRE, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

[13] "To this *aporia* are action and spirituality called to answer, that they might provide, not a solution, but a *response* whereby the *aporia* might become fruitful, i.e. lead to the thought's continuing activity in the key of acting and feeling [...]. With regard to action, evil is, first of all, that which should not be in existence but must be fought. In this sense, action reverses the perspective. Under the ensign of myth, speculative thought is pulled back towards the origin: *from whence* does evil come? it asks. The answer – not the solution – of action is: what can we do *against* evil? Our eyes are thus turned to the future, with the idea of a task to perform replacing that of an origin to discover" (P. RICOEUR, *Le mal. Un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie*, cit., p. 39), "Suffering is an outrage only to those who see God as the source of all that is good in creation, including indignation against evil, courage in withstanding it and sympathy for its victims. Now we believe in God *in spite of* evil" (*ibi*, p. 420). "The irrationality of evil and the correct transcendence of the absolute Logos had denied our access to an 'argumentative theodicy.' Although the transcendental force of the Being implied the possibility of a judgement and a overcoming of evil, the *how* or the 'sense' of this relation remained beyond the reach of our exploration. In the wake of this impossibility we shifted our attention to the ethical decision in which, in some way, 'the work of God' remains manifest" (V. MELCHIORRE, *op. cit.*, p. 128).

[14] A reading of the Book of Job as a theodicy might, at first sight, seem groundless, or at least debatable, to readers more used, at least on the basis of contemporary philosophy, to considering Job as the very paradigm for the refutation of any form of theodicy. As I cannot possibly present an adequate justification for this notion here, I will refer such readers, at least provisionally, to the authority of Kant (cf. I. KANT, *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee*, Akademie Ausgabe, vol. 8, pp. 265 ff.; Eng. trans. cit., pp. 25 f.). See also my book *Avranno fine le parole vane? Una lettura del Libro di Giobbe*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1998; Apogeo, Milano 2005[2].

alone can provide full justification of his own sanctity and justice, when he finally reveals himself and we see him "face to face."

APPENDICES

ORIGINAL ITALIAN EDITIONS

APPENDIX ONE: *La metafora dei "due labirinti" e le sue implicazioni nel pensiero di Leibniz*, in "Filosofia", XLI (1990), n.1, pp.13-62.

APPENDIX TWO: *Le ragioni della ragione secondo Leibniz*, in AA.VV., *Filosofia della rivelazione*, a cura di Marco M. Olivetti, [Biblioteca dell' "Archivio di Filosofia", vol.11], CEDAM, Padova 1994, pp. 221-231.

APPENDIX THREE: *Dall'ontologia all'etica: Leibniz contro Eckhard*, in AA.VV., *Philosophie de la religion entre éthique et ontologie*, [Biblioteca dell' "Archivio di Filosofia", vol.14], a cura di M.M. Olivetti, CEDAM, Padova 1996, pp.623-631.

APPENDIX FOUR: *La necessità morale in Leibniz*, in "Paradigmi", XVII (1999), n.51, pp.473-490.

APPENDIX ONE

THE METAPHOR OF THE "TWO LABYRINTHS" AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN LEIBNIZ'S THOUGHT

1.   The Metaphor and its Meaning

In a famous passage from the *Preface* to the *Theodicy*, Leibniz writes:

> There are two famous labyrinths where our reason very often goes astray: one concerns the great question of the Free and the Necessary, above all in the production and the origin of Evil; the other consists in the discussion of continuity and of the indivisibles which appear to be the elements thereof, and where the consideration of the infinite must enter in.[1]

It would certainly be possible to limit ourselves to appreciating the "labyrinth" image, as one should with any good metaphor, before passing beyond it. However, we might also dwell on the metaphor itself, seeking to understand its meaning and analyse its implications. This second approach seems more justified to me, inasmuch as the metaphor is anything but episodic, recurring insistently throughout the *Theodicy* and throughout Leibniz's work in general. It would also appear particularly worthwhile, inasmuch as it opens the way for a comparative analysis of Leibniz's scientific and theological thought, which, to my mind, will yield interesting results.

Leibniz uses the "two labyrinths" metaphor again in §§ 24 and 25 of his *Preliminary Dissertation*.[2] He refers implicitly thereto in §§ 5 and 68-70 of the same section,[3] in § 8 of *Part One*[4] and in § 242 of *Part Three*.[5] In § 384 of *Part Three* he refers again to the labyrinth of the continuum.[6] In § 48 of *Part One*,[7] in § 292[8] and in

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[1] *T* 29/53.

[2] Cf. *T* 65/112 f.

[3] Cf. *T* 52, 88 ff./97, 139 ff.

[4] Cf. *T* 107/160.

[5] Cf. *T* 261 f./331 f.

[6] Cf. *T* 343/420.

[7] Cf. *T* 129/185.

[8] Cf. *T* 290/363.

§ 367[9] of *Part Three* he refers to the labyrinth of predestination, and in § 406 of the same section[10] he makes a further, implicit reference thereto.

As we can see, this is no impromptu metaphorical flourish. It is rather a figure which has been intentionally and accurately selected. Here were many other terms from which Leibniz could have chosen: problem, enigma, mystery, etc. Indeed, he frequently does deploy these other terms elsewhere. However, for issues related to continuity and predestination, he intentionally uses the term "labyrinth." Further, he groups these two matters together with the figure of the "two labyrinths," thus specifically indicating that they share the same essential character.

Leibniz also develops this metaphor, albeit only minimally. One improper development is the figure of the "labyrinth whence there is absolutely no means of egress",[11] used in reference to the improper formulation of the question of God's freedom in terms of indifference of equipoise. Another development consists in referring to the human mind as an "unhappy Daedalus",[12] who has himself built the labyrinth of predestination in which he is now imprisoned, but from which he will be able to free himself with the wings of true wisdom.[13] The most interesting development, however, is that of the "thread," leading out of the labyrinth.[14] Not only is this image of Ariadne's thread recurrent throughout Leibniz's *oeuvre*, as we shall see, but it also reveals an important significance of the labyrinth metaphor, as used by Leibniz. In §§ 24 and 25 of the *Preliminary Dissertation*,[15] Leibniz takes issue with Bayle's grouping together of the theological doctrine of predestination and the philosophical doctrine of the composition of the *continuum* as two truths subject to insoluble objections. Bayle, famously, presented this argument as a justification for fideism as the only possible approach to theodical issues. It is on precisely this point that Leibniz argues against Bayle. He, too, adopts the labyrinth metaphor, sometimes used by Bayle[16] in accordance with its common usage – i.e. in the sense of a problem so intricate that there is no way out of it – only to transform it by adapting it to his own position:

> He [Bayle] believes that the theological doctrine of predestination is of this nature, and in philosophy that of the composition of the *Continuum*. These are, indeed, the two labyrinths

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[9] Cf. *T* 333/408.

[10] Cf. *T* 358/432.

[11] *T* 129/149.

[12] *T* 333/345.

[13] Cf. *ibidem*.

[14] Cf. *T* 65/89.

[15] Cf. *T* 64 f./88 f.

[16] Cf., for example, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1740⁵), entry on "*Rorarius*", note L, p. 86.

which have ever exercised theologians and philosophers [...]. As for me, I confess that I cannot agree with those who maintain that a truth can admit of irrefutable objections.[17]

The two labyrinths also appear side by side elsewhere in Leibniz's oeuvre. For example, in the *Discourse on Metaphysics,* we find the following:

just as a geometer does not need to burden his mind with the famous labyrinth of the composition of the continuum, there is no need for any moral philosopher and even less need for a jurist or statesman to trouble himself with the great difficulties involved in reconciling free will and God's providence.[18]

Elsewhere, too, Leibniz writes:

Since my adolescence I have concerned myself with the matter of freedom, contingency, fate and predestination in all its various aspects. It seemed to me that I found a thread through this labyrinth once I revealed the root of contingency, whose metaphysical notion has some analogy with the geometrical nature of the incommensurables.[19]

The analogy to which Leibniz refers is explained in a text which probably predates that just quoted by quite a few years: the *Vindicatio justitiae divinae et libertatis humanae, sumta ex consideratione ideae integrae quam Deus de re creabili habet*:

There are two labyrinths, famous for their misdirections: one has been the particular torment of theologians, the other of philosophers. The former regards freedom, the latter the composition of the continuum. This means that, while the former regards the intimate nature of the mind, the latter concerns the body. Nonetheless, just as we can be geometers and physicists even if we do not consider whether the line be composed of points, since we instead assume indivisible quantities so small that any error which can arise therefrom is less than that arising from a given quantity, or, rather, will be as small as we want it to be, just so, we can legitimately satisfy the demands of theological truth even if we do not acknowledge the way in which things and their actions depend on God and on each other reciprocally, since we, instead of the actual things themselves, assume the integral notions of possibles, i.e. their ideas, which, undeniably, are present in the divine Mind before any decree of the divine will or the existence of anything.[20]

More interesting yet is another brief text bearing the title *De libertate*,[21] in which Leibniz deals with the issue of freedom and predestination, of contingency and necessity, posited as a universally valid principle, for all the (affirmative) necessary and contingent propositions. Given

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[17] *T* 65/89.

[18] *GP IV* 435; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 43.

[19] *GRUA* 457.

[20] *GRUA* 371.

[21] *FdCNL* 178 ff.; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 94 ff.

that the predicate is in the subject, that is, that the notion of the predicate is involved *somehow* (*aliqua ratione*) in the notion of the subject,[22]

he seeks to tackle the difficulties connected to the application of this absolute principle of truth to contingent propositions by arguing that,

if the notion of the predicate is in the notion of the subject at a given time, then how could the subject lack the predicate without contradiction and impossibility, and without changing that notion?[23]

At this point, significantly, the metaphor of the two labyrinths emerges as a "new and unexpected light:"

At last a certain new and unexpected light shined from where I least expected it, namely, from mathematical considerations on the nature of infinity. For there are two labyrinths of the human mind, one concerning the composition of the continuum, and the other concerning the nature of freedom, *and they arise from the same source, infinity*.[24]

Leibniz thus draws the analogy between the certain, although non-demonstrative, scientific knowledge which mankind can have of the continuum and the equally certain and non-demonstrative knowledge which God has of contingency, concluding:

just as incommensurable propositions are treated in the science of geometry, and we even have proofs about infinite series, so to a much greater extent, contingent or infinite truths are subordinate to God's knowledge, and are known by him not, indeed, through demonstration (which would imply a contradiction) but through his infallible intuition (*visio*).[25]

The consideration of the use of this metaphor in the overall context of Leibniz's oeuvre and, more generally, in the philosophical and scientific literature of the modern age, will prove useful in further clarifying Leibniz's conceptual process.[26]

Leibniz was not the first to use the term "labyrinth" with reference to problems connected to the doctrines of the continuum and to that of predestination. There are precedents in both cases, but with one significant difference. For mathematical and physical problems pertaining to the continuum, the use of the term "labyrinth" was already widespread – one might even say, had already been firmly established –

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[22] *Ibi*, 179; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 95; *italics mine*.

[23] *Ibidem*.

[24] *Ibi*, 179 f.; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 95; *italics mine*.

[25] *Ibi*, 184; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 97.

[26] Cf. for further indications, in addition to those which will appear in the following pages, G. GRUA, *Jurisprudence universelle et Théodicée selon Leibniz*, cit., pp. 468 ff.

before Leibniz. Galilei and Cavalieri had already referred to the "obscure labyrinths" of the indivisibles,[27] and Leibniz himself uses the term "labyrinth of the continuum" with reference to physical[28] and mathematical issues.[29]

Far rarer, instead, prior to Leibniz, is the use of this expression to indicate problems connected to the doctrine of predestination. Apart from its, already cited, occasional use in Bayle, it also appears in the work of Ochino,[30] to which Leibniz himself refers.[31] Besides these, I do not believe that even the most exhaustive of bibliographical studies would reveal many other instances (as, indeed, the above-quoted passage from the Grua edition, which is, generally speaking, very thorough, demonstrates).

On the connection of the two issues by means of the shared metaphor of the "labyrinth," Leibniz only cites the work of Libert Fromond, *Labyrinthus sive de compositione continui*.[32]

It would appear, then, that at Leibniz's time and for Leibniz himself, the labyrinth metaphor was already widely established and accepted as a representation of the continuum, to the extent that it often came to be considered a characteristic form of expression. With regard to predestination, instead, it was rare and unusual. This leads us to infer that Leibniz was operating on a precise philosophical agenda: namely, having identified various characteristics of the issue of predestination which rendered it similar to that of the continuum (as also suggested in the above quoted passage from the *De libertate* on the "new and unexpected light"), he drew inspiration from the method used to resolve the latter conundrum ("Ariadne's thread") in order to seek out a fitting resolution to the former. This is not to say that exactly the same method ("thread") can be deployed, since we are not here concerned with the same problem ("labyrinth"). Nonetheless, the similarity of the two labyrinths leads us to seek out a "thread" which we can follow out of the labyrinth of predestination, like that which has already led us out of the labyrinth of the continuum (and here Leibniz was thinking above all of the *ars combinatoria*, of the

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[27] Cf. G. GALILEI, *Discorsi e dimostrazioni matematiche intorno a due nuove scienze, Giornata I,* in IDEM, *Opere,* vol. VIII, Barbera, Firenze 1968, p. 77; B. CAVALIERI, *Geometria degli indivisibili,* Appendix Two: *La polemica con Guldino,* ed. Lucio Lombardi-Radice, UTET, Torino 1966, p. 314; also cited in G. GIORELLO, *Lo spettro e il libertino. Teologia, matematica, libero pensiero,* Mondadori, Milano 1985, pp. 132, 156, where the topic is discussed extensively.

[28] Cf. *GP II* 379; *IV* 491 (Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 146); *VII* 467; *GRUA* 42.

[29] Cf. *GM VII* 17, 49, 50.

[30] *Prediche… nomate Laberinti del libero ver servo Arbitrio, Prescienza, Predestinatione, & Libertà divina e del modo per uscirne,* Basel, s.d. (1561?), translated into Latin with the title: *Labyrinthi hoc est, De libero aut servo arbitrio, de divina praenotione, destinatione, & libertate. Et quonam pacto sit ex hijs Labyrinthis exeundum,* Basel, s.d. (1561?).

[31] Cf. *T* 65/89.

[32] Cf. *T* 65/89. The work of Fromond was published in Antwerp in 1631.

ars inveniendi, and of the *mathesis universalis* and of the *characteristica generalis*;[33] and subsequently, more precisely, of infinitesimal analysis):[34]

> One day, God willing […] I will bring together all my most abstract philosophical considerations, especially if I have time to develop my *Theodicy*, in which I hope to present the core issues *de fato et contingentia, gratia et libertate, et jure Dei,* and to demonstrate how even mathematics, albeit in an analogical manner, can help us to approach such matters, in the sense that we thereby attain to more precise notions of things.[35]

Leibniz here, then, posits an analogy between the issues pertaining to the fields of the continuum and of predestination, understanding this latter as the issue of the relationship between determination and contingency and between necessity and freedom. We must, then, verify this hypothesis in Leibniz's mathematical writings and consider how it may be analogically transposed in reference to the issues of the *Theodicy*.

When Leibniz exemplifies the analogy between the labyrinth of predestination and the labyrinth of the continuum, he refers above all, as we have already seen in the passages above cited, either to the mathematical example of incommensurable qualities, i.e. of irrational numbers, or to the physical example of the infinite divisibility of space and time. It is well-known that in both fields – the mathematical and the physical – the veritable revolution enacted by Leibniz has its foundations in the formulation of the continuity principle, which lies at the basis of both Leibniz's infinitesimal analysis and his dynamics. What is interesting to note and analyse here is Leibniz's awareness that the continuity principle and the new mathematical and physical sciences which are built up on this foundation, effectively represent an "overthrow"[36] of the traditional approaches and a genuine innovation, the fruits of which go well beyond the resolution of the problem of incommensurable magnitudes or of the ancient zenonian antinomies. Indeed, on the basis of the continuity principle, mathematical or physical magnitude is no longer considered as a whole made up of an infinite number of "indivisible" parts. It is rather considered the "integral" of a continuous process, whose increases are considered as infinitely small, and therefore not as infinite determined magnitudes, but rather as infinite indeterminate differences. The way is thus paved for the consideration of mathematical and physical magnitudes as being precisely determinable through the calculus of the indeterminate.

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[33] Cf. *GM I* 181; *VII* 16 f., 49 f.

[34] Cf. *GM IV* 25; *VII* 326, 359; *FdCNL* 151, 411.

[35] *GM VII* 389.

[36] *T* 29/54.

2. *Geometric and Mechanical Curves*.

In the *Theoria motus abstracti* (1670) we come across the following definition:

> There is a triple construction: *geometric,* i.e. imaginary, but exact; *mechanical,* , i.e. real but not exact; and *physical*, i.e. real and exact. Geometric construction contains the ways in which bodies can be constructed, although often by God alone, provided, obviously that they are not understood in a contradictory manner, as if the circle were to result from flexion of the straight line along the minima. Mechanic construction contains our own methods of construction. Physical construction, instead, contains the ways in which nature produces things, i.e. those produced by the bodies themselves.[37]

Mechanics is therefore a constructive method which is real, but not exact.

A similar definition of "*mechanismus*" appears in the *De vera proportione circuli ad quadratum circumscriptum in numeris rationalibus expressa* (1682):

> I refer to quadrature by means of precise (*accuratum*) calculus as analytic, and to that which occurs through precise construction as *geometric*. Through a near exact calculation we obtain to an *approximation*, while through a near exact construction, we attain to a *mechanism*.[38]

Here, however, Leibniz passes beyond this traditional definition and, in the lines which follow, asserts the possibility of an exact and therefore geometric calculus and construction for the so-called "mechanical" curves, too – i.e. for "transcendent" curves, which, "although not algebraic and not reducible to algebraic equations, i.e. to equations of a certain degree," nonetheless "have their own [equations] which, although not algebraic, are nonetheless analytic".[39] Leibniz was enables to progress to the possibility of an exact calculus of mechanical curves by means of infinitesimal analysis, founded on the continuity principle.

We will do well, at this point, to take a step back, not in order to reconstruct the whole long and well-known history of the difference between "geometric" and "mechanical curves," but simply to foreground various moments of that history which are essential for our understanding of the matter at hand.

It is well-known that, since antiquity, lines which could be constructed with a rule and a compass alone were termed "geometric," while all the other lines, including conic curves (with the obvious exception of the circle), although extensively studied, were considered mechanical, inasmuch as they could only be constructed through complex and therefore less exact procedures. The difference between "geometric" and "mechanical" thus became synonymous with that between "exact" and "inexact." It is equally well-known that Descartes' *Geometry* revolutionised these science. In the work in question, Descartes calls into discussion the traditional distinction just discussed and extends upon his own revolutionary new

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[37] *GM VI* 74.

[38] *GM V* 119.

[39] *GM V* 119 f.

findings in applying algebra to geometry in such a way as to allow for the exact construction and calculation of a great part of the so-called "mechanical" curves.[40] Descartes posits one sole condition upon which a curve can be considered "geometric" and therefore exactly determined: namely, that

> two or more lines can be moved, one by the other, determining by their intersection other curves.[41]

The hugely extended field of geometric curves was thus defined as follows:

> All points of those curves which we may call 'geometric,' that is, those which admit of precise and exact measurement, must bear a definite relation to all points of a straight line, and that this relation must be expressed by means of a single equation.[42]

"Equation" here is obviously to be taken as referring to algebraic equation. In other words, all the curves whose coordinates are such that there is an algebraic relation between them – whose points, in other words, are algebraically determined, or can be expressed through a determinate algebraic equation – are geometric and therefore exact. Nonetheless, this definition still excludes – and therefore relegates to the status of mechanical, not exactly determined curves – curves such as the spiral and the quadratrix, inasmuch as these are "described by two separate movements whose relation does not admit of exact determination."[43] In other words, it excludes those curves between whose coordinates there is no algebraic relationship, whose points, then, are not all algebraically determined, which can only be expressed through a non-algebraic equation of an indeterminate degree.

It has been necessary to provide such a specifically focused overview of the state of the things at Leibniz's time (if we can refer to a "state" with regard to an issue of such rapid and energetic evolution thanks to the work of the great mathematicians of the 1600s), in order to clearly frame the analysis of the process carried out by Leibniz himself in introducing an entirely new approach to the problem of mechanical curves.

Leibniz's ideal of formulating a *Characteristica generalis,* which would extend certain knowledge to all fields of learning, is well-known.[44] Infinitesimal calculus, in its progressive and multiple developments, was an initial, magnificent realisation of this ideal. One of the results of this method was the possibility to exactly calculate the

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[40] See in this regard G. GIORELLO, *op. cit.,* pp. 161 f.

[41] R. DESCARTES, *Oeuvres*, eds. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, Vrin, Paris 1965, vol. VI, p. 389; Eng. trans. by David E. Smith and Marcia L. Latham, Dover Publications, Inc., New York 1954. p.43.

[42] *Ibi*, p. 392; Eng. trans. cit., p. 48.

[43] *Ibi*, p. 390; Eng. trans. cit., p. 44.

[44] Cf. *GM I* 85 f.

so-called "mechanical curves" and transcendent equations. For this reason and on the basis of these results, Leibniz believed himself to have traced "mechanical" problems, too, back to the field of geometric construction and transcendent equations to the field of analysis, and that his infinitesimal calculus could, in all justice, be called "the analysis of the transcendents" or the "analysis of the infinites." He was so fully confident in his result that he did not even wish to hear any mention of "mechanical curves".[45]

A brief clarification (important from the point of view of our present concern) is nonetheless necessary here if we are to fully comprehend the legitimate pride and consciousness of Leibniz in the enormous value of the step he had taken. It did not simply consist in having reclassified new curves and new equations into the field of exact construction (geometry) and exact calculation (analysis), which had formerly been excluded therefrom. The great innovation of infinitesimal calculus lies in the fact that it made possible the exact calculation of transcendent, and therefore curves and equations of an indeterminate degree. Of the many texts which I might quote on this point, I have here chosen, for its clarity, a passage from a letter from Leibniz to Wallis of 28 May 1697:

> I assume the denomination of Transcendents […] in the sense that I oppose transcendent quantities to the ordinary or algebric. And I call algebraic or ordinary those quantities whose relation to given quantities can be expressed in an algebraic manner, i.e. through equations of a certain degree, first, second, third, etc. In his Geometry, Descartes only accepted quantities of this kind. But I call transcendent all those quantities which transcend any algebric degree. Now, we express these either through infinite values, and in particular through series (indeed, I do not refer to the series themselves as transcendental, but rather to the quantities which must be expressed through them) or through finite equations, and these may be either differential […] or exponential.[46]

And in a *Postscriptum* to the same letter, Leibniz specifies:

> I would add just one thing: that I liked the highly acute Newton's choice of words when he referred to those quantities which Descartes does acute not admit into his *Geometry* as geometrically irrational. But I would distinguish these from the transcendent as one would the genus from the species. Indeed, I consider those quantities which are geometrically irrational as falling into two genera. Some, indeed, are of a determinate but irrational degree. Those whose exponent is a deaf number, such as $^{\sqrt{2}}\sqrt{2}$, or the power of two whose exponent is $1/\sqrt{2}$, and those which I call interscendent, as their degree falls in the interval between rational degrees might indeed be called, in the strictest sense of the term, geometrically (or, if you prefer, algebraically) irrational. The others, in truth, are of an indefinite degree, such as x^y, and these I would call more truly transcendent.[47]

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[45] Cf. *GM II* 188.

[46] *GM IV* 26.

[47] *GM IV* 27 f.; cf. also *GM II* 50; *IV* 479, 506; *V* 248, 259, 264, 278, 294; *VII* 13 f.

Infinitesimal analysis thus, for Leibniz, completed the *Mathesis universalis*, adding to the determination of the finite through the finite the determination of the finite through the infinite:

> *Mathesis universalis* is the science of quantities in general, or rather of the rule for calculating, and, above all, for designating the limits within which something occurs. And since every creature has limits, we might say that, just as metaphysics is the general science of things, so *Mathesis universalis* is the general science of creatures. And it has two parts: the science of the finite (which is presented under the name of algebra and is the first to be dealt with), and the science of the infinite, in which the finite is defined through recourse to the infinite.[48]

This latter part, then consists in a science of the infinite:

> Thus the higher branch of the *Mathesis universalis* is essentially nothing other than the science of the infinite, inasmuch as it is useful for the discovery of finite quantities.[49]

What I intend to underline here, then, is the fact that, through infinitesimal analysis, Leibniz manages to found and develop an exact science of the indeterminate which permits the determination and also the "discovery" (meaning that it also constitutes an *ars inveniendi*) of the finite, but which has as its object the infinite, the indeterminate as such, and is hence distinct from algebra and from algebraic geometry. If, as we have said, on the one hand, Leibniz frequently asserts that he has enlarged the field of geometry to include the study of mechanical curves, on the other, he makes equally frequent distinctions between this new geometry and that of Descartes, as a consequence of this very difference of object and method, adding to the terms "geometry" and "analysis" various specific predicates: "transcendent," "profound" or "most profound," "sublime" or "superior".[50] This new calculus of the infinite has important implications in Leibniz's thought in the physical and metaphysical fields, and is of particular interest for its analogy with the labyrinth of predestination.

3. *Natural and Artificial Machines*

I will not here dwell on the physical implications of infinitesimal analysis, as these are not our concern here. I will simply limit myself to briefly noting a few points which readers may find useful should they choose to explore the matter in any further depth.

One of the main motives behind Leibniz's enquiry into infinitesimal calculus, right from the very beginning, was its applications in the field of physics:

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[48] *GM VII* 53.

[49] *GM VII* 69; cf. also *FdCNL* 149.

[50] Cf., for example *GM I* 168; *II* 54, 170; *III/1* 20, 217; *V* 303; *VII* 52, 68 f., 360.

Hence it is no longer surprising that, once my calculus has been adopted, certain problems can be considered resolved, which there formerly seemed to be scant hope of resolving: especially those regarding the passage from geometry to nature, since it is certainly true that, each time the consideration of the infinite is implied, as it logically is in many operations of nature, the more nature mirrors its Author, the less vulgar geometry is sufficient.[51]

If we take these considerations seriously, we should analyse Leibniz's mechanical interpretation of nature with great care, since, in the light of the abovementioned mathematical considerations, the natural mechanism assumed wholly original connotations in Leibniz. These distinguish Leibniz's conception from the absolutely deterministic so-called newtonian concept, which dominated modern philosophy and science, and constitute its radical difference from cartesianism, in both its spinozan and its occasionalist outcomes.[52]

In this regard, I would here only recall the highly important distinction which Leibniz draws between "natural" and "artificial machines." In § 10 of the *New System of Nature*, Leibniz famously writes:

I am the most readily disposed person to do justice to the moderns, yet I find that they have carried reform too far, among other things, by confusing natural things with artificial things, because they have lacked sufficiently grand ideas of the majesty of nature. They think that the difference between natural machines and ours is only the difference between great and small. Recently this led a very able man, the author of the *Conversations of the Plurality of Worlds*, to assert that when we examine nature more closely we find it less admirable than previously thought and more like the workshop of a craftsman. I believe that this conception does not give us a sufficiently just or worthy idea of nature, and that my system alone allows us to understand the true and immense distance between the least productions and mechanisms of divine wisdom and the greatest masterpieces that derive from the craft of a limited mind; this difference is not simply a difference of degree, but a difference of kind. We must then know that the machines of nature have a truly infinite number of organs, and are so well supplied and so resistant to all accidents that it is not possible to destroy them. A natural machine still remains a machine in its least parts, and moreover, it always remains the same machine that it has been, being merely transformed through the different enfolding it undergoes, sometimes extended, sometimes compressed and concentrated, as it were, when it is thought to have perished.[53]

As we can see, the distinction between the two is clearly defined and its link to infinitesimal analysis, although here unstated, exists and is substantial. In confirmation of this, I will here limit myself to indicating a brief but interesting discussion between Leibniz and Johann Bernoulli, during their 1699 correspondence, in which the comparison of the difference between "geometric" and "mechanical curves" and of that between "artificial" and "natural machines" is explicitly made.

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[51] *GM IV* 26; cf. also *GM II* 21; *III/1* 133; *IV* 488, 504; *V* 305, 307, 308; *VII* 52, 53; *FdCNL* 327.

[52] Cf., for example, *GM VII* 242.

[53] *GP IV* 481 f.; Eng. trans. *Phil Ess*. 141 f.; cf. also *GP IV* 505; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess*. 156. Cf. also the letter from Leibniz to Bossuet of 8/18 April 1692, in *A VII* 314.

The question to which I am here referring constitutes but a marginal episode in the ample and complex exchange between Leibniz and de Volder on mathematical, physical and metaphysical matters, in which Johann Bernoulli participated, not only as an intermediary, but also as an active player.

In his letter to Johann Bernoulli of 1 March 1699,[54] Leibniz, explicitly referring back to § 10 of his *New System of Nature*, quoted above, proposes a parallelism between the difference between confused and distinct perceptions and that between natural and artificial machines. He then immediately extends the parallelism to the difference between a straight line and a curve, specifying:

> There is, however, a difference: that the curve has infinite flexions which are nonetheless subject to a sole finite and distinctly intelligible law, something which could not possibly occur in the machines of nature.[55]

In his reply dated 4 March 1699,[56] Johann Bernoulli expresses his perplexity at Leibniz's first parallelism, since in this way, to his mind, Leibniz would be suggesting that artificial machines are more perfect than natural ones, which would be unacceptable. In his letter of 25 March 1699, he also refutes the difference between natural machines and curves put forward by Leibniz:

> I do not see that a machine of nature, for all that it implies an infinite number of organs, cannot nonetheless be subject to a sole finite law, although that law is unknown to us. For example, one body running against others, which are infinite in number and infinitely small, makes them all move, and the law governing the movement of that body is nonetheless finite. I admit every geometric curve with infinite flexions, which are nonetheless all expressed through a sole finite law, but I deny this for mechanical curves, i.e. for those which are drawn freehand, without observing any exact law.[57]

The two interlocutors rapidly came to an agreement. Leibniz expressed satisfaction that Johann Bernoulli had acknowledged that natural machines, *like mechanical curves*, are not subject to a finite law:

> For those curves which are drawn freehand, things stand much as they do for natural machines – i.e. they cannot be subject to any finite law. Since you have admitted this for free curves, you will see, upon more accurate consideration of the matter, that you must also admit it for natural machines.[58]

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[54] Cf. *GM III/2* 577.

[55] *GM II/2* 577.

[56] Cf. *GM III/2* 580.

[57] *GM III/2* 582.

[58] Letter from Leibniz to Johann Bernoulli, 16 May 1699, in *GM III/2* 583 f.

Johann Bernoulli, for his part, expressed satisfaction that Leibniz had acknowledged that confused perceptions can be unreservedly compared to both natural machines *and mechanical curves*:

> You admit, then, that confused ideas can be compared, not only to natural machines, but also to curves drawn freehand.[59]

The interesting aspect of this brief discussion from our point of view is that it is the consideration of mechanical curves (together with a certain amount of "fair play"!) which permits the two parties to come to an agreement. These are grouped together with natural machines (and opposed, in the one case to geometric curves, in the other to artificial machines) through their shared characteristic of not being subject to any finite law.

Also in the field of physics, then, the principle of continuity the infinitesimal analysis founded thereon permits Leibniz, not only to overcome the zenonian antinomy of the infinite divisibility of space and time, but also to construct a new science of "natural machines" i.e. dynamics.

This also brings us back to the brief text *De libertate*, quoted above, in which necessary and contingent truths are distinguished on the basis of the same criterion:

> Derivative truths are, in turn, of two sorts, for some can be resolved into basic truths, and others, in their resolution, give rise to a series of steps that go to infinity. The former are necessary, the latter contingent.[60]

As we have seen,[61] on the basis of this criterion Leibniz proposed the analogy between infinitesimal calculus and God's certain, but not necessary knowledge of the contingent.

4. *Necessity and Contingency*

It is a fact well-known that Leibniz had the highest hopes for the *Ars combinatoria*, to the extent that he even believed that he could thereby attain to a certain knowledge in the theological field. I will here limit myself to citing one passage from a letter from Leibniz to Oldenburg of 28 December 1675 in which, with reference to the *ars combinatoria,* this hope is, significantly, located within a single agenda, together with the new breakthroughs in mathematics and physics:

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[59] Letter from Johann Bernoulli to Leibniz, 3 June 1699, in *GM III/2* 590.

[60] *FdCNL* 181; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 96.

[61] Cf. *FdCNL* 184 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 96 f.), quoted above.

I cannot express the nature of the thing in just a few words. I would nonetheless dare to say that nothing more effective for the perfection of the human mind can be conceived of; and that when this method of reasoning has been established, the time will come, and soon, too, when we will attain to truths regarding God and his mind no less certain than those which we have of figures and numbers, and in which the inventions of machines will be no more difficult than the construction of geometrical problems. And when these studies have been fully exhausted (there nonetheless remaining the elegant harmonies of infinite theorems, to be observed rather than constructed), mankind will return to the investigation of nature, the only thing which will never be fully within our power.[62]

Infinitesimal analysis appeared to Leibniz a significant first step towards the execution of this plan, also in this sense:

My wish, in which I am not without hope, if others tend towards the same end, is to see geometry reduced to perfect analysis (to aim for the best possible), so that the human race, having resolved this difficulty, will in the future practice its own Mathesis in the study of nature itself and of concrete bodies more fruitfully and enjoyably, recognising therein the divine *Mathesis*. Since if the army of men, armed, so to speak, with the true method were to convert themselves seriously thereto, I have no doubt that great and admirable things would arise one day, to overcome illnesses, to increase quality of life, to know the miracles of GOD, made manifest in nature.[63]

We can then expect to find, as indeed is the case, this agenda put into practice in the *Theodicy*. Moreover, this comes about precisely through the treatment of labyrinth of predestination as an analogue of the labyrinth of the continuum. The key concept for Leibniz, in his discussion of the issue of predestination as one of the relationship between necessity and contingency, is indeed that of "hypothetical" or "moral necessity," set against "absolute necessity." In the wake of what has been said so far, it should be no surprise, but may nonetheless be of interest, that in the *Theodicy* this problem is presented in terms analogous to those considered so far, with regard to the labyrinth of the continuum. Within the statement of the problem,[64] indeed, absolute necessity is referred to as "logical" or "metaphysical," but also as "geometrical." The problem is thus formulated as follows:

I will point out that absolute necessity, which is called also logical and metaphysical and sometimes geometrical, and which would alone be formidable in this connexion, does not exist in free actions, and that thus freedom is exempt not only from constraint but also from real necessity. I will show that God himself, although he always chooses the best, does not act by an absolute necessity, and that the laws of nature laid down by God, founded upon the fitness of things, keep the mean between geometrical truths, absolutely necessary, and arbitrary decrees [...]. Further I will show that there is an indifference in freedom, because there is no absolute necessity for one course or the other; but yet that there is never an indifference of perfect equipoise. And I will demonstrate that there is in free actions a perfect spontaneity beyond all

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[62] *GM I* 86.

[63] *GM V* 272; cf. also *GM VII* 389.

[64] Cf. *T* 37/61.

that has been conceived hitherto. Finally I will make it plain that the hypothetical and the moral necessity which subsist in free actions are open to no objection, and that the 'Lazy Reason' is a pure sophism.

As we can see, the nub of the argument lies in its denial of absolute arbitrariness and in its definition of "hypothetical" or "moral necessity" as a distinct and intermediary concept between geometric necessity and absolute arbitrariness.

A concise definition of these concepts can be found, amongst the numerous relevant passages in the *Theodicy*, in § 367:[65]

> Necessity and possibility, taken metaphysically and strictly, depend solely upon this question, whether the object in itself or that which is opposed to it implies contradiction or not.

Contingency, on the other hand

> is consistent with the inclinations, or reasons which contribute towards causing determination by the will.

We must, therefore

> distinguish clearly between necessity and determination or certainty, between metaphysical necessity, which admits of no choice, presenting only one single object as possible, and moral necessity, which constrains the wisest to choose the best.

Finally, we must eschew

> the chimera of complete indifference, which can only be found in the books of philosophers, and on paper.

Leibniz's statement that the laws of nature, established by God, "keep the mean between geometrical truths, absolutely necessary, and arbitrary decrees," is certainly debatable as an expression. This is not only because of the inadequate image which the expression calls to mind, but also because one of the two extremes between which the physical laws should function, the notion of "arbitrary decrees" passed by God, is absolutely denied by Leibniz, while the other extreme, the "geometrical truths, absolutely necessary," is the only authentic, real alternative to the contingent laws of nature. Nonetheless, in light of what has been said in the previous pages, we can well understand what the intention must have been behind Leibniz's debatable expression: the laws of nature are contingent and nonetheless determinate, since they have as much determination and certainty as geometric truth. Nonetheless, their certainty does not rest on the simple principle of non-contradiction, but on a contingent principle put in place by God – namely, that principle which regulates hypothetical and moral necessity.

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[65] *T* 333/345.

As is well-known, Leibniz locates the principle of identity at the foundation of necessary truths and the reason principle (determinant or sufficient) at the foundation of contingent truths. Without wishing to go into the details of this crucial issue of the relationship between these two principles, which has played a key role in the history of Leibniz scholarship, it will here be enough to note that the identity principle is sufficient for an understanding of necessary truths precisely because of their necessity, which is absolute or geometrical, founded, that is to say, on non-contradiction. If truths of fact, then, can be understood by means of the reason principle, this is because the reality which they express is ordered according to a principle, or a system of principles, distinct from that of non-contradiction. Such a system is not, therefore, necessary, in the sense of "real" necessity,[66] inasmuch as it is perfectly determined, and therefore "necessary" only in an analogical sense.[67] In other words, its necessity is hypothetical.

As far as natural reality is concerned, this system of principles is nothing other than the ensemble of the laws of nature, of which the principle of the conservation of force plays a fundamental role.[68] Now, the fact that this principle was formulated by Leibiz in a direct polemic against Descartes and cartesianism is well known, as is the fact that Leibniz consciously constructed a dynamic conception of nature thereon, distinct from the cartesian mechanical conception and founded on a metaphysical principle.[69] What is less well-known, or has been less emphasised, is the fact that this fundamental difference from cartesian physics was not conceived of by Leibniz as an alternative between a mechanical and a dynamic conception of nature, but rather as a difference between a geometric and a dynamic conception of the natural mechanism:

> And in general the nature of bodies, as far as we know, is subject to mechanical laws. Hence physics, if it does its job, is reduced into mechanics. In turn, mechanics is reduced into geometric equations, *with almost the sole addition of that higher metaphysical principle, which we introduced a while ago, regarding the equality of the full cause and the integral effect*. Geometry itself, finally, may be reduced to calculus, i.e. to our science, whose precepts will be the subject of the present study.[70]

It is certainly true that, also in Leibniz, we often encounter the term "mechanical" used in accordance with the common, cartesian acception. However, in these cases, the acception is nonetheless more qualified inasmuch as it is placed in opposition to the "geometric." For example, in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

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[66] Cf. T 37/61.

[67] Cf. *T* 386/387.

[68] Cf. T 319 ff./332 f.

[69] Cf. *GM VII* 242.

[70] *GM VII* 52; *italics mine. The* work in question, from whose *Preface* the quotation is drawn, is the *Mathesis universalis* (in *GM VII* 49-76).

although all the particular phenomena of nature can be explained mathematically or mechanically by those who understand them, nevertheless the general principles of corporeal nature and of mechanics itself are more metaphysical than geometrical, and belong to some indivisible forms or natures as the causes of appearances, rather then to corporeal mass or extension.[71]

Leibniz elaborates upon the same conception in his *Tentamen Anagogicum: Essay Anagogique dans la recherche des causes*. In this brief essay, Leibniz is in fact seeking to explain, among other things, the need to refer to final causes, in addition to efficient causes, in seeking knowledge of nature. We should not allow ourselves to be misled, however, by the expression "final causes," since it is here used by Leibniz, certainly also in the sense of an intentional design on the part of the divine wisdom,[72] but above all in the sense of an "architectonic" order,[73] opposed to the "geometric",[74] inasmuch as

> geometric determinations introduce an absolute necessity, the contrary of which implies a contradiction, but architectonic determinations introduce only a necessity of choice whose contrary means imperfection.[75]

Leibniz explicitly refers this type of order to differential calculus.[76] It is founded on principles of justice[77] and of continuity.[78] Now, it is true that, in one passage in this essay, Leibniz distinguishes the "realm of power" from the "realm of wisdom," inasmuch as in the former everything can be explained "mechanically" through efficient causes while in the second everything can be explained "architectonically" through final causes. In this case, Leibniz uses the term "mechanical" in accordance with its common usage.[79] Yet we must also note that Leibniz draws this distinction, not to distinguish the field of nature from that of freedom, but to distinguish the

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[71] *GP IV* 444; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 51 f.

[72] Cf. *GP VII* 270, 272, 273, 279 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 477, 478, 479, 484).

[73] Cf. *GP VII* 273, 278, 279 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 479, 484).

[74] Cf. *GP VII* 278 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 484).

[75] *GP VII* 278; Eng. trans *PhPL* 484.

[76] Cf. *GP VII* 270.

[77] Cf. *GP VII* 278 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 484).

[78] Cf. *GP VII* 279 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 484).

[79] See the passage quoted in the following lines (*GP VII* 273 [Eng. trans. *PhPL* 479]). Later on, too, on the same page, with reference to optical problems, Leibniz repeats the term "mechanism" in this sense.

geometric dimension from the architectonic *in nature*. What he is describing, then, is not really two realms, but two methods or orders with coexist in nature, or rather, as Leibniz writes (with a use of the term "mechanism" in accordance in the interpretation presented here) in "natural machines." I quote:

> It is for this reason that I usually say that there are, so to speak, two kingdoms even in corporeal nature, which interpenetrate without confusing or interfering with each other – the realm of power, according to which everything can be explained *mechanically* by efficient causes when we have sufficiently penetrated into its interior, and the realm of wisdom, according to which everything can be explained architectonically, so to speak, or by final causes when we understand its ways sufficiently. In this sense one can say with Lucretius not only that animals see because they have eyes but also that eyes have been given them in order to see, though I know that some people, in order the better to pass as free thinkers, admit only the former. Those who enter into the details of natural machines, however, must have need of a strong bias to resist the attractions of their beauty. Even Galen, after learning something about the function of the parts of animals, was so stirred with admiration that he held that to explain them was essentially to sing hymns to the honor of divinity.[80]

This essay too, then, confirms that the true alternative in interpreting nature is not, for Leibniz, that between mechanics and dynamics, but rather that between "geometric" and "architectonic" mechanics, founded on the continuity principle and defined in accordance with the infinitesimal method:

> The true middle term for satisfying both truth and piety is this: all natural phenomena could be explained mechanically if we understood them well enough, but the principles of mechanics themselves cannot be explained geometrically, since they depend on more sublime principles which show the wisdom of the Author in the order and perfection of his work.[81]

In the *Theodicy,* too, we can find a similar passage, in which the same ambiguous use is made of the term "mechanical." Leibniz does not seem to worry about this ambiguity too much, providing that the different importance which he attributes to the term's two meanings is clear. I am referring to § 403, where Leibniz has no difficulty in referring to souls as "spiritual automata," specifying, by means of this very double meaning of the term "mechanical," that their operation

> is not mechanical, but it contains in the highest degree all that is beautiful in mechanism.[82]

We should also note here the reference to the "beauty" in the mechanism, which also appears in the passage from the *Tentamen Anagogicum* quoted above.

Now, the ultimate principle to which natural laws can be traced back and on which they are founded is that of continuity, as Leibniz explains in § 348 of the *Theodicy*. Herein lies the validity of the dynamic explanation of the natural

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[80] *GP VII* 273; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 478 f.

[81] *GP VII* 272 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 478); cf. *GP VII* 271 f., 278 f. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 478, 484).

[82] *T* 356/365.

mechanism which Leibniz opposes to Descartes' geometric explanation. The continuity principle founds the order of contingent realities. This means that "geometric" necessity is the correlate of the principle of non-contradiction and the continuity principle is the correlate of the reason principle. This correlation is expressed with the utmost clarity in the essay on the *First Truths*:

> Therefore, the predicate or consequent is always in the subject or antecedent, and the nature of truth in general or the connection between the terms of a statement, consists in this very thing, as Aristotle also observed. The connection and inclusion of the predicate in the subject is explicit in identities, but in all other propositions it is implicit and must be shown through the analysis of notions; *a priori* demonstration rests on this.
>
> Moreover, this is true for every affirmative truth, universal or particular, necessary or contingent, and in both an intrinsic and extrinsic denomination. And here lies hidden a wonderful secret, a secret that contains the nature of contingency, that is, the essential difference between necessary and contingent truths, a secret that eliminates the difficulty concerning the fatal necessity of even those things that are free.
>
> Many things of great importance follow from these considerations, considerations insufficiently attended to because of their obviousness. For the received axiom that *nothing is without reason*, or *there is no effect without a cause*, directly follows from these considerations; otherwise there would be a truth which could not be proved *a priori*, that is, a truth which could not be resolved into identities, contrary to the nature of truth, which is always an explicit or implicit identity. It also follows that, when in the givens everything on the one side is the same as it is on the other side, then everything will be the same in the unknowns, that is, in the consequents. This is because no reason can be given for any difference, a reason which certainly must derive from the givens.[83]

This passage is immediately followed by the example of a mechanical postulate of Archimedes.

Physical necessity, then, is founded on hypothetical and moral necessity, not on absolute or geometric necessity, and is expressed through various physical laws, founded on the continuity principle. However, since reality is not reducible to nature, and yet it is entirely contingent, hypothetical or moral necessity is the principle of order for the whole of reality. The continuity principle, in its strictest sense, only concerns mathematics and physics. However, the idea of continuity, not as an enigma but rather, on the contrary, as a principle of explanation, is also valid for metaphysics and theology. The relationship between distinct and confused perceptions in psychology, for example, can only be adequately understood through the continuity principle; such is also the case for the labyrinth of predestination.

Correspondingly, the principle of determinant reason must also be applied in these fields. Not all of the many formulations of this principle are equally felicitous. In particular, perhaps the most famous formulation thereof, which also crops up in the *Theodicy*,[84] lends itself to reductive interpretations:

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[83] *COUT* 518 s.; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 31.

[84] *T* 127/147.

nothing ever comes to pass without there being a cause or at least a reason determining it.

This principle can, in fact, be read as a banal and obvious affirmation that it is always possible to attribute a reason to what happens. Such a reading, however, would be utterly inadequate for a true comprehension. The radical difference between any miscellaneous reason for an event and an event's "determinant reason" would remain intact and would utterly undermine the value of the principle of determinant reason. Euler would have been right to ironies such a principle as this.[85]

Leibniz himself was well aware of this: we need only consider the particular attention which he always paid to the passage in Plato's *Phaedo* (97c-99c), in which Socrates argues against the philosophy of Anaxagoras and ironises its confusion between the obvious individuation of any miscellaneous cause of an event and the individuation of its determinant cause.

Elsewhere, the principle finds more satisfying formulations. That cited above – "nothing is without reason" or "there is no effect without a cause"[86] – is already an improvement, since its very negative form precludes the imprecision of the former expression – *one* "cause," *one* "reason." Better still is the specification of the principle which we find in other formulations, among which I will here cite that which appears in the *Theodicy,* as an example which has many analogies. The reason principle (in this context, Leibniz terms it the principle "of the sufficient reason")

> states that there is no true enunciation whose reason could not be seen by one possessing all the knowledge necessary for its complete understanding.[87]

The expression "one possessing all the knowledge necessary for its complete understanding" is important, because it brings us to understand that the meaning of this principle is not reducible to the obvious platitude that we can always find a reason for everything. Yet neither can it be reduced to the, albeit important, postulation of a rationality of the order of events, on which their causal connection (both efficient and final) is founded. The principle of determinant reason goes beyond this: it affirms that every contingent event is determined, and is therefore comprehensible, only inasmuch as it has its foundations in a *ratio,* i.e. in a general law, which is infinitely complex. In other words, it affirms that the contingent, unlike the necessary, is not determined by an immediate relationship of identity, but rather on the basis of an infinitely mediated relationship of causality, or rather of functionality. That is to say, the contingent order is an infinite series, and that the particular event or substance only has any determinacy and comprehensibility as a function of this infinite series. In Leibniz, therefore, the principle of determinant

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[85] Cf. L. EULER, *Lettres à une princesse d'Allemagne sur divers sujets de Physique & de Philosophie*, Mietau/Lipsia 1770, vol. II, pp. 231 ff.

[86] *COUT* 519; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 31.

[87] *T* 413 f./419.

reason is not a mere heuristic and regulatory postulation. It is rather the logical reference for a metaphysical principle – the continuity principle.

This is the meaning of the reason principle at work, for example, in § 195 of the *Theodicy*, in which Leibniz refutes the objection whereby for every possible world a better one could always be thought of by arguing that a possible world is not a substance, but an infinite series. This is also the principle in the light of which Leibniz refutes another objection (by Bayle), according to which God preferred to create Adam the sinner instead of Adam the innocent, by inserting and justifying the existence of Adam the sinner within the infinite series of the universe.[88]

A brief summary of what has been said so far can be found in the *A Specimen of Discoveries About Marvelous Secrets of Nature*, where Leibniz, with reference to the principle of determinant reason, which he here calls "the principle of rendering reason," states:

> Arithmetic and geometry can do without this principle, but physics and mechanics have need of its and Archimedes draws from it.
>
> There is an essential difference between necessary or eternal truths and factual or contingent ones: the distinction between them is not dissimilar to that between rational and irrational numbers. Indeed, necessary truths can be resolved into identicals, as commensurable quantities can be resolved into a common measure; while in contingent truths, as in irrational numbers, the resolution proceeds *ad infinitum*, never finding an end. The certainty, then, and the perfect reason of contingent truths is known to God alone, who takes the infinity in a single glance. Once we are aware of this secret, the difficulty of the absolute necessity of all things is dissolved, and we become aware of the difference between the necessary and the infallible.[89]

The rational order of the contingent, then, is that which Leibniz calls "harmony," and is as distinct from the geometric order as an infinite series is from an identity, as a differential equation differs from an algebraic one. Leibniz already refers to this "harmonious" and "non geometric" character of the contingent in the *Preliminary Dissertation* of the *Theodicy*, in defence of the distinction, refuted by Bayle, between "that which is *above* reason and that which is *against* reason".[90] If the truths of faith were of a "geometric" nature and the objections thereto were conclusive, then not only would Bayle be right in affirming that objections are incontrovertible, but neither would it be possible, as Bayle instead proposes, to take refuge in a *credo quia absurdum*. Indeed, an objection which demonstrates the contradictory nature of the thesis also demonstrates its falsity. But the truths of faith, inasmuch as they are implicated in the labyrinth of predestination, regard the order of the contingent and God's sovereignty over that order. Hence, they cannot be demonstrably refuted. They simply regard the divine knowledge and determination of the infinite series of causes. Their comprehension would require "the clear

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[88] Cf. *T* 204/222 f.

[89] *GP VII* 309.

[90] *T* 64/88.

knowledge of an infinity of things at once",[91] superior to the limited capacity of human reason, but not contrary thereto – indeed, actual in the infinite reason of God. Mankind, indeed, "cannot always penetrate to the truth":[92] we cannot always have "'adequate notions', involving nothing that is not explained".[93] Nonetheless,

> It suffices for us to have some analogical understanding of a Mystery such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, to the end that in accepting them we pronounce not words altogether devoid of meaning.[94]

This is because human reason is limited, inasmuch as man is a creature, and corrupt, inasmuch as man is a sinner.[95] Nonetheless, it is still a divine gift and is not essentially different from divine reason:

> this portion of reason which we possess is a gift of God, and consists in the natural light that has remained with us in the midst of corruption; thus it is in accordance with the whole, and it differs from that which is in God only as a drop of water differs from the ocean or rather as the finite from the infinite. Therefore Mysteries may transcend it, but they cannot be contrary to it.[96]

Thus, even in the face of the highly peculiar labyrinth of the infinite which is the issue of predestination, although human reason cannot fully understand the mystery, neither is it impotent and constrained to admit defeat:

> albeit our mind is finite and cannot comprehend the infinite, of the infinite nevertheless it has proofs whose strength or weakness it comprehends; why then should it not have the same comprehension in regard to the objections?[97]

Not only is our reason able to refute the so-called "insoluble objections" against faith, using the rules of logic which it already possesses,[98] but it can also hope to progress

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[91] *Ibidem.*

[92] *T* 69/92.

[93] *T* 80/103; cf. *COUT* 388 f. (Eng. trans. *LP* 77 f.).

[94] *T* 80/103.

[95] Hence Leibniz's stance regarding the implication of reason in corruption regarding sin is not always unambiguous: cf., for example, *T* 153/173. See also P. BURGELIN, *Commentaire du Discours de Métaphysique de Leibniz*, cit., p. 273. See also my Chapter on Leibniz's, in *Il peccato originale nel pensiero moderno*, ed. by G. Riconda, M. Ravera, C. Ciancio, G. Cuozzo, Morcelliana, Brescia 2009, pp. 377-394.

[96] *T* 84/107.

[97] *T* 89/112.

[98] Cf. *T* 66 f./90.

towards a comprehension of the harmonious order of the contingent, established by God, through the pursuit of the

art of discovery [...] whereof we have nothing beyond very imperfect samples in mathematics.[99]

But above all, in this way reason as such (as critical reason) is justified by itself in overcoming itself, as Leibniz explicitly affirms, referring to one of his favourite biblical passages, *Rom* 11:33, one of the interpretative keys to the *Theodicy* as a whole:

To say with St. Paul, *O altitudo divitiarum et sapientiae,* is not renouncing reason, it is rather employing the reasons that we know, for they teach us that immensity of God whereof the Apostle speaks. But therein we confess our ignorance of the facts, and we acknowledge, moreover, before we see it, that God does all the best possible, in accordance with the infinite wisdom which guides his actions.[100]

5.   *Hypothetical and Moral Necessity*

Up to this point, we have considered the two concepts of "hypothetical" and "moral necessity" indifferently, but in reality the two concepts are in no way identical. Leibniz himself frequently names them together, without distinguishing between them, and there is a meaning and a justification behind this, inasmuch as he is simply identifying the real as a field of determinate contingency, opposed to the geometric imaginary or the illusory casual. However, when we further explore the domain of the contingent, so defined, we need to distinguish between the two concepts. This is truer than ever if we bear in mind the fact that moral necessity, more than hypothetical necessity, constitutes the very foundation for the arguments presented in the *Theodicy*: it is the "happy necessity," which

instead of destroying religion [...] shows divine perfection to the best advantage.[101]

Indeed, hypothetical necessity is the rule according to which something

happens as a result of the supposition that this or that has been foreseen or resolved, or done beforehand.[102]

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[99] *T* 68/92.

[100] *T* 188/206 f.

[101] *T* 338/350; cf. *T* 182/147.

[102] *T* 390/395.

In other words, it is the connection of the conditioned to its series of conditions. Moral necessity, instead,

> contains an obligation imposed by reason, which is always followed by its effect in the wise.[103]

It is, that is to say, "the wise one's choice which is worthy of his wisdom".[104] The definition of these two concepts makes evident their differences, amongst which one in particular emerges as discriminating: hypothetical necessity is a rule of determination, while moral necessity, instead, is a rule of choice between an infinite possible determined series. This difference is very clear to Leibniz and, in the *Theodicy*, too, he refers back to it when he is dealing with those problems of which it is a premise. I will here refer only, as an example, to the problem of the distinction between prescience and predetermination.

As is well known, in §§ 36 ff. of the *Theodicy*, Leibniz confronts the molinist doctrine of "mediate knowledge," according to which, between the "knowledge of mere intelligence," the object of which is the possibles, and the "knowledge of intuition," the object of which is actual events, there would lie a mediate knowledge in God, the object of which would be conditioned events. Leibniz, notoriously begins by denying the necessity of individuating one particular type of science for conditioned events and then traces such knowledge of God back to his intelligence. This is an interesting crux in Leibniz's thought, the full implications of which I can certainly not examine here. What I am interested in underlining at this point is that it is the concept of hypothetical necessity which is, for Leibniz, at play here, and not yet that of moral necessity. Indeed, from the Leibnizian perspective, the former may serve as a rule for simple intelligence, be it human or divine, whereas the latter cannot, since it implies a choice, in which wisdom intervenes. Leibniz is himself aware that such a position may perhaps justify divine prescience, but not predetermination:

> if the foreknowledge of God has nothing to do with the dependence or independence of our free actions, it is not so with the foreordinance of God, his decrees, and the sequence of causes which, as I believe, always contribute to the determination of the will. And if I am for the Molinists in the first point, I am for the predeterminators in the second, provided always that predetermination be taken as not necessitating. In a word, I am of opinion that the will is always more inclined towards the course it adopts, but that it is never bound by the necessity to adopt it. That it will adopt this course is certain, but it is not necessary.[105]

I cannot here delve any further into this argument. It is nonetheless interesting to note, at least in passing, that the problem of the relationship between hypothetical and moral necessity in God is, for Leibniz himself, more complicated than he himself

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[103] *Ibidem.*

[104] *T* 50/74.

[105] *T* 126/147.

chose to present it as being in these pages. Indeed, here too, Leibniz suggests (without, however, sufficiently expanding on the problem) that without divine predetermination divine prescience, too, would be unfounded. It is true that, at § 47, he writes:

> it suffices that the creature be predetermined by its preceding state, which inclines it to one course more than to the other. Moreover, all these connexions of the actions of the creature and of all creatures were represented in the divine understanding, and known to God through the knowledge of mere intelligence, before he had decreed to give them existence. Thus we see that, in order to account for the foreknowledge of God, one may dispense with both the mediate knowledge of the Molinists and the predetermination which a Bañez or an Alvarez […] have taught.[106]

However, that sole condition "that the creature be predetermined by its preceding state," is decisive and retroactively presupposes a series of conditions and a law, which, in turn, require a foundation:

> all being ordered from the beginning, it is only because of this hypothetical necessity, recognized by everyone, that after God's prevision or after his resolution nothing can be changed: and yet the events in themselves remain contingent [...]. And as for the connexion between causes and effects, it only inclined, without necessitating, the free agency, as I have just explained; thus it does not produce even a hypothetical necessity, save in conjunction with something from outside, to wit, this very maxim, that the prevailing inclination always triumphs.[107]

This "maxim" is closely connected to the other two, from which it follows that "existence prevails over non-existence" and that "possibility tends towards existence." Yet this is nothing other than the metaphysical content of the reason principle, and this latter, in turn, has its foundation in God, who is the necessary Being. In the *Appendix* to the text *On the Radical Origin of Things* (to which I was also referring in the lines above), God is therefore termed the "necessary" and "existifying" Being,[108] but Leibniz does not explain how these two notions are identical, which, in reality, is by no means the case. Absolute necessity, which constitutes the essence of God, can explain neither the "existifying" act of God, and therefore the existence of the realised possibles, nor the very "tendency towards existence" which makes eternal truths into possible essences which are compossibles in infinite series. It seems, then, that moral necessity itself, which determines the choices made by God's wisdom and therefore the decree of existification brought about by his power, must already lie at the basis of the constitution of the possibles and of their composition into series of compossibles. Yet Leibniz does not say this. Indeed, he rather confesses himself unable to explain the origin of incompossibility:

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[106] *T* 129/149.

[107] *T* 131 f./152.

[108] Cf. *GP VII* 289.

It nonetheless remains unknown to men from whence springs the incompatibility (*incompossibilitas*) of those things which are diverse. In other words, we do not yet know how it can be that the same essences are mutually contrasting, given that all purely positive terms prove compatible with one another.[109]

The issue therefore remains open, representing part of that crucial problematic complex in Leibniz's philosophy concerning the relationship between the various levels of being. I have already strayed too far from the theme of the present study to be able to tackle this complex issue here. I would nevertheless refer my readers to the research of Vittorio Mathieu,[110] who has repeatedly discussed and expanded upon this theme.

To return to our fundamental theme, then, we have now ascertained that the "moral necessity" on which Leibniz founds his doctrine of predestination implies a choice between possible contingencies (or "free contingencies," as Leibniz calls them,[111] thus specifically defining as "contingent futurities" those which the divine power decrees to bring into actuality). At this point, then, we must ask ourselves if the two labyrinths metaphor still stands, or if it should be abandoned. In other words, we must ask ourselves if the labyrinth of the continuum, too, involves an analogous situation, implying something analogous to a choice. I believe that we can begin this further enquiry, not only with a question, but already with a positive hypothesis, on the basis of the fact that, in this problematic field, too, Leibniz continues to draw as usual from analogies with mathematics and physics.

6. *The Calculus of Variations*

For Leibniz and his contemporaries, the problem "*de maximis et minimis*" was a generic expression, used with reference to the whole group of problems concerning infinitesimal analysis in general. In confirmation of this, we need only recall the title of the paper with which, in 1684, Leibniz officially presented his theory of infinitesimal calculus: *Nova Methodus pro Maximis et Minimis, itemque Tangentibus, quae nec fractas nec irrationales quantitates moratur, et singolare pro illis calculi genus*.

In reality, the problems dealt with in the mathematics of the time under this title are highly divergent. This heading covers a wide variety of problems, often

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[109] *E* 99.

[110] Cf. in particular: *L'equivoco dell'incompossibilità e il problema del virtuale*, in "Atti dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino," CLXVI (1949-50), vol. 84, Tomo II, Accademia delle Scienze Torino 1950, pp. 206-229; *Die drei Stufen des Weltbegriffes bei Leibniz*, in "Studia Leibnitiana", I (1969), pp. 7-23; *Introduction*, in *T* 3-56 (in particular pp. 18ff.). I discuss the thesis of Mathieu below, Appendix Four.

[111] *T* 126/146.

entirely different from one another, from the point of view of both the data and the queries raised. Awareness of this difference, in Leibniz and his contemporaries, is limited. We might say that it progresses, in its practical developments, through the discovery and resolution of ever-emerging new problems with ever-changing methods, rather than being founded on an *a priori* systematic classification. Nonetheless, we must note that, in the *Tentamen Anagogicum,* discussed above,[112] Leibniz displays a certain awareness of the peculiarity of issues pertaining to the calculus of variations, which I now intend to discuss, compared to normal problems *"de maximis et minimis,"* significantly denominating their distinct method of solution the "method of *optimal forms*:"

> the principle of perfection is not limited to the general but descends also to the particulars of things and of phenomena and that in this respect it closely resembles the method of *optimal forms* (*de Formis Optimis*), that is to say, of forms *which provide a maximum or minimum* (*Maximum aut Minimum praestantibus*), as the case may be – a method which I have introduced into geometry in addition to the ancient method of *maximal and minimal quantities* (*de maximis et minimis quantitatibus*).[113]

In the vast sea of problems *"de maximis et minimis,"* we can identify a specific group, distinguishable from the others for certain characteristics and of particular interest regarding our present concern. I am referring to the problems dealt with in that specific field of infinitesimal analysis which, after Leibniz, from Euler and Lagrange onwards, has been termed "the calculus of variations." Not only for this denomination, but also for the first systematic theorisation of calculus which falls thereunder, as I have already stated, we have Euler and Lagrange to thank. However, a number of the issues which they tackle have far more ancient origins. Some geometric properties, such as the maximum property of the circle and the sphere, were already known to the Greeks, although they had not, obviously, been reached through the calculus of variations. The same is true for the problem of the catenary, which is a problem of the calculus of variations which had already been proposed and tackled with other methods by Galileo and, after him, by many others, including Leibniz. Also in the field of physics, Heron's studies of the reflection of light and Fermat and Huygens' work on refraction tackle problems of the same kind of those with which the calculus of variations is concerned.[114] Above all, the first attempts at

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[112] Gerhardt (cf. *GP VII* 252) dates this work to 1690-95, but perhaps its specific reference to the problem of the Brachistochrone curve (cf. *GP VII* 272 [Eng. trans. *PhPL* 478]) and to the principle on which Jacob Bernoulli bases his method for its solution suggest that it was composed somewhat later.

[113] *GP VII* 272; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 478.

[114] See T. VIOLA, entry on *"Analisi (in Matematica),"* in the *Enciclopedia della scienza e della tecnica*, vol. I, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano 1963, p. 561; L. TONELLI, *Fondamenti di calcolo delle variazioni*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1921, vol. I, pp. 8 f. The work by Tonelli cited, together with that by Robert Woodhouse, which is even earlier, and which I will quote below, have by now become classic studies on the calculus of variations. They are also of particular interest for

this type of calculus date to Leibniz's own time. We cannot identify Leibniz as the inventor of these problems. However, he was abreast of events. Indeed, he was one of the protagonists in the discussion which accompanied their genesis and first developments. Hence we can be sure that Leibniz's contribution to the first developments of the classical problems related to the calculus of variations was as profound and decisive as the influence of these problems on his philosophical thought in general. I am here referring, not so much to the problem of the solid of revolution with minimum resistance, already tackled by Newton, as, above all, to the Brachistochrone curve, proposed by Johann Bernoulli in 1696, and to the isoperimetric problems proposed by Jacob Bernoulli in 1697. A very significant part of Leibniz's correspondence with the Bernoulli brothers (and also with other mathematicians of the time, such as de l'Hópital) is dedicated to this discussion.

Before we seek to deal with these problems, although we will do so in general, non-technical terms, in the interests of our current focus, it will perhaps prove useful to take a step back, following the profound echo of the term "variation," a term typical of Leibniz, which resounds right back from his very first writings.

Famously, Leibniz already treats of the concept of "variation" and traces the fundamental principles of a calculus of variations, consisting in his *ars combinatoria* or *ars complicatoria* in his *Dissertatio de arte combinatoria*.[115] "Variation" is here defined as "the mutation of the relation";[116] and "variability" as the "quantity of all the variations".[117] Leibniz distinguishes two "genera" of variation: the "site," or "the collocation of the parts",[118] and the "complexion," of "the union of a lesser totality in a greater".[119] As we immediately note, the "complexion" is a specific concept within the more general concept of the "site." Indeed, Leibniz specifies that

the site is either absolute or relative: the former case is that of the parts in respect to the whole, the latter that of the parts in respect to the parts. In the former the number of loci and the distance from the beginning to the end are considered, in the second neither the beginning nor the end are observed, but only the distance from one part to another given part [...]. In the former case, the greatest possible heed is paid to priority and posteriority, in the latter none at all. It is therefore quite fitting that the first be called *order,* the second *vicinity;* the first disposition, the second composition.[120]

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our present purposes, inasmuch as they reconstruct the history of this mathematical discipline right back to its two true founders, Euler and Lagrange. This is why I have preferred to draw from these two texts, instead of the others available.

[115] *GM V* 42.

[116] *GM V* 13.

[117] *Ibidem*.

[118] *GM V* 14.

[119] *GM V* 14.

[120] *GM V* 14.

The term "site" is therefore only used in the remainder of the work to indicate the "absolute site," whilst the terms "composition," "combination" or "complexion" are introduced to refer to the "relative site." The "complexions," then, do not indicate the "variability of the order," but the "variability of the complexion".[121]

With this system of definitions, Leibniz had already determined, and to a certain extent prejudiced, the direction of the *ars combinatoria*. However, he had also defined it boundaries. The *ars combinatoria*, on which Leibniz's great hopes are founded, not only as an *ars judicandi*, but also as an *ars inveniendi*, precludes, more as a matter of fact than a matter of principle, the considerations of "site" and of "order." In other words, it precludes those very elements which, as Cassirer has well shown,[122] might have constituted the most important and radical novelty in Leibniz's logic, developing it as a relational, and not a predicative logic (although Cassirer sees in the *Ars combinatoria* a far more significant foreshadowing of the subsequent developments of Leibniz's thought on the continuum than I would concede). The reasons for this, as I have already stated, are not so much principles as simple facts. At that time Leibniz did not yet possess the conceptual tools and frame of reference which would permit the development of a logic of order and site. If this irremediably limits the value of this work, it also permits us to hope for a correction and an overcoming of this defect in the future, as is in fact the case when Leibniz, armed with the new conception of continuity, develops the *analysis situs* and infinitesimal analysis.

If Leibniz, in his *Dissertatio de arte combinatoria*, only makes reference "in passing"[123] to the problem of the site, this is because he is still immersed in the logical conception of totality and of number as the sum of parts:

> The whole (and thus the number or totality) can be divided up into parts understood as lesser wholes, and this is the fundament of complexions.[124]

Leibniz is therefore still reasoning on "variation" as a mutation of relation between discrete quantities:

> Thus two genera of *variations* arise: that of *complexion* and that of *site*. Both complexion and site belong to metaphysics, i.e. the doctrine of the whole and the parts, if they are considered per se. But if we consider *variability*, i.e. the quantity of variation, we need to pass to numbers and

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[121] Cf. *GM V* 14.

[122] See E. CASSIRER, *op. cit.*, pp. 138 f.

[123] Cf. *GM V* 13, 40.

[124] *GM V* 13.

arithmetic. I would be inclined, however, to believe that the doctrine of complexion belongs to pure, and that of site to figured arithmetic.[125]

In the course of the work, Leibniz formulates problems very similar to those of the labyrinth of predestination (such as the composition of possible worlds or the identity of possible Adams):

> It is hence the task of the inventive logic of propositions to solve the following problems 1) given the subject to find the predicates; 2) given the predicate to find the subjects, in both cases both affirmatively and negatively.[126]

He is nonetheless unable to propose a satisfying method for resolving these problems. At best, the *ars combinatoria* permits him to consider as identical complexions formed from the same parts (since the order of the parts, i.e. the site, is irrelevant) and therefore to count them just once and exclude non-useful variations,[127] i.e. those which, "by the nature of their content," cannot occur, i.e. are contradictory. Leibniz can take this first *ars inveniendi* project no further, since he remains in the domain of discrete quantities, of the whole with its simple parts, of "arithmetic," of simple identity and contradiction, of predicative logic. In other words, Leibniz remains in that conceptual universe in which the labyrinth of the composition of the continuum persists, wherein the calculus of "complications" is unable to offer any Ariadne's "thread." Leibniz would later find this "thread" in his consideration of continuity as "continuation," of the reason principle, of relational logic, i.e. of the field of quality, of intensive magnitude, of the "direction" of motion, of the infinitesimal: i.e. in his development of the concepts of "site" and "order." In one important aspect, although not exclusively, the "harmony" concept also played a part in this development. All of these concepts are already individuated in the earlier work, but their decisive importance is not yet grasped.[128]

Leibniz himself actually acknowledges the limitations of the *Ars combinatoria*, in his 1691 *Note* to that work. He attributes this inadequacy to the insufficience of his own mathematical knowledge at that time:

> indeed, at that time, the Author had only just glimpsed the higher mathematics from afar and therefore, ignorant of the discoveries of others and with an insufficient grasp of analysis, he had discovered something on his own account with a hasty meditation which still had the air of the novice about it.[129]

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[125] *GM V* 13.

[126] *GM V* 39.

[127] Cf. *GM V* 15.

[128] Cf. *ibi*, p. 152 f.

[129] *GP IV* 103 f.; cf. also *GP VII* 522 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 467).

We thus come to the calculus of variations which, as I have said, is not yet clearly distinct and defined as such, amidst the problems *"de maximis et minimis,"* by Leibniz and his interlocutors. Nonetheless they do attain to some glimpse of its peculiar character and treat of it with success. It presents certain interesting analogies with the theological problem of the choice of the best possible world.

In order to briefly summarise the characteristics of these problems, I will take my cue from the definition given of them by one of the greatest contemporary theorists on this subject (who, starting from Lagrange, sparked a long tradition in Italy): Leonida Tonelli. He writes:

> The object of the Calculus of Variations is to seek out the conditions under which a given variable number, which may be a defined integral or the solution to a differential equation, and which depends on one or more unknown functions, attains to its maximum or minimum value.[130]

These problems, then, are different from the simple problems *de maximis et minimis*, first of al because the latter are tackled with differential calculus alone, whereas in the former case it is necessary to combine differential with integral calculus. To quote Tonelli again:

> The two problems examined above [the newtonian problem of the solid of minimum resistance and Johann Bernoulli's Brachistocrone curve] have one aspect in common. In both cases, the question boils down to finding, amongst all the curves which join two given points, those which minimise the value of a certain integral in which the *y* ordinates intervene and also the direction of the curve in its various points [...]. As Jacob Bernoulli pointed out, the question which presents itself here is not one of the ordinary problems *de maximis et minimis*, dealt with by differential calculus, which propose to determine the minimum or maximum value of a number ϕ $(x_1, x_2,...x_n)$, the function of one or more other numbers $x_1, x_2,...x_n$, or, geometrically speaking, dependent from the position of one point in a space of one or more dimensions. The number *I*, to be made minimal or maximal, no longer depends on *a point,* but rather on *a curve,* or rather a complex of *infinite* points; or, analytically, on a function *y(x)* and not on one or more other numbers.[131]

This passage from Tonelli (from which I have cut out the *formulae*) clearly highlights the first characteristic with which we are concerned: i.e. it treats of problems in which that which is sought is not the maximum or minimum of a function (i.e. one number or one point), but, of the multiple functions (or curves) which satisfy a certain given differential equation, those which renders minimal or maximal a given integral. I am here referring to problems of the first order, such as the Brachistochrone, without proceeding to the consideration of problems of the higher order, such as the isoperimetric,[132] since the former suffice as a paradigm for our current purposes.

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[130] L. TONELLI, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[131] *Ibi*, pp. 3 f.

[132] See *ibi*, pp. 13 ff.

From all this, a second interesting characteristic emerges. In the problems here considered, the object of the research is not the value of a function, but the function itself.[133] This shift of object from that of the normal calculus *de maximis et minimis* implies that

> The value of the integral depends not only on the position of the points of the curve on which it is calculated, but also on the direction, on the curvature, etc. of the curve in its various points.[134]

From this it follows that

> A curve, even if it is very close to another, may be very different from that other in its development. That is to say, it may have tangents which differ considerably in their direction from the tangents of the points close together on the other curve […]. This, instead, does not occur in the case of the ordinary functions of differential calculus, since in those, by force of continuity, when the variable elements draw near to given values, the function to approximates itself to the value which it assumes for those given values of the independent variables.[135]

Thirdly, the problems of the calculus of variations are distinguished from the normal problems *de maximis et minimis* by the fact that the former, together with the fundamental principle of the latter, i.e. that "if, for example, we wish to determine when a *y* ordinate is minimum, we will let its *dy* differential equal zero,"[136] must also assume another, i.e. that "the property belonging to the whole curve also belongs to every element of the curve."[137] This principle, in the calculus of variations, is stipulated thus:

> if a curve possesses a maximum or minimum property, each of its elements however small, will also possess the same property.[138]

This principle represented the basis for the solution provided by Jacob Bernoulli to the Brachistochrone problem posed by his brother Johann. Herein lay the decisive advantage of this method over the other methodological solutions proposed.

Without further exploring or following on from the technical aspects of the calculus of variations, from the consideration of these initial, fundamental traits we

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[133] Cf. R. WOODHOUSE, *A History of the Calculus of Variations in the Eighteenth Century* (originally published with the title: *A Treatise on Isoperimetrical Problems and the Calculus of Variations*, Cambridge, 1810), Chelsea Publishing Company, New York, s.d. (1964), pp. 8 f.

[134] L. TONELLI, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[135] *Ibi*, p. 18.

[136] R. WOODHOUSE, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[137] *Ibi*, p. 6.

[138] L. TONELLI, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

can already observe various characteristics which not only permit but also suggest some evident analogies with the Leibnizian theological problem of the divine determination of the contingent, or of the choice of the best of all possible worlds. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to assume that Leibniz, having repeatedly dealt with and discussed these problems, bore them in mind when he proposed the analogy between the two labyrinths. This is much more credible if we consider that the other mathematicians who discussed these problems conceived of them within the context of a principle of economy with evident theological implications.[139] We need only cite Euler:

> Since, indeed, the fabric of the universe is supremely perfect and is the work of a creator who is supremely wise, absolutely nothing happens in the world in which some maximum or minimum property does not shine forth.[140]

We might at this point consider, furthermore, the theological implications of the "principle of least action," formulated by Maupertuis, together with the diatribes to which it gave rise (it is not irrelevant to recall that Samuel Koenig attributed this principle to Leibniz).[141]

7.   *The Best of all Possible Worlds*

This very same principle of economy or minimum expense also emerges in the Leibnizian doctrine of "the best of all possible worlds" in the *Theodicy*[142] and elsewhere.[143] It is a constituent aspect of the "convenience" principle, to which Leibniz continually refers in the *Theodicy* to explain harmony. Leibniz explicitly groups the problem of God's choice of the best of all possible worlds with that of maxima and minima.[144] Let us now see to which aspects this analogy applies, with reference to the considerations already presented.

First of all we must note that, in the *Theodicy*, the systems of compossibles, i.e. of the infinite possible worlds, are not considered in the sense of "complexions," of which Leibniz treated in his *Dissertatio de arte combinatoria*, but rather in the sense

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[139] Cfr. *ibi*, pp. 8 ff.

[140] *Methodus inveniendi lineas curvas maximi minimive proprietate gaudentes*, Losanna 1774; quoted by L. TONELLI, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[141] See L. GEYMONAT, *Storia del pensiero filosofico e scientifico*, vol. III, Garzanti, Milano 1971, pp. 222 ff.

[142] Cf. *T* 169 f., 236/189, 192 f.

[143] For example, in the essay *On the Radical Origin of Things*: *GP VII* 303; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 150.

[144] Cf. *T* 107/128; *GP VII* 303 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 150 f.).

of "infinite series" as dealt with in infinitesimal analysis. The term "series" is that normally used by Leibniz to indicate the "system" or "aggregate" of possibilities which constitutes a possible world, both in the *Theodicy* and in the essay *On the Radical Origin of Things*. Only in a few, rare cases, instead, do we come across the term "combination." In §§ 159 f., Leibniz only uses this term in order to remain on the same terminological level as his interlocutors (Bayle and Jaquelot). In § 225, he refers to the infinite possible worlds as "infinitely infinite combinations",[145] but immediately afterwards, in the same paragraph, he specifies that these "systems" must be considered as "an infinity of infinites, that is to say, an infinity of possible sequences of the universe".[146] In this case, then, the term "combination" appears, but in the sense of an "infinite sequence." Only in § 119 are the possible worlds considered as "combinations" without there being, in the same paragraph, elements suggesting that this concept should be understood in the sense of a mathematical series. If we wish to be rigorous, we might then accuse Leibniz of incoherence on this point. However, the general contextual framework might permit us to also read the term here in its more usual sense. Anyway, it does not seem to me that this paragraph does anything to change the meaning of its broader context.

This section, nonetheless, also has another aspect of interest. It poses the question of the distinction between God's "antecedent" and "final will," which is one of the recurrent themes of the *Theodicy,* in a peculiar form, which is curiously similar to the structure of the molinist doctrine of divine science. In this passage, Leibniz distinguishes between three "wills." First, there is the "primitive antecedent will," which

> has as its object each good and each evil in itself, detached from all combination, and tends to advance the good and prevent the evil.[147]

Then, there is the "mediate will," which

> relates to combinations, as when one attaches a good to an evil: then the will will have some tendency towards this combination when the good exceeds the evil therein.[148]

Finally, there is the "final and decisive will," which

> results from consideration of all the goods and all the evils that enter into our deliberation, it results from a total combination.[149]

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[145] *T* 252/267.

[146] *Ibidem*.

[147] *T* 170/189.

[148] *Ibidem*.

[149] *T* 170/189 f.

As we can see, the "mediate will" of God unites two functions: it presides over the combination of possibles, "as when one attaches a good to an evil," and at the same time chooses between them, having "some tendency towards" the best combination. We thus once again encounter the unresolved crux of priority between hypothetical and moral necessity, which I have already referred to above but is nonetheless worth mentioning once more, even if I will not here be able to tackle it.

After all, if the term "series," which indicates the possible worlds, indicates the hypothetical necessity which connects the compossibles in each of them, the term "project" or "plan" (Leibniz uses the French term "plan"), which is also recurrent in the *Theodicy*, indicates moral necessity, on the basis of which God "has ordered all things beforehand once for all".[150] The "plan" chosen by God is the best possible "general harmony," which he decrees to bring into existence. This, in Leibniz's thought, permits us to sidestep the necessity of occasionalism and to have recourse to continuous specific divine decrees in order to explain the order of the world and to thus endorse a "derangement of the natural laws".[151] Leibniz writes of the occasionlists that they "produce a God, as it were, *ex machina*, to bring about the final solution of the piece".[152] This remains true for Leibniz (and is the distinguishing point between his conception of the order of the world and that of occasionalism) even if, as Bayle points out, God's intervention, according to the occasionalist system, were not to be considered as a miracle which dispenses with every law, but rather as an intervention which "follows only general laws." Leibniz responds:

> let us see whether the system of occasional causes does not in fact imply a perpetual miracle. Here it is said that it does not, because God would act only through general laws according to this system. I agree, but in my opinion that does not suffice to remove the miracles. Even if God should do it continuously, they would not cease being miracles, if we take this term, not in the popular sense of a rare and wonderful thing, but in the philosophical sense of that which exceeds the powers of created beings. It is not enough to say that God has made a general law, for besides the decree there is also necessary a natural means of carrying it out, that is, all that happens must also be explained through the nature which God gives to things. The law of nature are not so arbitrary and so indifferent as many people imagine.[153]

As we can see, the aspect which Leibniz considers specific to the system of harmony, compared to that of occasional causes, is this very conception of the order of the world as a "plan," chosen by the divine wisdom on the basis of the moral necessity to found a hypothetical necessity (for which the decree of divine power is

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[150] *T* 107/128.

[151] *T* 136/157.

[152] *T* 136/156.

[153] *GP IV* 520; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 494.

only a consequent moment of "existification"). This conception is distinct from the occasionalist (cartesian) notion of a primacy of the divine decree, not only in suspending the laws of nature and interrupting the regularity of the world, but also in establishing and founding both.

Coming back to the analogy with the calculus of variations, it is clear that, for Leibniz, the choice of the best possible worlds, too, represents, not the determination of the maximum value of a function, but rather the choice of a function, from an infinite number of given functions, which maximises the value of a certain integral. In other words, we are not here seeking that which is optimal in the world, but the best of all possible worlds, or, as Leibniz writes, "the maximum series of all the possibles".[154] This is confirmed by the fact that, when Leibniz, in his essay *On the Radical Origin of Things*, presents, as an analogy, the "divine *mathesis*" with which God chose the best of all possible worlds as a problem *de maximis et minimis*, at least two of the three examples drawn from the science being presented – that is to say, the problems of the equilibrium of a liquid without weight and that of the equilibrium of a system moved by gravity – pertain to the calculus of variations.[155]

Since, then, also in the choice of the best of all possible worlds, the object being sought is not the maximum value of a given function, but the function itself, the second characteristic of problems of the calculus of variations, illustrated above, is also valid in this case. Here too, in other words, unlike in the case of normal calculus *de maximis et minimis*,

> a curve, even if it is very close to another, may be very different from that other in its development.[156]

This is, in fact, one of the most important themes in Pallas's speech to Theodorus, at the end of the *Theodicy*.[157] In addition to the real Sextus, there may possibly be – states Pallas – "a Sextus, indeed, of every kind and endless diversity of forms".[158] There are "several Sextuses resembling him [i.e. the Sextus who realy existed]",[159] since he had posited the hypothesis of "a case that differs from the actual world only in one single definite thing and in its results"[160] (Sextus does not go to Rome).

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[154] *GP VII* 290.

[155] Cf. *GP VII* 304; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 150 f. See also L. TONELLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 9 f. The example with which Leibniz follows up the above cited expression, "the maximum series of all possibles" is analogous (cf. *GP VII* 290).

[156] L. TONELLI, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[157] Cf. *T* 362 ff./370 ff.

[158] *T* 363/371.

[159] *Ibidem.*

[160] *Ibidem.*

Nonetheless, we need only alter just one single case to completely change, not only the life of Sextus, but also the whole of universal history.[161]

The analogy between the problems of the calculus of variations and the choice of the best of all possible worlds ceases, however, when we come to a third point. There, we had posited a principle whereby

> if a curve possesses a maximum or minimum property, each of its elements however small, will also possess the same property.[162]

Here, this principle cannot stand. Leibniz can clearly see the unacceptable implications of the admission of such a principle for the best of all possible worlds. It is in fact evident that, were we to accept this principle, the fundamental thesis of the *Theodicy* regarding the existence of evil would not consist in the affirmation that the existing world is the best possible notwithstanding evil. On the basis of this principle, on the contrary, we would immediately arrive at the affirmation that whatever is, in the best of all possible worlds, is good. This, however, is the thesis of Pope's theodicy, not of Leibniz's. For this reason, Voltaire's accusations, in his *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*, and his satire in the *Candide*, definitively refute the former theodicy, but in no way touch on the essence of the latter.

It is this very acknowledgement of the reality of evil which makes Leibniz's theodicy interesting. This recognition, in truth, is not unique to Leibniz, but can also be traced in other contemporary theodical systems. We must here cite at least the greatest of these, which also represents a continuous presence in Leibniz's work: namely, that of Malebranche. Malebranche too, at a certain moment in the evolution of his thought, beginning, that is, with the *Treatise on Nature and Grace* (1680), found himself faced with the irreducible reality of evil. Malebranche then considered evil as an "irregularity" and overturned the traditional augustinian argument, pointing to the real imperfection behind the apparent beauty of the universe. Starting from this frank statement, he attempted a theodicy in which he put the perfection of divine laws before the perfection of their results. The existence of certain irregularities would be the negative but inevitable consequence of the perfection – i.e. of the simplicity – of the laws with which God orders and governs the world.[163] This new focus of theodicy signified a break with cartesian arbitrarism and the primacy of divine wisdom over divine power. Leibniz and Malebranche are on agreement on this point, as Leibniz explicitly states, but this does not change their divergence when they come to consider the problem in more depth.[164]

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[161] Cf. also the case of the siege of Keilah: *T* 126/146 f.

[162] *Ibi*, p. 13.

[163] See S. LANDUCCI, *La teodicea nell'età cartesiana*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 1986, pp. 32 ff.

[164] I must for this reason disagree with S. LANDUCCI, *op. cit.*, p. 42 note 40, who argues that such differences are only apparent.

Although he accepts the reality of evil, Leibniz, unlike Malebranche, refuses outright to consider it an irregularity:

> But one must believe that even sufferings and monstrosities are part of order; and it is well to bear in mind not only that it was better to admit these defects and these monstrosities than to violate general laws, as Father Malebranche sometimes argues, but also that these very monstrosities are in the rules, and are in conformity with general acts of will, though we be not capable of discerning this conformity.[165]

This refusal is not just a simple divergence on a particular point. It is rather the consequence of an essentially different philosophical position which is also reflected when we consider the analogy with the labyrinth of the continuum. In the lines immediately after the passage just quoted, indeed, Leibniz cites the analogy with numerical series and mechanical curves, which, as irregular as they may appear, are nevertheless such that

> it may be that one can give its equation and construction, wherein a geometrician would find the reason and the fittingness of all these so-called irregularities.[166]

In §§ 203 ff., Leibniz approaches this very distinction between his approach and that of Malebranche. He summarises Malebranche's position in this regard, borrowing Bayle's words:

> This thought has something dazzling about it: Father Malebranche has placed it in the best possible light; and he has persuaded some of his readers that a system which is simple and very productive is more consistent with God's wisdom than a system more composite and less productive in proportion, but more capable of averting irregularities.[167]

This would explain why God does not always resort to miracles, i.e. to specific interventions, in breach of general laws, so as to correct the "irregularities" inevitably included in the order of the world as a consequence of the "simplicity" of its laws. Leibniz, however, coherently with his own philosophy as a whole, cannot agree with Malebranche, since, as he himself tells us:

> I agree with Father Malebranche that God does things in the way most worthy of him. But I go a little further than he, with regard to 'general and particular acts of will'.[168]

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[165] *T* 261/276.

[166] *T* 262/277.

[167] *T* 243 f./259.

[168] *T* 240/256.

We thus again come face to face with the difference between Leibniz's thought and occasionalism.[169] For Leibniz nothing – not even a miracle – is a suspension of general laws. A miracle is simple the application of a different law:

> I would not say, with this Father, that God departs from general laws whenever order requires it: he departs from one law only for another law more applicable, and what order requires cannot fail to be in conformity with the rule of order, which is one of the general laws.[170]

This is characteritstic of Leibniz's system, founded on his radical understading of the reason principle, which differentiates it from every form of occasionalism, and thus also from the not inconsiderable degree of occasionalism which still remains in Malebranche's system. No event, including those which are unique and unrepeatable, such as miracles, is ever uniquely willed by the will of God. Every event, instead, results from a law; every particular is regulated by a general law, which remains such even if it is only valid in one particular case:

> Thus I would say that God never has a *particular will* such as this Father [Malebranche] implies, that is to say, *a particular primitive will*.[171]

He thus, in sum, radically affirms the functionalistic sense of the law, in opposition to a conception which, although developed with extreme subtlety, has not yet altogether shaken of the decretory sense of the law.

It is clear that, on these bases, evil cannot be considered as an "irregularity." But it is equally clear that Malebranche's solution, of justifying the imperfection of the results on the grounds of the simplicity of the laws, is unacceptable for Leibniz. Leibniz, too, certainly does recognise order and harmony as a proportion of the "simplicity" and "productivity" of the rules;[172] and on this point he declares himself in agreement with Malebranche:

> thus Father Malebranche's system in this point amounts to the same as mine (!).[173]

However, in reality, his understanding of this notion is very different from that of Malebranche:

> One may, indeed, reduce these two conditions, simplicity and productivity, to a single advantage, which is to produce as much perfection as is possible [...]. Even if the effect were assumed to be greater, but the process less simple, I think one might say that, when all is said and done, the

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[169] Cf. *T* 241/257.

[170] *T* 241/257.

[171] *T* 240/256.

[172] Cf. *T* 240/257.

[173] *T* 241/257.

effect itself would be less great, taking into account not only the final effect but also the mediate effect. For the wisest mind so acts, as far as it is possible, that the *means* are also in a sense *ends*, that is, they are desirable not only on account of what they do, but on account of what they are.[174]

As we can see, in the sense in which Leibniz understands it, the proportion between the simplicity and the productivity of the rules does not allow for irregularity. Hence, the way in which Leibniz understands the "simplicity" of the rules is very different from Malebranche's conception:

> Yet I am not altogether pleased with M. Bayle's manner of expression here on this subject, and I am not of the opinion 'that a more composite and less productive plan might be more capable of averting irregularities'. Rules are the expression of general will: the more one observes rules, the more regularity there is; simplicity and productivity are the aim of rules. I shall be met with the objection that a uniform system will be free from irregularities. I answer that it would be an irregularity to be too uniform, that would offend against the rules of harmony. *Et citharoedus ridetur chorda qui semper oberrat eadem.*[175]

We here come face to face with Leibniz's peculiar conception of the perfection principle which, to my mind, represents an extremely interesting point in his thought and which would definitely merit careful analysis. Although I cannot undertake such an analysis in this Appendix, I will nonetheless dwell on this matter briefly. Leibniz voices the highly original conviction that there is not a relation of inverse proportionality between simplicity and productivity, whereby perfection should consist in an optimal "medium" between these two functions, but that there is instead a relation of direct proportionality, whereby perfection consists in the maximum value of both functions. This notion derives from his genetic conception of contingent reality (and correspondingly, of the logical concept), founded on the continuity principle and the infinitesimal method (and, in the logical field, on the reason principle), valid for contingent realities. This emerges clearly in the already-cited *Tentamen Anagogicum*. Here, Leibniz identifies "the simplest"[176] and "the [...] unique"[177] with "the most determined." It is this difference, which can be traced back to the difference between the principle of non-contradiction and that of determinant reason, which distinguishes the harmonic or architectonic perfection of contingency from the geometric perfection of the necessary.[178]

For these reasons, Leibniz is faced with a difficulty which does not affect Malebranche and which derives from the radical stance of Leibnizian theodicy which,

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[174] *Ibidem.*

[175] *T* 244/260.

[176] Cf. *GP VII* 274 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 479).

[177] cf. *GP VII* 276 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 482).

[178] Cf. *GP VII* 27l ff. (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 477 ff.).

on the one hand, acknowledges the reality of evil and, on the other, refuses to justify it as a mere dysfunction, which is inevitably implicit in the beauty and simplicity of the order of the world. Leibniz's attitude in the *Theodicy* is not always so clear and unequivocal as I have here, for brevity's sake, presented it. Nonetheless, despite various oscillations, this is his fundamental attitude. He must in fact at once justify the order of the world as the best possible, in the sense of it being perfectly regular, and the presence of evil therein. He upholds the truth of God's reconciliation of these elements, but is unable to demonstrate it:

> I believe therefore that God can follow a simple, productive, regular plan; but I do not believe that the best and the most regular is always opportune for all creatures simultaneously; and I judge *a posteriori*, for the plan chosen by God is not so.[179]

And thus we return to the third characteristic of the calculus of variations, for which the analogy with the labyrinth of predestination does not stand. Leibniz presents this diversity as a justification of the affirmation quoted above:

> What is deceptive in this subject, as I have already observed, is that one feels an inclination to believe that what is the best in the whole is also the best possible in each part. One reasons thus in geometry, when it is a question *de maximis et minimis*. If the road from A to B that one proposes to take is the shortest possible, and if this road passes by C, then the road from A to C, part of the first, must also be the shortest possible. But the inference from *quantity* to *quality* is not always right [...].This difference between quantity and quality appears also in our case. The part of the shortest way between two extreme points is also the shortest way between the extreme points of this part; but the part of the best whole is not of necessity the best that one could have made of this part. For the part of a beautiful thing is not always beautiful, since it can be extracted from the whole, or marked out within the whole, in an irregular manner. If goodness and beauty always lay in something absolute and uniform, such as extension, matter, gold, water, and other bodies assumed to be homogeneous or similar, one must say that the part of the good and the beautiful would be beautiful and good like the whole, since it would always have resemblance to the whole: but this is not the case in things that have mutual relations.[180]

However, in reality, this argument does not justify the assertion. It affirms that the principle valid in the calculus of variations, whereby the property belonging to the whole curve is also valid for every single element thereof, is not valid for the calculus of qualities (here, evidently, he refers, not to the mathematic, but to the axiologic concept of "quality"). Leibniz does not tell us which other principle is valid in the divine calculus of qualities. Nor does he know it, since this is the domain of mystery. It is also a mystery that enables us to consider reality as history and progress:

> Taking the whole sequence of things, the best has no equal; but one part of the sequence may be equalled by another part of the same sequence. Besides it might be said that the whole sequence

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[179] *T* 244/260.

[180] *T* 245 f./260 f.

of things to infinity may be the best possible, although what exists all through the universe in each portion of time be not the best. It might be therefore that the universe became even better and better, if the nature of things were such that it was not permitted to attain to the best all at once. But these are problems of which it is hard for us to judge.[181]

Leibniz, then, acknowledges that divine calculus and choice are different from their human equivalents, and in the face of this difference he can do no more than recognise the mystery[182] and trust in an *a priori* faith option:

> since God chooses the best possible, one cannot tax him with any limitation of his perfections; and in the universe not only does the good exceed the evil, but also the evil serves to augment the good.[183]

The nature of the difference between Leibniz's adhesion to this option and Bayle's fideism, and the way in which Leibniz manages to demonstrate the reasonableness of this option, is certainly one of the most important and interesting aspects of the *Theodicy,* but cannot be dwelt on here.

8. *Conclusion*

The analogy between the two labyrinths, then, is interrupted on this last point. Herein lies its limit; and this is a serious limitation, because all of the most important problems of the *Theodicy* are concentrated around this point. Indeed, if Leibniz were constrained to affirm the goodness of everything, without being able either to demonstrate the goodness of the elements or to justify their imperfection in the context of the perfect whole, his position would not differ substantially from Bayle's fideism. The existence of evil, the responsibility of God, the freedom and imputability of man – all of the most important questions of theodicy would remain unanswered.

In reality, we must admit that the Leibnizian theory of moral necessity and the connected analogy of the two labyrinths, although constituting an original element in Leibniz's *Theodicy,* to which he himself attributed a great importance, cannot fully answer these questions. Leibniz's *Theodicy* contains other arguments, which are far more valid and important, on the justification of God in the face of evil and the freedom of mankind with regard to divine predestination.

The analogy of the two labyrinths, instead, proves its salt in the investigation of the nature of the contingent. In this field, as we have seen, although it can shed no light on the origin of the contingent, it is nonetheless enlightening when we come to

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[181] *T* 237/253 f.

[182] See the hypothesis regarding missing pieces in the geometric construction in § 214 (*T* 246 f./261 f.).

[183] *T* 247/263.

consider its modality and order. Here, the comparison between the field of mathematics and physics, on the one hand, and that of theology, on the other, proves fruitful. It permits us to understand contingent reality as the field of the infinitely determinate, counterpoised to the absolutely necessary order of geometric ideas which, unlike Descartes and Spinoza, Leibniz does not deem to represent the order of natural reality.

With regard to the concept of contingency, the two labyrinths analogy also serves to clarify one meaning of the "mechanism" concept, on the basis of which the famous Leibnizian theory of the definition of the best of all possible worlds through a "Metaphysical Mechanism"[184] is not in contradiction with the doctrine of "choice" on the part of the divine wisdom. Some scholars have pointed to an insurmountable contradiction here.[185] However, in reality, once we have ascertained that the Leibnizian conception of "natural mechanism" does not share the characteristics of absolute and geometric necessity, deriving from the cartesian conception, but rather defines the contingent in opposition to this conception, the "Metaphysical Mechanism" metaphor, applied to possibles, does not preclude God's free choice, but rather requires it, as a consequence of the already discussed connection between moral and hypothetical necessity.

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[184] *GP VII* 304 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 151); cf. *T* 116/137.

[185] I will here limit myself to referring my readers to the views conclusions drawn by S. DEL BOCA, *op. cit.*, and in particular to Chapter II: *L'ordine del mondo risulta dal "mechanismus metaphysicus" o da libera scelta divina?*, pp. 51 ff.

APPENDIX TWO

THE REASONS OF REASON ACCORDING TO LEIBNIZ

It is doubtless true that, in the modern era, the confrontation between faith and reason, which had a history stretching back to far before the beginning of modernity, was radicalised, frequently becoming a mortal conflict, in which it seemed that neither contender could be satisfied with anything less than the elimination of the other. Reason had certainly undergone huge advances in its methods and results, and was therefore ever more aware of its own power and autonomy. As a consequence of this, it not only brushed aside any external impediment to its free exercise, including those coming from religious tradition, but also often itself became aggressive against religion, either with the intention of re-founding it on purely rational and immanentistic basis, or in order to eliminate it altogether, as a form of slavery and obscurantism. Faith, for its part, at times defended itself by hermetically sealing itself off from reason, which it only considered as its mortal enemy, taking refuge in fideism or mysticism. Alternatively it sought to tame and dominate this new barbarian aggressor by harnessing reason and subjecting it to orthodoxy. As in every conflict of this kind, it is difficult to make out which party was the aggressor. It is certainly true that on a fair number of occasions the rationalist criticism of faith was destructive and blind. Revelation, as a fundamental document of faith, was one of the main sites for these clashes. Whilst one party doggedly endeavoured to narrow revelation down to one of the mere "natural" contents of reason (the "natural" rationalism of which is often, by the by, highly debatable) or used reason to pick away at and gradually demolish its credibility, the other often opposed reason by presenting revelation as a sacred object before which we can do nothing more than bow our heads, or as a rule constricting and limiting the free exercise of reflection.

This conflict had become so ingrained that, in many cases, the pascalian distinction between the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob (…) the God of Jesus Christ" and the God "of philosophers and scholars"[1] was applied in such an extended sense and its validity was assumed so unconditionally and acritically that one might have concluded that, on these bases, no dialogue or encounter between the two were possible.

Yet it is important that faith engage with reason, that believers attain to an every deeper understanding of revelation, that we love God "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength",[2] and reason numbers among our strengths. If faith were completely closed off from reason, it would also be detached from culture,

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[1] B. PASCAL, *Mémorial*, in IDEM, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. J. CHEVALIER, Gallimard, Paris 1954, p. 554.

[2] *Dt* 6:5.

that is to say, from the whole arena of communication and dialogue. If revelation were removed from rational analysis, it would run the risk of being reduced to the kind of occult sacrality to which it has always been extraneous, from its origins and in its very essence. I will here undertake, in brief, to demonstrate that Leibniz's position represents a form of rationalism which is not aggressive in its approach to faith and revelation – that Leibniz employs reason critically, not to destroy, but rather to edify faith. As Leibniz is by no means a minor figure in modern thought – he is, indeed, one of its principal representatives – I believe that his example can serve to demonstrate that the modern rationalists were not all in conflict with faith, and that a significant number of them moved in concord and in collaboration with faith. Leibniz was one of the main representatives of this movement, but it can also be traced beyond Leibniz, right up to the present day. Such a historical study would prove of the utmost use in re-engaging and rekindling the dialogue between reason and faith on a traditional basis. Pascal's maxim that "the heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing"[3] is very famous. However, to this we might perhaps add (and, perhaps, in doing so, we would not be running altogether counter to the intentions of Pascal himself, as author of the famous "gambit") the following: and reason has its reasons, which the heart needs. We will here therefore briefly examine how the reasons of reason upon confrontation with revelation are presented in Leibniz's thought.

<p align="center">*****</p>

Leibniz sums up the relationship between reason and revelation with a particularly effective metaphor, of which I will here present two versions, that which appears in the *Systema theologicum*, presumably dated at around 1690, and that in the 1710 *Essais de théodicée*. These two texts will represent the starting point for the discussion which follows.

In the *Systema theologicum*, then, we read:

> It is therefore necessary that the right reason, almost as if it were the natural interpreter of God, may judge the authority of the other interpreters of God, before they are accepted. But when these have proved, so to say, once and for all the authenticity and legitimacy of their own condition, reason must offer up its obsequies to faith. This may be understood through the example of a governor who resides in a province or a garrison in the prince's name. He will not blindly accept a successor sent to him, but will only do so after accurately examining his credentials, so as to make sure that an enemy is not insinuating himself into office under false pretences. But when he has recognised the lord's will once and for all, he will submit himself and the whole garrison without any contestation.[4]

About forty years later, in the *Essais de théodicée*, Leibniz employed the same metaphor in an almost unaltered form:

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[3] B. PASCAL, *Pensées*, fr. 477 (ed. Brunschvicg fr. 277), in IDEM, *op. cit.*, p. 1221.

[4] *TS* 13.

Also it is a matter of no difficulty among theologians who are expert in their profession, that the motives of credibility justify, once for all, the authority of Holy Scripture before the tribunal of reason, so that reason in consequence gives way before it, as before a new light, and sacrifices thereto all its probabilities. It is more or less as if a new president sent by the prince must show his letters patent in the assembly where he is afterwards to preside.[5]

As we can see, the two versions of the metaphor are almost identical. The striking difference is that, whereas the first version treats of a change of governors, the second refers to the installation of a new governor in a free city. In the first case, then, reason, as the critic of revelation, is symbolised by a physical person, in the second by an assembly. To the extent to which the metaphor in the first case is more personal, its actual meaning is instead more impersonal: it is a figure for reason in the abstract sense. On the contrary, in the second case, the metaphor is a collective, an "assembly," but as a consequence of this very fact it actually refers, in a very concrete sense, to men and to every individual, inasmuch as (s)he is endowed with reason. Nonetheless, this is of no particular relevance for the present study. It is here more important to note, instead, that both the governor in the first metaphor and the city assembly in the second define their rights and duties, and hence their authority in undertaking a critical study of the legitimacy of the new lieutenant, on a direct delegation (an assignment in the first case, a privilege in the second) from the sovereign. I will come back to this point later on.

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First of all, then, it is reason's duty to exam the "credentials" of revelation, in order to verify their content and regularity before submitting itself to their bearer. It must undertake, in sum, the tasks of the "critical art," i.e. of that form of historical-philological enquiry of which Leibniz was a committed and active proponent. He always displays a great deal of respect for such enquiries and never missed out on any opportunity to procure the works of others in this field, to study and to praise them (provided they were serious in their methods and findings) for their great utility. Leibniz himself, famously, dedicated a significant part of his own energies to enquiries of this kind, not only in his professional activities, as historiographer to the House of Hannover, but also branching out into many other fields, including the political, the diplomatic, the legal, etc. Now, when Leibniz writes in praise of the critical art, he does not omit to underline its utility for the understanding of Holy Scripture and for the affirmation of faith. Indeed, he proposes these as the principal and supreme aims of the critical art. In his *Discours touchant la méthode de la certitude et de l'art d'inventer*, for example, he writes:

With regard to *les belles lettres*, history, sacred and profain, has been elucidated to the extent that we can often recognise the errors of those authors writing on matters of their own time. It would be impossible to consider the prodigious mass of remains bequeathed to us by antiquity without

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[5] *T* 67/91.

admiration: the series of coins, the quantity of inscriptions, the large number of manuscripts, both European and oriental, together with the insights which we have been able to gain from old papers, chronicles, foundations and titles which have been retrieved from the dust and have brought to our knowledge a thousand important details regarding the origins and vicissitudes of famous families, states, laws, languages and customs. All of this serves, not only to satisfy the curious, but also, more importantly, to conserve and correct history, whose examples are living lessons and pleasant exhortations. Yet it serves above all to re-establish that which is most important, i.e. criticism, which is necessary in discerning supposition from the truth and fairy tales from history, and which provides admirable assistance in presenting proofs for religion.[6]

The critical art, then, with its historical and philological method which is constantly verified and has an ever-increasing degree of accuracy, is, for Leibniz, an indispensable tool for the examination of religion, its tradition and, first and foremost, Holy Scripture. Yet Leibniz never displays any intention whatsoever of using this method to the detriment of faith and revelation, that they might be falsified or "demythologised." On the contrary, he is convinced of the edifying and demonstrative value of criticism applied to reason. He writes, for example, to Nicaise:

> If someone wished to expound upon revealed theology in a demonstrative manner, [...], he would require certain pre-established elements of the critical art, because the truth of revealed religion is founded on the facts of ancient history, which cannot be proved in any better way than by means of the monuments of antiquity.[7]

Leibniz is so far from thinking he can somehow attain, by means of the critical art, to the authority of revealed religion, that, rather, when treating of religious topics, he accepts no licence regarding biblical truth whatsoever, even in non-scientific situations regarding which others might consider a certain interpretative freedom tolerable. In reference to a theatrical performance on a biblical subject which he had attended, Leibniz pronounces the following, exasperated judgement:

> We must acknowledge that the verses are graceful; but with regard to the invention, the author has no quibbles about departing from Holy Scripture. There is a custom which permits poets to add the odd fiction in novels and poems, but does not allow them to change their essential characteristics. How much less licence, then, should be permitted when they treat of Holy Scripture, which everybody knows and which, as a consequence, must not be altered at any cost![8]

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[6] *GP VII* 175; cf. *GP III* 12 f.; *V* 316, 45l f./*A VI/6* 336,469 f.; *VII* 72, 143 f.; *GRUA* 117; *COUT* 225 f.; *FdCL* 281 f.

[7] *GP II* 567; cf. *GP III* 12 f., 161, 165 f.; *V* 451/*A VI/6* 469; *VII* 143 f.; *GRUA* 117; *COUT* 226; *FdCL* 282.

[8] *FdCL* 264. It is curious to note that this argument is exactly reiterated, although deprived of every association with moral judgement, by Jacob Bernays and, through him, by Hans Blumenberg: cf. H. BLUMENBERG, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

Beyond historical enquiry into monuments and texts, the critical art must also include linguistic criticism and comparative linguistics. Or rather, this branch of enquiry is a continuation of that already discussed, since Leibniz, fascinatingly, considers languages as monuments of the most ancient history. In predicting and eagerly anticipating a critical art which will progressively examine and explicate all the books of all the cultures, Leibniz adds:

> And when there are no more ancient books to examine, their place will be taken by mankind's most ancient monument – languages. Eventually every language in the universe will be recorded, and contained in dictionaries and grammars; and comparisons will be made amongst them.[9]

Linguistic study, too, is placed at the service of faith by Leibniz, as a tool for better understanding the Holy Scripture.[10]

The critical art applied to religion cannot but have operative implications for biblical exegesis. First of all, historical and linguistic knowledge is an indispensable tool for the adequate understanding of the literal meaning of biblical texts, and thus often enables readers to overcome the apparent difficulties which the text itself, being incorrectly understood, appears to pose.[11] However, beyond this point, literal comprehension is not always sufficient and hermeneutic problems become more arduous. Leibniz displays a considerable freedom in unreservedly posing hermeneutic problems regarding the Bible: he has no scruples about posing the question of the divine inspiration of Scripture, the integrity of the text, its relation to apocryphal texts, etc.[12] However, this scientific honesty goes hand in hand with an ideological moderation. The rational examination of Scripture is never pushed towards subversive ends, but is rather tempered by edifying intentions. Biblical hermeneutics, for Leibniz, takes place freely between two fundamental points of reference: the divine inspiration and authority of the text, on the one hand, and the rational truth, in a physical and metaphysical, but above all in an ethical sense, on the other:

> This is where the rules of interpretation come into play; but if they provide nothing which goes against the literal sense in deference to the philosophical maxim, and if furthermore the literal sense contains nothing imputing some imperfection to God or involving a threat to pious observances, it is safer and indeed more reasonable to keep to the letter.[13]

This attitude becomes particularly prominent, for example, when we compare Leibniz's position with that of Spinoza.[14] Ultimately, for Leibniz, the rational

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[9] *GP V* 317/*A VI/6* 336.

[10] Cf. *GP II* 541; *III* 161, 165 f.; *V* 316 ff./*A VI/6* 336 f.

[11] Cf. *GP II* 541; *GRUA* 117.

[12] Cf. *GP III* 12 f., 172 f., 206; *V* 451/*A VI/6* 469 f.; *GRUA* 176 f.; *TS* 29.

[13] *GP V* 482/*A VI/6* 500; cf. *GRUA* 380.

exegesis of the Bible is never a weapon against orthodoxy. He insists, instead, on the importance of tradition and on the teachings of the Church "interpreter of the divine will",[15] as the highest possible authority for biblical interpretation.[16]

This rapid consideration of Leibniz's perspective on the use of the critical art in religious matters has aimed to do nothing more than demonstrate that Leibniz in no way considered the use of reason, in historical, philological and hermeneutic enquiry as having a negative and polemical function with regard to faith and revelation. It instead always served positive and apologetic ends. The task of the critical art is to provide the "motives of credibility" for faith.[17] In this sense, the "divine benefit of criticism"[18] may render services to faith which are without par:

> The only necessary use of history and the critical art is to confirm the truth of religion. Indeed, I am certain that, were we to abstain from the critical art, we would at the same time lose the human instruments of divine faith and nothing solid, with which our religion might be demonstrated to a Chinaman, a Jew or a Muslim, would remain to us.[19]

Nonetheless, the critical-hermeneutic use of reason, although of the utmost use, is not, for Leibniz, sufficient to confirm and uphold faith and revelation. We must, then, further extent our enquiry in the direction of the metaphysical demonstrative use of reason, in which we will also discover reason's most fundamental "critical" value. This will serve, moreover, to clear the air of a suspicion which, up to now, may have obscured Leibniz's valid apologetic intention in deploying the critical art: namely, that it is a mere consequence of an anti-scientific prejudice, an undue limitation to the free exercise of reason on Leibniz's part, in sum, not a genuine research finding, but the reflection of a dogmatic prejudice on the part of the scholar.

In the *Essais de théodicée*, Leibniz writes, with regard to positive truths:

> We learn them either by experience, that is, *a posteriori*, or by reason and *a priori*.[20]

Just a few lines above, he had noted that

> one may compare faith with experience, since faith (in respect of the motives that give it justification) depends upon the experience of those who have seen the miracles whereon

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[14] Cf. GP *I* 123 ff.

[15] *TS* 171.

[16] Cf. *GP III* 172; *GRUA* 176 ff.; *TS* 129, 171, 195.

[17] Cf. *TS* 11 ff. *passim*.

[18] *GP VII* 70.

[19] *GP III* 15.

[20] *T* 50/74.

revelation is founded, and upon the trustworthy tradition which has handed them down to us, whether through the Scriptures or by the account of those who have preserved them.[21]

Faith, then, inasmuch as it constitutes an experience, must be elucidated and confirmed through the critical art, as we have already seen above. However, this alone is not sufficient, it is also necessary that reason provide faith with *a priori* "motives of credibility," through its logical-metaphysical use. In a letter to Thomas Burnett of 11 February 1697, Leibniz specifies:

> Thus, then, truths and their theological consequences also fall into two distinct categories, the first being of a metaphysical certainty and the second of a moral. The first assume definitions, axioms and theorems, drawn from true philosophy and natural theology. The second assume, in part, history and facts and, in part, the interpretation of texts. But to be able to draw benefit from history and texts, and to establish the truth and the antiquity of facts, the authenticity and divinity of our holy books and also of ecclesiastical antiquity, and, finally, the meaning of texts, it must yet make recourse to true philosophy and, in part, to natural jurisprudence […]. Thus, before we can treat of theology with the method of determinants, as I call it, we need a form of metaphysics, or a natural demonstrative theology, together with a moral dialectics and a natural jurisprudence, whereby we can ascertain demonstratively how to evaluate the degree of proof to which we have attained.[22]

For Leibniz, then, there is an *a priori* use of reason, in the recovery of the motives of credibility of faith, which is anterior and fundamental to its *a posteriori* use in the critical art. On this point, too, Leibniz eschews every tendency to reduce religion to reason. It is significant, for example, that in his review of the *Religio naturalis*, a work written under the pseudonym Arsenius Sophianus, he opposes the pietistic theses of the author of the polemical preface written under the name Synesius Philadelphus, but at the same time is reserved and critical in accepting the socinian extremism of the author's rationalist reductionism.[23] In the *Nouveaux Essais*, Theophilus responds to Philalethes' almost unilateral insistence on the necessity of not accepting the contents of faith except via reason by defending the possibility that the Holy Spirit might imbue an individual with faith by non-rational means (even though the contents of such a faith would not be contrary to reason).[24] He effectively sums up his position with this double affirmation:

> In general one can say that the socinians are too quick to reject everything that fails to conform to the order of nature, even when they cannot conclusively prove its impossibility. But sometimes their adversaries also go too far and push mistery to the verge of contradiction, thereby wronging the truth they seek to defend.[25]

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[21] *T* 49 f./74.

[22] *GP III* 193 f.

[23] Cf. *GRUA* 69 ff.

[24] Cf. *GP V* 478 ff./*A VI/6* 495 ff.

Reason, for Leibniz, is "strict reason," and this is above all, as he writes in the *Essais de théodicée*, that "reason pure and simple (*la Raison pure et nue*)," which is "distinct from experience" and "only has to do with truths independent of the senses".[26] In that work, Leibniz opposes this reason, which defines "the linking together of truths",[27] to reason as the mere "faculty of reasoning whether well or ill",[28] i.e. reason understood as "the opinions and discourses of men," as

> the habit they have formed of judging things according to the usual course of Nature.[29]

According to Leibniz, reason understood in the latter word "might" and "does indeed deceive us," but if we conceive of reason as "the linking together of truths," it is then "impossible for reason to deceive us",[30] as

> all that is said against reason has no force save against a kind of counterfeit reason, corrupted and deluded by false appearances.[31]

This does not mean that pure *a priori* reason, i.e. reason as "the linking together of truths," does not have the task of judging appearances. It rather implies that this task is only performed in a legitimate manner if, in performing it, reason founds its activities on its own pure knowledge of the eternal truths. The distinction between "strict and true reason"[32] and "corrupt reason",[33] is not intended to mark the difference between a good reason (i.e. divine reason and human reason before original sin) and a bad one, source of error and guilt (human reason after original sin), which are to be considered as entirely heterogeneous. This, rather, is the position of the fideists, against whom Leibniz argues. For Leibniz, instead, there is only one divine and human reason, and it is good. Only its incorrect use, its "abuse"[34] is evil. Those who abuse reason limit its exercise to the judgement of things "according to

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[25] *GP V* 481/*A VI/6* 498.

[26] Cf. *T* 49/73.

[27] Cf. *T* 49/73, *passim*; cf. also *GP V* 185, 457/*A VI/6* 199, 475; *GRUA* 68.

[28] *T* 87/110.

[29] Cf. *T* 64/88.

[30] Cf. *T* 87/110.

[31] *T* 51/75.

[32] *T* 49/73; cf. *T* 84/107: "right reason".

[33] Cf. *T* 84/107.

[34] *T* 72/96.

the usual course of Nature".[35] They fail to consider the "fitness of things" (*convenance*) which led God to choose this order. In other words, they lack an *a priori* foundation.[36] This "abuse" of reason leads it into error, reducing it to "seeming" reason.[37]

Pure reason, for Leibniz, is the supreme good.[38] Any attack against this form of reason is not, then, a legitimate criticism, but rather an act of aggression against truth itself.[39] Leibniz, moreover, underlines the edifying character of reason understood in this light. Indeed, the implicit or explicit motivation behind fideism's attempt to shield faith and revelation from the examination and criticism of reason lay in a conviction that such an enquiry would be of a destructive character. To this assumption, Leibniz opposes the ever-edifying quality of the "right reason:"

> When it overthrows some thesis, it builds up the opposing thesis. And when it seems to be overthrowing the two opposing theses at the same time, it is then that it promises us something profound, provided that we follow it *as far as it can go*, not in a disputatious spirit but with an ardent desire to search out and discover the truth, which will always be recompensed with a great measure of success.[40]

Critical reason, as "true reason," opposes sceptical reason, as "seeming" reason. The latter is capable of nothing but destruction, whilst the former has an inexhaustible capacity to edify. This does not signify that reason is dogmatic but, on the contrary, is characteristic of its criticism, as its relationship to truth is not one of dependency on a datum received intuitively, but rather consists in the homogeneity of its operations with the objective connections forged between truths in the divine intellect. Reason does not perceive truths to then discuss them. It rather discovers them through discussion. As it destroys and edifies it discovers the same dialectic which exists between truths in the mind of God.

Only on the basis of the relationship between pure reason and truth can reason legitimately pass judgement on appearance, above all in the sense that the divine reason, as a linking together of eternal truths in God's intellect, determines the positive truths and, as a consequence, in the sense the human reason judges the apparent, i.e. the existent, in the light of the truths which it knows *a priori*. It is this very *a priori* procedure of reason that, for Leibniz, distinguishes men from brutes.[41]

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[35] Cf. *T* 64/88.

[36] Cf. *T* 50/74.

[37] *T* 98/120.

[38] Cf. *GP III* 278; *FdCL* 182.

[39] Cf. *GP V* 185/*A VI/6* 199.

[40] *T* 97/119.

[41] Cf. *T* 87/109; cf. also *GP V* 44, 130, 457/*A VI/6* 50, 142 f., 475 f.; *VI* 600 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 609), 611 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 217); *VII* 330 ff.

Since, as we have seen, "one may compare faith with experience",[42] faith, too, must be screened by reason, in order to discern the true from the false. This does not represent a demythologisation of faith or a rationalistic reductionism, but rather responds to the need to distinguish the true religion from false creeds and provide the "motives of credibility" for the true faith. As we have already noted with regard to the Leibnizian metaphor quoted at the beginning, reason, or rather humanity, inasmuch as it is endowed with reason, is authorised to undertake the critical examination of faith and revelation, since the authority in question comes straight from God. Human reason, for Leibniz, is the "natural light",[43] which God has placed in each of us: it is "a gift" of God.[44] In reason, God makes a gift of himself to mankind: he "communicates himself to us".[45] For this gift, man is the image of God and can, or rather must, legitimately evaluate divine revelation in order to discover and uphold its truth. This by no means implies that Leibniz is a proponent of "religious rationalism," if this expression is taken to suggest a reduction of faith into reason, immanentism and the denial of transcendence. Leibniz maintains the sense of mystery, as a truth counter to appearance, intact.[46] The task of reason does not consist in unveiling the mysteries of faith, but rather in upholding them, in finding their "motives of credibility." Moreover, the recognition of divine transcendence is preserved by reason's character as a divine "gift," by man's creatural relation to God the creator, from the free and sovereign gratuity of divine munificence.

For Leibniz, then, to submit faith to the criticism of reason does not involve any denial of the transcendence of the truth of faith. It rather affirms that reason, too, has a transcendent origin, as a consequence of which it has been assigned the task of checking the "credentials" of revelation, "so as to make sure that an enemy is not insinuating himself into office under false pretences." Reason is charged with finding the "motives of credibility" for faith, which justify revelation "once and for all," so that reason may willingly subject itself thereto.[47] At this point, then, after such a critical examination has been performed, reason has justified itself in surpassing itself: it recognises mystery (although it does not cognitively know it). The rational critical examination of faith and revelation is not, then, opposed to obedience, but rather constitutes the freely exercised choice to be obedient. It should not, then, seem strange that Leibniz quotes *Rom* 11:33 more than any other biblical passage – that he

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[42] *T* 49/74.

[43] Cf. *T* 84/107; cf. also *GP III* 291 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 285), 353, 660 (Eng. trans. *DM* 116); *IV* 453 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 60); *VI* 453; *VII* 111.

[44] Cf. *T* 73/96, *passim*.

[45] Cf. *GP IV* 453; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 59.

[46] Cf. *T* 51/75, *passim*; *GRUA* 68.

[47] Cf. above, Chapter Two, § 1.

makes it, in a certain sense, his motto. He has no difficulty in recognising God's transcendence and the inscrutability of faith, as soon as reason has first verified its "motives of credibility:"

> To say with St. Paul, *O altitudo divitiarum et sapientiae,* is not renouncing reason, it is rather employing the reasons that we know, for they teach us that immensity of God whereof the Apostle speaks. But therein we confess our ignorance of the facts, and we acknowledge, moreover, before we see it, that God does all the best possible, in accordance with the infinite wisdom which guides his actions.[48]

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[48] *T* 188/206 f.

FROM ONTOLOGY TO ETHICS: LEIBNIZ VS. ECKHARD

The identity of being with the good is a fundamental principle, an authentic pillar of ontology, which cannot be called into discussion without jeopardising the ontological edifice as a whole. Yet the ontological character of this principle is not evident *per se*. It is rather somewhat equivocal. In the sense that it traditionally assumes in ontology, this principle is not an ontological proposition, as it is not a statement regarding being. It instead regards the good, which is identified with being and reduced into it. It should, instead, be considered as an ontological principle inasmuch as it assumes, dogmatically, that being is the absolute with which everything, including the good, must be identified. Yet it is possible to read this principle from a very different point of view. That is to say, it can be read as an effectively ontological proposition, which traces being back to the good, making it commensurate to value, and which, thus, passes beyond ontology, demolishing the dogma of the absoluteness of being. Such a modification to the principle's meaning reintroduces the fissure between being and value, noted since the very origins of philosophical thought, from the Platonic *epékeina tès ousías*, reintroducing the notion of ideality instead of reality as the medium term of comparison. Is such an operation possible? The answer is certainly yes, but it cannot be limited to a simple overturning of the ontological perspective. It constitutes a radical passage, not so much from the absoluteness of being to the absoluteness of the good, as rather from the dogmatism of the absolute to the criticism of the foundation. This involves an essential transformation of perspective, method and aim. Had such a surpassing of ontology already been attempted at some point in the history of philosophy? To answer this question, we must look beyond current historiographical frameworks. For a certain period it was commonly held that modern philosophy, as a whole, was characterised by an abandonment and destruction of ontology in favour of a philosophy of the subject, leading to scepticism, relativism, atheism, and every other kind of woeful error. Later, a new historiographical perspective asserted itself which pre-dated the abandonment of being to a point far before modern philosophy, suggesting that it arose at the very origins of western philosophical thought in Socrates and Plato. However, at the same time, this approach also traced a strain of inauthentically ontological, metaphysical thought which endured well beyond the origins of modern philosophy, and has continued to endure up to now. This extended metaphysical era is read as referring more to the fatal vicissitudes of the "Being," than to the history of thought. Recently, on the basis of the specific problems of theodicy, i.e. of evil, God's justice and human freedom, a new perspective (although not without points in common with that just described) has been developed and found favour. According to this reading, traditional onto-theology does not die with the advent of modern thought, but is

rather reinforced thereby. This constitutes a limitation to philosophy as a result of which it proves incapable of adequately responding to the question of evil. Leibniz, as one of the philosophers most representative of modern philosophy, would be one of the most significant examples of this impotence. Each of these perspectives is significant inasmuch as it is an integral part of a theoretical thesis, provided that they are not taken to correctly describe the actual historical intersections between classic ontology and modern thought. Like any period in the western intellectual history, modernity cannot be adequately described as a univocal stage in the destined evolution of being or truth or thought. In the modern era, as in every other period, different options and alternatives remain open in response to the biggest issues and, as a consequence, diverse forms and directions of philosophical thought emerge which engage each other in dialogue and conflict. Leibniz himself may provide us with the clearest and most effective example of how, if we look beyond scholarly commonplaces, we can encounter a radical discussion of traditional onto-theology right at the very heart of modern philosophy. It is a discussion which does not resolve itself into a simple destruction and abandonment of the issues at hand, but which rather constitutes a radical critical refoundation of traditional principles, in the very light of the devastating instance of evil. I will here seek to briefly illustrate this situation through a brief overview of a highly significant point in Leibniz's oeuvre: his discussion of the cartesian ontological argument with Arnold Eckhard.[1]

The discussion took place during a meeting between Leibniz and Eckhard, in the presence of the brother of the abbot Molanus and, when it resumed in the afternoon, of the abbot himself and others. Leibniz himself provides us with a brief account, dated Hannover, 5 April 1677.[2] After a few preliminaries, the discussion focused on Descartes' ontological argument. Leibniz proposed to amendments to this argument: firstly, the abandonment of the expression "supremely perfect being" to refer to God, in favour of the term "necessary Being" and, secondly, that the argument be concluded by making the ascertainment of God's possibility a condition for the recognition of the necessary connection between the essence and the existence of God. I will here leave the second amendment uncommented, even though this is the most famous of the two and has always attracted the greatest degree of scholarly attention, to instead dwell on the first. Although this point has been much more neglected in discussions of Leibniz, I would nonetheless maintain that it is of primary importance. Leibniz himself contributes to underplaying its significance, by presenting this proposal as a mere simplification of the argument:

> [I said] that it seemed to me that this argument could be made briefer if we were to eliminate the definition of the perfections.[3]

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[1] The texts discussed here can be found in *GP* I 211-270.

[2] Cf. *GP I* 212-215.

[3] *GP I* 212; cf. also 220, 223; *GP IV* 359 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 386), 402, 405.

In reality, the application of the ontological argument to the necessary Being instead of the supremely perfect Being is far more than a simple question of discursive economy. It is rather an alternative of fundamental importance, not only because it takes in the ancient and unsolved problem as to whether existence is to be considered an attribute of being, but also because it calls into question the identity of being with the good, which Eckhard, in accordance with traditional ontology, takes for granted.

The importance of the question soon becomes apparent. Eckhard, indeed, shows no signs of welcoming Leibniz's proposal or of paying any attention to it, and continues unperturbed along the path he has chosen. For Eckhard, the identity of being, reality and perfection is an ontological axiom – more than that, perhaps, it is a definition in the truest sense – and he does not see why nor how anyone might call it into question:

> I said that in considering this demonstration of divine existence we must consider two things: [...] firstly [...], secondly, whether existence is to be counted amongst the perfections. It in fact seems that perfections are certain qualities, amongst which existence does not number. Hence I asked him to declare what he understood by the term perfection. He answered that perfection is not easy to define, like many other things which are commonly known. That nonetheless anyone would concede that to exist is a perfection and that those things realised in existence are more perfect than those which are not [...] that every attribute, or rather every reality, is a perfection.[4]

At this point, Leibniz goes in for the kill, opposing the dramatic reality of suffering to this ontological dogma. He introduces suffering as an example,[5] but it is in fact much more than that: pain is here introduced as the stumbling block of ontology. In its irreducible dramatic reality, suffering renders impossible the notion that the identification of being with good might be a self-evident truth, requiring no further justification. Leibniz's argument pivots on the reality of pain and the moral impossibility of considering it as a mere deficiency of being in the traditional ontological sense:

> I: Therefore pain, too, is a perfection? He: Pain is not something positive, but is rather the privation of tranquillity, like darkness is the privation of light. I: It seems to me that we cannot say that pain is the privation of pleasure any more than we can say that pleasure is the privation of pain. Instead, both pleasure and pain are positive. Moreover, the relationship of pain to pleasure is very different from that of darkness to light. Indeed, shadows cannot spread and melt away where light is excluded, and those shadows where light is utterly absent are no more profound than those elsewhere. Pain, instead, does not exist solely where pleasure is eliminated and one pain may be stronger than another: and from there it would follow that also the absolutely perfect Being would experience suffering.[6]

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[4] *GP I* 214.

[5] Cf. *GP I* 221.

[6] *Ibidem.*

The issue, as we can see, is decisive: the ontological dogma of the identity of being with the good is called into question by the moral case of suffering. The proponents of the dogma vacillate under the attacks of the indignant moral conscience and are unable to respond except by further entrenching themselves in their definition. Yet in so doing they seek shelter under the very edifice which is collapsing. The brother of Abbot Molanus intervenes, believing himself able to resolve the conflict by distinguishing between the definitions:

> Molanus' brother [said] that if it were permitted to use the definition of moral perfection, assuming, specifically, that perfection is *congruence with reason*, then it would appear quite straightforward that suffering should be excluded. Nonetheless he acknowledged that here we were treating of the metaphysical definition, from which it follows that existence is a perfection.[7]

He has hit the mark and is, in a certain sense, correct: the discussion stems from the difference between the ontological and moral definitions of perfection. What he, nonetheless, seems not to see, or to wish to see, is that drawing this distinction does not solve the problem, as the issue which Leibniz had raised is more radical. The moral significance of perfection is not only different from the ontological. It enters into conflict with the ontological definition, calling it into question and challenging it to a mortal duel which only one of the conceptions can survive. The tragic reality of suffering is the battering ram with which the moral conscience topples the centuries-old walls of traditional onto-theology.

The discussion described, however, is not followed through to these final conclusions. The issue is left suspended:

> Then we drifted, unawares, to other issues.[8]

Nonetheless, we can track the tail-end of the discussion in the subsequent correspondence between Leibniz and Eckhard. Just a few days after the meeting, on 9 April 1677, Eckhard writes a long letter to Leibniz, in which he resumes the discussion as a whole, including the matter with which we are here concerned, in the hope of thus clearing it up in a definitive manner. On the identity of being and perfection, nonetheless, he has no decisive argument to add. It is evident, from Eckhard's letter, that for its writer any discussion regarding the identity of being with perfection is simply inconceivable. He simply reformulates that identity as an undeniable dogma, of which nobody has ever, nor could ever be in any doubt:

> I was saying that I do not understand the word "perfect" in any other way, like all the philosophers of the world, who draw no distinction between "perfect" and "being," if not with reason alone. Indeed, we oppose "being" and "the positive" to "non-being." And since being true

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[7] *Ibidem, italics mine.*

[8] *Ibidem.*

and real implies a concept which non-being does not have and being something is better than being nothing, every being can be termed perfect. On this point, all are in agreement.[9]

To Leibniz's argument regarding pain, Eckhard only concedes that pain is positive to the extent that it is sensation and thought, but *inasmuch as it is pain*, it is privation and therefore non-entity. Pain, therefore, in no way compromises the goodness of existence. In justification of this point, Eckhard can do no more than seek refuge, once again, in the dogmatic repetition of the identity of being and perfection:

> You come to ask, at this point, if existence is a perfection. It seems to me that on this point there is no doubt. Indeed, if "being," "positive" and "real" do not differ between themselves, who could deny that existence is a perfection? Indeed, there is no difference between being an entity, being real, being positive and existing.[10]

Such a unyielding re-proposition of the dogma could not possibly satisfy Leibniz. Indeed, his objection calls into question the very heart of the position repeated by Eckhard. He refuses to reduce suffering into simple non-being and this calls into question the perfection of existence *per se*. Hence, ultimately, the very foundation of these certainties, that "to be something is better than to be nothing" can no longer be accepted as an absolute principle, but is itself in need of foundation. Ontology as a whole is called into discussion, then, not that it may be destroyed but, on the contrary, that it may be founded. Leibniz's novelty lies in his surpassing of traditional ontology, not because he wishes to reject its content, but rather because he no longer accepts dogmatism and makes manifest the new, revolutionary requirement that it have a foundation. Herein, I believe, lies an important aspect of that specific tradition of modern rationalism, critical idealism, in which Leibniz played a key role. Indeed, in response to Eckhard, Leibniz reiterates his own criticism of his counterpart's argument in general and of its premises in particular, demanding that his counterpart account for that which he presents as a dogma:

> The major [premise] will be demonstrated when it has been demonstrated that *existence is a perfection*.[11]

With this he returns to his objections, whose significance cannot be reduced, as the brother of abbot Molanus asserted, to the simple distinction between metaphysical and moral perfection. The question is rather, for Leibniz, that the metaphysical significance of perfection may only be sustained dogmatically, while if we seek a critical foundation we must inevitably turn to the moral significance:

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[9] *GP I* 216.

[10] *Ibidem*.

[11] *GP I* 221.

To prove that existence is a perfection, we must first define perfection. If I am not wrong, you have still not presented such a definition. You say that "perfect" does not differ from "being" if not for reason alone. You should therefore have specified for which reason they differ, if you do not wish us to understand the following from your reasoning:

> That which is better is more perfect;
> Being is better than non-being;
> Therefore being is more perfect.

But I would like to know what it means to say "it is better." If "better" is like "more pleasurable" […] In this sense, then, not being, but well-being (*bene essere*) will be perfection.[12]

At this point, Leibniz returns to the "example" of suffering. He sums up his counterpart's arguments, that pain is a perfection only inasmuch as it is a sensation and a thought, but is in itself an imperfection

Since it implies the lack of something and to have this something would be better for us than to suffer.[13]

At this point, Leibniz repeats his own question:

Why a better situation, if not because more pleasurable? Granted! I would therefore concede that in this sense pain is not a perfection, *but I still do not see why existence is a perfection.*[14]

He proceeds in an imaginary dialogue with his counterpart (who he does not spare from an explicit irony in reference to the cartesian conception of the animal-machine):

It seems that someone in your position could answer, therefore, that the greatest or most perfect good lies with that which, all other conditions remaining unaltered, constitutes the greatest or most perfect good. Such would seem, in any case, to be existence. Indeed, even if there were any doubt as to *whether it might be better not to exist at all than to exist in a state of utter unhappiness,* one should nonetheless acknowledge that it is better to exist in an indifferent state, devoid of happiness or unhappiness (if such a state can be considered possible in a being capable of choice), than not to exist at all. I, however, do not consider that such is the case for stones, for example. I would rather argue that the existence of stones is better for us, on the grounds of their utility, and not for the stones themselves. That cats exist, for the cartesians, should be indifferent for the cats themselves, better for us, but for the rats, if we may pretend that they are capable of good and evil, it is surely worse. That deer exist is indifferent for the deer themselves (you would have it), for the nobility it is better, but for the peasants it is worse than if they did not exist at all. It seems, then, that existence is not, *per se*, better than non-existence. And in these terms I will concede that existence is a perfection – i.e. that, without giving any consideration to the other

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[12] *Ibidem.*

[13] *Ibidem.*

[14] *Ibidem, italics mine.*

circumstances of life, it is better to exist than not to exist. *Better*, however, I mean in the sense of *more desirable with the reason* (*cum ratione optabilius*).[15]

In May 1677 Eckhard tried once more to convince Leibniz of the absurdity of his ontological heresy in a letter long enough to be considered a short essay. However, to multiply the words does not, in itself, imply any further development of the arguments. Indeed, with regard to the point with which we are here concerned, Eckhard does nothing more than repeat, in a far more extended form but without an substantial variation, his profession of ontological faith: the identity of being, reality, the good and perfection; the primacy of being over non-being; the metaphysical significance of the notion of imperfection and of the notion of pain as imperfection. Eckhard begins by reconstructing once more the framework for these definitions, with a quantity of word which could, as Leibniz notes in his gloss,[16] be reduced to a sole affirmation: perfection is the quantity of reality. Indeed, after many twists and turns, Eckhard brings us to this very conclusion:

> I have argued that "perfection" is not distinct from "being," if not for reason alone.[17]

Two corollaries descend from this assertion:
1) that, in its metaphysical sense, the good is identical with being:

> every entity is a good and every good is an entity (*omne ens esse bonum et omne bonum ens*). [...] "Better" and "perfect" also entail that which has more reality [...]. "Excellent" and "supremely perfect" is that which encompasses every reality;[18]

2) that he moral significance of the good "is completely different" from the metaphysical and is thus "simply not pertinent here".[19]

At this point he considers Leibniz's objections one by one, quoting his counterparts arguments to the letter. However, this exhibition of rigour and loyalty is, in reality, illusory, since Eckhard has already pre-judged the confrontation with the dogmatic re-proposition of his own theses and his implicit and obstinate refusal to consider the true significance of the objections. His apparent refutation of Leibniz's arguments therefore boils down to nothing more than a vain and monotonous repetition of his own assumptions, which adds nothing to the discussion. Leibniz's glosses to the section of the response regarding pain[20] reveal his irritation at

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[15] *GP I* 221-222, *italics mine*.

[16] Cf. *GP I* 225-228.

[17] *GP I* 228.

[18] *GP I* 228-229.

[19] Cf. *GP I* 229.

[20] Cf. *GP I* 230-232.

Eckhard's total refusal to seriously consider the nub of his objections, irenically seeking refuge in the metaphysical definition of evil as imperfection or privation of being. One of these glosses includes a characteristic definition of suffering

> The true and intimate reason for pain seems to consist in the sense of something confused, perturbed and lacking in harmony.[21]

Leibniz's definition of suffering as privation of harmony is very different from Eckhard's definition of suffering as privation of being. The fact that it occurs as part of an argument against Eckhard's thesis, its association with "confusion" and "disturbance," and the moral pathos of this affirmation all converge to indicate that this affirmation has a morally powerful significance. It refers to what Leibniz, in the *Theodicy* and elsewhere, terms "inconvenience," a notion similar to the kantian "*zweckwidrig*." Hence, in another gloss to the same letter by Eckhard, Leibniz expresses his dissatisfaction with a statement of admirable power and modernity:

> Not existence, then, but its meaning is desirable *per se*.[22]

In the *Theodicy* and elsewhere Leibniz, too, will use the traditional apologetic argument of evil as privation of good, but in a very difference sense to the reductive manner in which it is deployed by canonical ontology.

This irritation and doubt in the possibility of shaking his interlocutor's certainties and, indeed, in the utility of proceeding with the discussion itself, rather than any concession to the arguments of his counterpart, led Leibniz, in the subsequent letter, to bring the dialogue to an abrupt close. He does so with a purely formal recognition of Eckhard's position, to which he appends an apparently small reservation, which is actually of crucial, substantial importance:

> Several of my objections have ended since you have explained that in your usage, perfection is being (*Entitas*) insofar as it is understood to differ from non-being (*a non Entitate*), or, as I should prefer to define it, *perfection* is degree or quantity of reality or essence, as *intensity* (*intensio*) is degree of quality, and *force* (*vis*) is degree of action […]. But it still seems to follow from this that there is more perfection or reality in a mind which suffers than in an indifferent one which is neither enjoying nor suffering, so that in a metaphysical sense, pain too is a perfection […]. But there remain certain scruples even here, which I pass over for now.[23]

I have thus discussed the key aspects of the debate between Leibniz and Eckhard on this highly important matter. On the basis of its immediate results, it might be better to describe the debate as a missed opportunity, a debate that never was, since after few attempts Leibniz relinquishes it, having noted Eckhard's

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[21] *GP I* 232.

[22] *GP I* 234.

[23] *GP I* 266; Eng. trans. *PhPL* 177.

unwillingness or, perhaps, his incapacity to really engage with the objection posed. Yet the significance of this issue in Leibniz's thought, and its influence on subsequent philosophy is, instead, profound. Leibniz definitively abandons the ontological dogma of the identity of being and the good. He does not do so in order to open up the chasm of nothingness. Instead, abandoning the aforementioned dogma enables him to approach the fundamental question – why being instead of nothing? – in the only way in which it effectively constitutes a question and not a fundamental anguish, i.e. by countering it with a fundamental answer, obtained via a rational method, the reason principle.

According to the most radical significance of this principle:

> There is a *reason*, in nature, why something exists instead of nothing.[24]

It therefore replaces the ontological dogma, cited by Eckhard amongst others, whereby "to be something is better than to be nothing".[25] Leibniz reaffirms the primacy of being over nothing, but on the basis of a foundation in reason. As a consequence, the link between being and the good is also reaffirmed, not as a simple identity, but rather through a foundation in "meaning." "Perfection" is no longer simply the "quantity of reality," but rather "congruence with reason".[26] "Better" now signifies "more desirable by the reason"[27] and God is the perfect Being because he is the "Being most supremely desirable by the reason".[28] Leibniz, then, formulates a principle which is more originary than that of identity, since it provides the critical foundation for the ontological meaning of identity: the reason principle. As it is not of a solely formal character, this principle refers back to God as the originary and eternal Being who is the first to operate rationally, in his goodness, wisdom and power, conceiving of the possibilities or essences in his mind and creating the best possible series thereof. In other words, God is "the ultimate reason for things".[29] As such, he is also the origin and guarantee of human reason, in both its theoretical and its practical uses.

It would be impossible to provide here even a rough sketch of anything approximating and adequate analysis of Leibniz's reason principle or of its fundamental concepts, such as "reason," "harmony," etc. I believe, however, that the rapid and summary glance at a single episode in Leibniz's reflection on ontology and the problem of evil provided here may stimulate a critical revision of many deep-rooted and unjustified commonplaces regarding Leibniz. He, indeed, emerges here is

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[24] *GP VII* 289.

[25] *GP I* 216.

[26] *GP I* 214.

[27] *GP I* 222.

[28] *Ibidem*.

[29] *GP VII* 302; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 149.

a very different light from that in which he is usually presented. He is far from passively adopting traditional onto-theology and accepting the reduction of evil into non-being in an ontological sense. On the contrary, as we have seen, the very moral instance of the ontological positivity of pain compels him to call into question the identity of being with the good, so as to ultimately re-establish it, no longer as an identity but rather as a harmony. This also entails the correction of another point of view, which I also hold to be misguided, which has been adopted by various illustrious Leibniz scholars. The reason principle should not be considered as related to that of identity or, worse yet, as a simple operative formula for reducing our comprehension of the contingent to identity. It is, on the contrary, a principle autonomous from, and every bit as fundamental as that of identity. Indeed, as the critical foundation for ontology, it is even more originary than the identity principle.

All of these arguments would obviously require a more in-depth discussion, which cannot be undertaken at this point. That which I have here sought to do, considering the space at my disposal, has been to put forward a few preliminary ideas, with reference to a particularly significant single episode, which should prompt readers to reconsider Leibniz's thought. Leibniz's philosophy should thus emerge as a decisive moment of passage for modern philosophy from traditional ontology to critical rationalism. This latter remains relevant today, as an antagonist, not only of ancient ontology, but also of its opposite – namely, the anguish of confronting the nothingness for which no expectation of a Being's coming can compensate – which is ever more prevalent nowadays. Critical idealism, of which Leibniz is one of the foremost proponents, points to a third way, that of the fundamental principle, which is a foundation at once for reason and a rational foundation for the originary, firmly established answer to the fundamental question.

APPENDIX FOUR

MORAL NECESSITY IN LEIBNIZ

In the *Theodicy*, Leibniz distinguishes a "happy necessity"[1] from the "real necessity".[2] He is referring to the famous distinction between

> absolute necessity, which is called also logical and metaphysical and sometimes geometrical [...] which would alone be formidable

and "the hypothetical and the moral necessity which [...] are open to no objection".[3] The former, indeed, may be harmful,[4] is to be feared,[5] and is incompatible with morality.[6] Instead the second is, in effect, a "non-necessity",[7] which "instead of destroying religion [...] shows divine perfection to the best advantage".[8]

In these few pages I will seek the examine and generally assess the significance of "moral necessity" in Leibniz's thought. Over the last century, Leibniz scholarship has taken some great steps forward with regard to logic, and in particular to Leibniz's use of modal categories. Specific and analytic studies, often of a noteworthy quality and depth, have brought to light the characteristic contents of this significant area of Leibnizian philosophy. They have also highlighted its problematic aspects, its short-fallings, together, sometimes, with the logical equivocations and incongruities in to which Leibniz fell when developing his conception of modal categories. I do not here intend so much to revisit these points, on which it seems to me that clear and convincing results have already been obtained, as to reflect on the Leibnizian notion of "moral necessity" in the general context of his thought. I will do so in order to highlight how this conception, even considering all the limits of its logical formulation, expresses one of the deepest intentions of Leibniz's thought. If analytical enquiry into the individual notions in the thought of a philosopher is,

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[1] *T* 219/236; cf. *T* 182/201, 319/332, 338/350, 386/387; *GP VII* 390 (Eng. trans. *L-C* 57); cf. also *GRUA* 289.

[2] *T* 37/61; cf. *GP III* 401(Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 193).

[3] Cf. *T* 37/61.

[4] Cf. *T* 33/57.

[5] Cf. *T* 37/61, 380/381, 386/387.

[6] Cf. *T* 380/381, 386/387, 390/395, 412/417.

[7] *T* 296/310.

[8] *T* 338/350.

without a doubt, invaluable and indispensable if we are to understand its contents, so too the synthetic overview has its utility, which should not be overlooked. By assuming such a broad, comprehensive perspective, we can understand the fundamental direction, the general sense of the thought, in which context specific notions, even if argued in a defective, blinkered or equivocal manner, may prove meaningful and valid.

To reach this goal, it will perhaps prove useful to take one of the fundamental assumptions of Leibniz's philosophy as our starting point: not all possibles are realised in existence.

1.   Possibility and Necessity: Non-Existent Possibles

As is well-known, Leibniz held the principle whereby all possibles exist to be the radical philosophical error on which necessary determinism and its grave ontological, theological and moral implications are based. One might say that the whole of Leibniz's ontological, theological and moral thought rests on the refutation of this principle and the assumption of its opposite. The assumption of the "megarian" principle of the existence of all possibles is the gravest of the accusations which he levels, with some reservations, at Abelard, Wyclif and Hobbes,[9] but above all, and with no indulgence whatsoever, at Spinoza.[10] It is interesting to note at this point, even if only in passing, that he also attributes an adhesion to this false principle to Descartes and that this is the most serious allegation which he makes against his great predecessor:

> One might say that Spinoza did nothing more than cultivate certain seeds from the philosophy of Descartes.[11]

Also worthy of brief mention is the fact that the refutation of this principle is the focal point of the entire debate in Lorenzo Valla's *Dialogo intorno al libero arbitrio,* a text whose influence on his own philosophy Leibniz openly acknowledged, to the extent that he inserted a reworking of it into his own *Theodicy,* in the famous myth of Sextus Tarquinius.[12]

In §§ 169-174 of the *Theodicy*[13] Leibniz outlines the terms of the question (with reference, above all, to Cicero's *De Fato*) in the polemic of Chrysippus and the

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[9] Cf. *T* 215 ff./233 f.

[10] Cf. *T* 217/234 f.

[11] *GP II* 563; cfr. *IV* 283 (Eng. trans. *PhPL* 273), 288 f., 299 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 242), 340 f.; *VII* 334 (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 282).

[12] Cf. L. VALLA, *Dialogo intorno al libero arbitrio*, cit., p. 267. Cf. *T* 359/484. For an expression of Leibniz's appreciation of Valla, cf. *T* 43/67. For the Leibnizian reworking of the myth of Sextus Tarquinius, cf. *T* 357 ff./365 ff.

stoics against Epicurus and in their critique of the thesis of Diodorus Cronus. In so doing, as is his custom in the *Theodicy*, he is actually engaging in dialogue with Bayle, and in particular with that which he wrote in the entry on "Chrysippus" in his *Dictionnaire*. Leibniz then moves on to discuss the position of Abelard, which he also associates, although with some significant reservations, with that of the Megarian school. He then considers Wyclif, Hobbes and, finally, Spinoza.

I will not at this point dwell on the various ambiguities surrounding the notion of "possibility," which are, besides anything else, self-evident. Leibniz himself does nothing to resolve these uncertainties. There is, first of all, the confusion between logical and real possibility and then the overlapping of the logical, ontological, gnoseological and ethical senses of the concept of possibility in the same discourse. At this point, however, we must seek to identify the overall aim of the discourse, the philosophical intent which it wishes to substantiate. Leibniz's intent clearly emerges in the conclusion to the argument. He declares himself in agreement with Bayle's criticism of Spinoza and the "Spinozists:"

> they are subverting a maxim so universal and so evident as this one: All that which implies contradiction is impossible, and all that which implies no contradiction is possible.[14]

Rather, Leibniz specifies that

> what has just been indicated as a maxim is in fact the definition of the *possible* and the *impossible*.[15]

At this point, however, he distances himself from Bayle, who, on the basis of this refutation of Spinoza's philosophy of necessity, adopts the opposite stance of unconditioned indeterminism and arbitrarism. For Leibniz, truth lies along a third way:

> It is true that there would have been no contradiction in the supposition that Spinoza died in Leyden and not at The Hague; there would have been nothing so possible: the matter was therefore indifferent in respect of the power of God. But one must not suppose that any event, however small it be, can be regarded as indifferent in respect of his wisdom and his goodness [...]. It is confusing what is necessary by moral necessity, that is, according to the principle of Wisdom and Goodness, with what is so by metaphysical and brute necessity, which occurs when the contrary implies contradiction.[16]

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[13] Cf. *T* 211 ff./229 ff.

[14] *T* 217/235.

[15] *T* 217 f./235.

[16] *T* 218/235 f.

It is therefore thanks to the notion of "moral necessity" that Leibniz can stand firm by the undefeasible principle that not all possibles exist, without falling into the indeterminism and arbitrarism of Bayle.

Nonetheless, the question of the reality of inexistent possibles would not be adequately explored were Leibniz not to clearly address the problem of their determination. At the very beginning of the discussion of inexistent possibles, to which we have already referred here, Leibniz raises the question with reference fo Epicurus and, indirectly, to Aristotle:

> It appears that Epicurus, to preserve freedom and to avoid an absolute necessity, maintained, after Aristotle, that contingent futurities were not susceptible of determinate truth.[17]

Later on, in § 331, Leibniz returns to the question, with a direct criticism of Aristotle:

> I think that Cicero is mistaken as regards Aristotle, who fully recognized contingency and freedom, and went even too far, saying (inadvertently, as I think) that propositions on contingent futurities had no determinate truth; on which point he was justifiably abandoned by most of the Schoolmen.[18]

Leibniz here raises a question no less significant than the one discussed above. Indeed, the refutation of the position which, denying reality to non-existent possibles, effectively identifies possibility with necessity, leaves the way open for two radically different alternatives. In the first, which Leibniz attributes to Aristotle and Epicurus, the possible is understood as the "virtual," not fully determined in the manner of the existent and therefore substantially emptied of its ontological content. In the second, which Leibniz defends as his own, the possible, although inexistent, is ontologically determined, which means, among other things, that existence is not considered an ontological predicate.

In his reference to Aristotle, Leibniz must surely have had in mind, among the most significant Aristotelian passages, also the famous Chapter Nine of the *De Interpretatione*. In this chapter we find a clear refutation of one of the implications of the "victorious argument" of the Megarians, whereby recognising inexistent possibles would mean violating the principle of non-contradiction. In denying that a proposition (regarding the possible future) must be true or false, Aristotle bases his argument on the conception of the possible as an insufficiently determined virtual. This concept does not violate the principle of non-contradiction, as it remains true that, of the two contradictory predicates, only one can be attributed to a given possible. In other words, we can still legitimately say that a proposition regarding a possible is true or false but, as a consequence of the indeterminacy of the possible, we cannot decide which of the two predicates is appropriate.[19]

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[17] *T* 211/229.

[18] *T* 311/324.

The alternative of the full determination of possibles proposed by Leibniz cannot, evidently, adopt this counter-argument. Leibniz, indeed, would surely have no interest in doing so, since his very intention is to deny the accidental nature of contingency and defend its certain determinacy, without, however, falling back on the thesis of absolute necessity.

In this regard, Leibniz's position *vis à vis* the scholastic debate between determinists and proponents of "mediate knowledge" regarding future contingents is of interest. First of all, Leibniz notes that both of the parties engaged in this debate assume that possibles are determined and that, consequently, the idea of the possible as a virtual indeterminate, which we discussed above, is not even taken into consideration:

> Philosophers agree today that the truth of contingent futurities is determinate, that is to say that contingent futurities are future, or that they will be, that they will happen: for it is as sure that the future will be, as it is sure that the past has been.[20]

Leibniz then examines the two positions, noting the advantages of each and declaring himself in partial agreement with both. In doing so, he actually formulates an original position of his own, which coincides with neither. This Leibnizian discussion, however, is geared towards the development of the doctrine of divine predetermination and the best of all possible worlds. Since this is not the matter with which we are at this moment concerned, we will skip through it, dwelling only on those passages in which emphasis is laid on the theme of necessity. Now, at the beginning of this discussion, Leibniz specifies:

> the contingent is not, because it is future, any the less contingent; and *determination*, which would be called certainty if it were known, is not incompatible with contingency. Often the certain and the determinate are taken as one thing, because a determinate truth is capable of being known: thus it may be said that determination is an objective certainty.[21]

From this it follows, according to Leibniz, that we must uphold the certain determination of future contingents, but without getting this confused with absolute necessity, which would remove contingency. In this case, too, the solution is possible thanks to the concept of "hypothetical necessity," which therefore assumes the sense of a determination which is certain but non-necessary (in the sense of absolute necessity).[22]

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[19] This conception of the possibles is the basis for the critique of the best of all possible worlds theory formulated by V. MATHIEU in his study on *L'equivoco dell'incompossibilità e il problema del virtuale*, cit.

[20] *T* 123/143.

[21] *T* 123/143 f.

[22] Cf. *ibidem*.

It is also interesting to note that, at the conclusion of this discussion of the false alternative between predeterminism and "mediate knowledge," Leibniz returns to the difference between absolute and hypothetical necessity, basing this distinction on the association between the originary principle of non-contradiction and the other equally original principle – the reason principle:

> Nevertheless, objective certainty or determination does not bring about the necessity of the determinate truth. All philosophers acknowledge this, asserting that the truth of contingent futurities is determinate, and that nevertheless they remain contingent. The thing indeed would imply no contradiction in itself if the effect did not follow; and therein lies contingency. The better to understand this point, we must take into account that there are two great principles of our arguments. The one is the principle of *contradiction*, stating that of two contradictory propositions the one is true, the other false; the other principle is that of the *determinant reason*: it states that nothing ever comes to pass without there being a cause or at least a reason determining it, that is, something to give an *a priori* reason why it is existent rather than non-existent, and in this wise rather than in any other.[23]

This reference to the reason principle, as we will see later on, is essential for an in-depth understanding of the Leibnizian conception of moral necessity.

The full determination of possibles is the crucial thesis in Leibniz's arguments against Arnauld's objections. The 1686 correspondence between Leibniz and Arnauld – two of the most acute philosophical intellects of their time – is of an extraordinary interest from a philosophical point of view.[24] This exchange will not be the object of thorough analysis here, although such a consideration would bring to light many themes and issues which are of the utmost importance to Leibniz's thought. It will nonetheless be opportune to make reference thereto at least in order to indicate the evidence with which Leibniz therein expresses his conception of contingent possibles, not as indeterminate virtualities, but rather as fully determined notions. The question of the absolute "fatal," "more than fatal", or hypothetical, "ex hypothesi"[25] character of the necessary determination of the contingent is soon overcome, with Arnauld accepting Leibniz's position. This facility is due to the fact that this is not the most important philosophical difficulty regarding which the two interlocutors are effectively divided – or, rather, to the fact that this difference is reduced to a nominal conflict if the conceptual problems which it entails are not addressed. These problems regard, first and foremost, the conception of the full determination of individual substances *inasmuch as they are possibles* or, to cite an analogous, although more imaginistic expression,

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[23] *T* 127/147.

[24] Cf. *GP II* 11 ff., in particular 11-59 (Eng. trans. *L-A* 11-66).

[25] Cfr. *GP II* 15, 17, 18, 27, *passim* (Eng. trans *L-A* 9, 12, 13, 26).

in the divine understanding, which is, so to speak, the domain (*le pays*) of possible realities.[26]

In order to counter Arnauld's doubts and objections in this regard, Leibniz must make explicit several fundamental implications of his own conception, which I will here seek to summarise in two key points. First of all, there is the distinction between general notions, or the "most abstract specific concepts," which "contain only necessary or eternal truths," and the "individual substances." The notion of these latter, "considered as possible," already contains *all* the determinations, including those which are contingent and external, as are the free decrees of God which have influence on them, which are "also considered as possible".[27] This means that, while the possibility of abstract general notions may be conceived of *per se*, solely on the basis of the principle of non-contradiction, the possibility of individual contingents cannot be contemplated if not by tracing it back to the *originary* overall context of the infinite possible series in which it is located. In other words, individual or contingent possibles are irreducible to general notions which can only attain to further determination through their effective realisation and are individuated on these grounds. Individual or contingent possibles are rather notions *whose possibility itself is entirely determined a priori as compossibility*.

From this we can infer, secondly, that, in the case of individual and contingent substances, not only their effective existence, *but also their very possibility itself*, cannot be adequately founded on the principle of non-contradiction, but also presupposes the reason principle. In an extremely significant passage from his correspondence with Arnauld, Leibniz identifies the reason principle with the principle *praedicatum inest subjecto*:

> Finally, I have given a decisive argument which in my view has the force of a demonstration; that always, in every true affirmative proposition, necessary or contingent, universal or particular, the concept of the predicate is in a sense included in that of the subject; the predicate is present in the subject (*praedicatum inest subjecto*); or else I do not know what truth is.
>
> Now, I do not ask for more of a connexion here than that which exists objectively (*a parte rei*) between the terms of a true proposition, and it is only in this sense that I say that the concept of the individual substance contains all its events and all its denominations, even those that one commonly calls extrinsics (that is to say, that belong to it only by virtue of the general connexion of things and of the fact that it is an expression of the entire universe after its own manner), since *there must always be some basis for the connexion between the terms of a proposition, and it is to be found in their concepts*. That is my great principle with which I believe all philosophers must agree, and of which one of the corollaries is the common axiom that there is a reason for everything that happens, and that one can always explain why a thing has worked out this way rather than that, although this reason often inclines without necessitating, since a state of perfect indifference is a chimerical or incomplete assumption.[28]

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[26] *GP II* 55 (Eng. trans. *L-A* 62); cf. 42 (Eng. trans. *L-A* 46).

[27] Cf. *GP II* 49 (Eng. trans. *L-A* 54 f.).

[28] *GP II* 56 f. (Eng. trans. *L-A* 63 f.).

The reason principle, then, understood in the sense indicated by Leibniz in this passage, is far from being reducible to the more originary principle of non-contradiction, as one highly regarded line of interpretation would have it. It is, on the contrary, itsef the originary principle, of which the principle of non-contradiction is, at most, a specific case[29] – that in which the relationship of implication of the notion of the predicate in that of the subject (*inesse*) is one of identity. Indeed, the principle *praedicatum inest subjecto* means, as we saw in the passage above, that "the concept of the predicate is *in a sense* included in that of the subject".[30] In the *Discours de metaphysique* (and elsewhere) Leibniz specificies:

> Now it is evident that all true predication has some basis in the nature of things and that, when a proposition is not an identity, that is, when the predicate is not explicitly contained in the subject, it must be contained in it virtually. That is what the philosophers call *in-esse*, when they say that the predicate is in the subject.[31]

2.   *Certain Determination*

The different relation of implication of the predicate in the subject, be it explicit or virtual, i.e. finite or infinite, is precisely what distinguishes necessary from contingent truths. In a passage from one of his writings *De libertate,* which I have chosen from many others for its clarity, Leibniz explains:

> After I considered these matters more attentively, a most profound distinction between necessary and contingent truths was revealed. Namely, every truth is either basic (*originaria*) or derivative. Basic truths are those for which we cannot give a reason; identities or immediate truths, which affirm the same thing of itself or deny the contradictory of its contradictory, are of this sort. Derivative truths are, in turn, of two sorts, for some can be resolved into basic truths, and others, in their resolution, give rise to a series of steps that go to infinity. The former are necessary, the latter contingent. Indeed, a necessary proposition is one whose contrary implies a contradiction. Every identical proposition and every derivative proposition resolvable into identical propositions is of such a kind, as are the truths called metaphysical or geometrical necessities. For demonstrating is nothing but displaying a certain equality or coincidence of the predicate

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[29] In the light of the above quoted passage, we might also read following passage in the same sense: "Therefore, the predicate or consequent is always in the subject or antecedent, and the nature of truth in general or the connection between the terms of a statement, consists in this very thing, as Aristotle also observed. The connection and inclusion of the predicate in the subject is explicit in identities, but in all other propositions it is implicit and must be shown through the analysis of notions; *a priori* demonstration rests on this" (*COUT* 518 f.; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 31). I have already briefly discussed the approaches of other scholars to the identification of the reason principle with the principle "praedicatum inest subjecto" and its implications above, Chapter Six, note 52.

[30] *GP II* 56; Eng. trans. *L-A* 62. *Italics mine*.

[31] *GP IV* 433; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 41.

with the subject (in the case of a reciprocal proposition) by resolving the terms of a proposition and substituting a definition or part of one for that which is defined […].

But in contingent truths, even though the predicate is in the subject, this can never be demonstrated, nor can a proposition ever be reduced (*revocari*) to an equality or to an identity, but the resolution proceeds to infinity, God alone seeing, not the end of the resolution, of course, which does not exist, but the connection of the terms or the containment of the predicate in the subject, since he sees whatever is in the series. Indeed, this very truth was derived in part from his intellect, in part from his will.[32]

This passage, which has numerous echoes right across Leibniz's oeuvre, brings to light various important points, of which we will here dwell on the parallel established between the difference between necessary and contingent truths and that between determinate and indeterminate equations. Leibniz himself, in the same text,[33] reveals that he has been guided out of the dilemma between absolute necessity and complete indetermination by the "inespectata lux" of the mathematical consideration of the infinite.[34]

In the field of mathematics,[35] in fact, Leibniz had effectively succeeded, through his invention of the infinitesimal method, in making possible the exact calculation of "transcendent" – i.e. indeterminate – curves. He reached this goal, not through any extension, however ingenious, of the available conceptions and methods, but rather through a veritable conceptual revolution, whereby the mathematical and physical conception of mathematical and physical magnitude as a whole made up of parts, which inevitably ran up against the paradoxes of continuity, was replaced with a conception of magnitude as the "integral" of a continuous process, whose increases, which are infinitely small, are not considered as determined magnitudes, but as infinite indeterminate differences. He hereby opened up the possibility of considering mathematical and physical magnitudes as exactly determinable through the calculus of the indeterminate.

Leibniz was legitimately proud of having succeeded in reducing the construction of the so-called "mechanical," indeterminate curves, and the calculus of the so-called "transcendent" indeterminate equations to the same degree of determinacy and exactness as geometric construction and algebric analysis, thus completing the *Mathesis universalis*:

Mathesis universalis is the science of quantities in general, or rather of the rule for calculating, and, above all, for designating the limits within which something occurs. And since every creature has limits, we might say that, just as metaphysics is the general science of things, so *Mathesis universalis* is the general science of creatures. And it has two parts: the science of the

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[32] *FdCNL* 181 f.; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 95 f.

[33] But also elsewhere: cf., for example, *COUT* 18.

[34] Cf. *FdCNL* 179 f. (Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 95).

[35] I am here summarising the key points discussed in more depth in Appendix One.

finite (which is presented under the name of algebra and is the first to be dealt with), and the science of the infinite, in which the finite is defined through recourse to the infinite .[36]

It is also true that, for Leibniz, while in the case of mathematics we are able to resolve transcendental problems, in that of contingent truths only God can know their infinite conditions of determination. This knowledge derives, not from a demonstration which, being infinite, could never be carried through to a conclusion, but rather from an originary intuitive comprehension, a "vision," which is tantamount to predetermination.[37] Yet the most important point is that Leibniz has established, through this analogy, that the certain determination of contingents by God differs radically from absolute or "geometric" necessity. Moreover, at the same time, although it cannot be fully comprehended by mankind, due to the limitations of human reason, it is nonetheless entirely rational, belonging to the same species as our own reasonings regarding the detemination of the infinite.

That which Leibniz refers to as "hypothetical" and "moral necessity," then, is not actually a necessity at all, in the true sense of the term. It is rather a *certain determination*, every bit as certain as necessity, although not necessary. As Leibniz writes, in a passage from the *Theodicy* already quoted above:

> *Determination*, which would be called certainty if it were known, is not incompatible with contingency. Often the certain and the determinate are taken as one thing, because a determinate truth is capable of being known: thus it may be said that determination is an objective certainty.[38]

And again, later on:

> One must always distinguish between the necessary and the certain or infallible, as I have already observed more than once, and distinguish metaphysical necessity from moral necessity.[39]

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[36] *GM VII* 53. In line with the considerations here being made, it is fitting to refer to Leibniz's contributions to the logic of probability. I will here limit myself to highlighting its importance. The Italian scholar, L. CATALDI MADONNA, in his study on *Gewissheit, Wahrscheinlichkeit und Wissenschaft in der Philosophie von Leibniz,* in "Aufklärung", V/2, 1990, pp. 103-115, clearly outlines how Leibniz's reflection on probability, through an objectivization and a mathematicisation of his concept, which posits probability in continuity with certainty, ultimately makes probability a degree of certainty (on the important precedent for this in the *Logique* of Port-Royal, cf. IDEM, *La filosofia della probabilità nel pensiero moderno. Dalla Logique di Port-Royal a Kant,* Cadmo, Roma 1988 pp. 17 ff.). Probability, then, is, for Leibniz, "a fitting means (…) for bridging the gap between the realms of necessity and contingency" (p.110). Some years before Cataldi's study, B. LEONI, in a famous and significant essay entitled *Probabilità e diritto nel pensiero di Leibniz,* in "Rivista di Filosofia", 38 (1947), pp. 65-95, had already written on this matter, with particular reference to its legal implications.

[37] Of the many pertinent passages, cf. for example, *FdCNL* 184 [Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 97]; *COUT* 1 ss. [Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 98 ff.], 18, 388 f. [Eng. trans. *LP* 77 f.].

[38] *T* 123/143 f.

[39] *T* 300/313.

We might at this point observe that all that has been said so far regarding hypothetical and moral necessity as certain but non-necessary determination regards contingents alone, not possibles. The fact is that the logical distinction between "possible" and "contingent," already weak and uncertain in tradition, with which Leibniz complies ("*possible* is everything which may happen, i.e which is true in a certain case [*possibilis est quicquid potest fieri seu quod verum est quodam casu*]," "*contingent* all that which might not happen, i.e. which is true in some non-case [*contingens est quicquid potest non fieri seu quod verum est quodam non casu*]")[40] is, on an ontological level, for Leibniz, irrelevant, or rather inexistent. The datum of actual existence, present in the concept of contingency and absent from that of the possible, is of no ontological relevance for Leibniz. As Russell well observed,

> For the fact that Leibniz definitely asserts the contrary [...], one would be tempted to state his position as tantamount to a denial that existence is a predicate at all.[41]

The predicate which is truly ontologically relevant for all possibles, be they are realised or otherwise, "possible" or "contingent," is instead, for Leibniz, the "tendency towards existence" which is, indeed, an essential characteristic of every possible. Leibniz's ontology is incomprehensible if we do not bear this premise, which might be termed "platonic"[42] in mind, whereby the significance of "being" is entirely comprehended in that of "having the possibility to be."[43]

In affirming their full determination, Leibniz conceives of individual possibles as being thought of by God as endowed with "possible existence." This, naturally, is also the case for "possible worlds," in which individual possibles are inserted and determined as compossibles. That, then, a possible be realised at a given time or otherwise, i.e. that it be, in a technical sense, a "contingent" or otherwise, is irrelevant from the point of view of its full ontological determination. We can again quote Russell, who clearly expresses this point:

> The notion of an individual, as Leibniz puts it, involves reference to existence and time *sub ratione possibilitatis*, i.e. the notion is exactly what it would be if the individual existed, but the existence is merely possible, and is not, in the mere notion, judged to be actual.[44]

On the basis of this observation,[45] Russell, however, famously, proceeds to radicalise the difference beween possibility and contingency, distinguishing between

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[40] Cf. G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Elementa juris naturalis*, in *A VI/1* 466.

[41] B. RUSSELL, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[42] Cf. *Sophist* 247 d-e.

[43] On this point cf. H. POSER, *Zur Theorie der Modalbegriffe bei G.W. Leibniz*, cit., pp. 36 note, 44, and the passages in Leibniz there indicated.

[44] B. RUSSELL, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

two meanings of the reason principle. The first of these is more synthetic, referring only to contingency inasmuch as it is existent. The second is more general, analytic and reducible to the principle of non-contradiction, on the basis of which the non-existent possible is reducible to the necessary:

> The part of the principle which is metaphysically necessary, which applies equally to possible and to actual existents, is the part which asserts all events to be due to design […]. And in this form, the law of sufficient reason is necessary and analytic, not a principle coordinated with that of contradiction, but a mere consequence of it.[46]

This interpretation, with all the defects and incongruities which it brings out and which come under Russell's attack has, as I have already suggested elsewhere,[47] the limitation that it does not take into account another meaning of the reason principle which is, instead, more originary and fundamental, whereby, Leibniz writes, there is "a reason why something rather than nothing is to exist".[48] This significance of the reason principle, which is not only irreducible into the principle of non-contradiction, but is actually ontologically more originary than that principle, constitutes the foundation, not only for the whole of existence, but also that of the possible, being the principle of its ontological consistency. It has important links with that peculiar sense of "moral necessity" in Leibniz, which I will now seek to outline and which I hope will clearly emerge in the following pages.

3. *Moral Necessity*

As I have already mentioned, Leibniz often refers to hypothetical and moral necessity together, opposing both to absolute necessity. This homologation is, in some way, justified, inasmuch as moral necessity can be considered as a form of hypothetical necessity. Even if this was not an entirely new conception introduced by Leibniz, his seminal authority surely influenced its circulation, as we can note from the philosophical dictionaries of his period. For example, in Chauvin's 1713 *Lexicon Philosophicum,* in the entry on "necessarium," when the different acceptions of the concept are discussed, the only significance attributed to "moral necessity" is that of a high degree of probability – of "moral certainty:"

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[45] Cf. *ibi*, pp. 27 ff.

[46] *Ibi*, p. 36; cf. pp. 26 f.

[47] See above, Chapter Six, note 38.

[48] *GP VII* 304; Eng. trans. *Phil*. *Ess*. 151. I dwell on the importance of this meaning of the reason principle in Chapter Six above.

> *Morally necessary* is that without which, although the effect may come about in absolute, this nonetheless almost never, or very rarely happens (*Necessarium morale* est id sine quo, quamvis absolute fieri possit effectus, numquam tamen vel raro fit).[49]

In the definition of absolute necessity in his 1740 *Grosses Vollständiges Universal-Lexikon,* which already amply reflects the philosophy of Leibniz and Wolff, Johann Heinrich Zedler opposes to absolute necessity, as synonyms,

> that which is necessary under a condition, or conditionally necessary, morally necessary, necessary under a hypothesis or hypothetically necessary (*das Nothwendige unter einer Bedingung, oder Bedingungsweise nothwendige, moralisch nothwendige, necessarium sub hypothesi, hypothetice necessarium, moraliter necessarium*).[50]

In his definition of "moral necessity (*Sittliche Nothwendigkeit*)," then, Zedler writes explicitly:

> Moral necessity is only a necessity under a condition (*necessitas hypothetica*), which does not damage freedom (*Die Nothwendigkeit der Sitten ist nur eine Nothwendigkeit unter einer Bedingung* (*necessitas hypothetica*), *die der Freiheit nichts schadet*).[51]

Moral necessity, then, in Leibniz, too, can be considered as such a case of hypothetical necessity in which the determinant condition is the decision of a free will. Nonetheless, if we consider the definition of the two concepts given by Leibniz, we can also detect the differences which, more than the similarities, permit us to enquire into the importance and peculiarity of moral necessity in Leibniz's thought. In the *Theodicy,* for example, Leibniz presents hypothetical necessity as the rule whereby something

> happens as a result of the supposition that this or that has been foreseen or resolved, or done beforehand.[52]

He continues:

> moral necessity contains an obligation imposed by reason, which is always followed by its effect in the wise.[53]

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[49] *Lexicon Philosophicum secundum curis Stephani Chauvini*, Leovardiae 1713, p. 435.

[50] Cf. J. H. ZEDLER, *Grosses Vollständiges Universal-Lexikon*, Bd. 35, Leipzig und Halle, 1743; facsimile edition Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz 1961, col. 4.

[51] J. H. ZEDLER, *Grosses Vollständiges Universal-Lexikon*, Bd. 37, Leipzig und Halle, 1743; facsimile edition cit, 1962, col. 1867.

[52] *T* 390/395.

[53] *Ibidem.*

At another point in the *Theodicy*, he defines moral necessity as "the wise one's choice which is worthy of his wisdom".[54]

As we can see, while hypothetical necessity is conceived of as the certainly determined connection of the conditioned with its series of conditions, in the case of moral necessity, the emphasis is placed on notions of "choice" and "wisdom." Moral necessity is thus in some way anterior to hypothetical necessity, in the sense that the the former certainly determines the harmonious ensemble within which the single elements proceed one from the other on the basis of the latter. This also emerges clearly in the correspondence between Leibniz and Arnauld, in which Leibniz, although referring solely to hypothetical necessity, actually distinguishes between an originary moment of overall planning on God's part and the process whereby, on the basis of that plan, single events run their course and condition each other:

> The other reply is that the consequence through which the events follow from the hypothesis is indeed always certain but that it is not always metaphysically necessary (nécessaire *necessitate metaphysica*) […], but that often the consequence is only physical and implies some free decrees of God, as do the consequences dependent on the laws of movement or on the moral principle that every mind will incline to what seems to it to be the greatest good.[55]

In Leibniz, then, moral necessity is the notion that, in addition to explaining the free choices of every individual, also expresses the originary decree with which God *thinks and wills,* in a single act, the harmonious whole, within which every single event, including God's actual decrees themselves,[56] is inserted into a causal series determined with the certainty which belongs to hypothetical necessity:

> the fact is that they [the events] are certain from the time God has made his choice of this possible universe, the concept of which embraces this sequence of things.[57]

At this point, we need to take a decisive step and demonstrate how, for Leibniz, moral necessity is not only the determining principle behind the divine choice of the existent world from all the possibles, but that it is also the origin of the possibles themselves. This, it seems to me, will place me in good stead to respond to the assertions made by Vittorio Mathieu, at the end of his highly significant study, with which the present has implicitly been in dialogue since the beginning. In the study in question,[58] Mathieu declares himself convinced that the origin of the Leibnizian

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[54] *T* 50/74.

[55] *GP II* 38 (Eng. trans *L-A* 40). In the letter to Des Bosses of 16 June 1712, in reference to the *Theodicy,* Leibniz writes: "Indeed, in my little essay, I explained physical necessity as a consequence of moral necessity" (*GP II* 450; cf. 456).

[56] Cf. *GP II* 40, 49, 51 (Eng. trans *L-A* 43, 54 f., 56 f.).

[57] *GP II* 42 (Eng. trans. *L-A* 46).

[58] V. MATHIEU, *Die drei Stufen des Weltbegriffes bei Leibniz*, cit.

doctrine of the world is to be found in Plotinus. However, due to the scholastic modification of plotinian tradition, stemming above all from the Arabic school, the "creative" meaning of the divine will and originary act had been lost, transforming creation into nothing more than a mere "positing" of the world, as a consequence of the calculation and solution of a mathematical problem.[59] Mathieu therefore concludes:

> In Plotinus the connection of all the events in the world was not, effectively arbitrary. Indeed, it was nothing other than the translation of the originary unity of the Intellect into a multiple and dispersed medium. This translation doubtless implies a certain accidentality or "contingency," since it may come about in an infinite variety of ways, even though every one of these possibilities has its own law, which is not a logical-formal law, but a metaphysical one, translating the originary unity of the Intellect into the necessity of a connection between the multiple.
>   Also Leibniz could have accepted this noting, had he modified his own doctrine in the following ways:
>   1) substituting the infinite number of possible worlds, designated in all of their details, with an infinite number of possible ways in which the Intellect can express itself;
>   2) referring, with the principle of sufficient reason, to the law which expresses the uniqueness of the Intellect (thus implying – at least in the case of God – that it cannot be a logical-formal principle);
>   3) inserting contingency, not only into the passages from the first and second levels of the world [possible world and monad] to the second and third [monad and physical world], but also and above all at the very origin of the *first* level.
>
> This third condition would doubtless have proved the most difficult for Leibniz.[60]

It seems to me that the first of these conditions, if not understood in the sense of possibility as indeterminate virtuality,[61] is already explicitly accepted by Leibniz, for example in his correspondence with Arnauld,[62] and is effectively applied, for example in the description of the pyramid of possible worlds in the *Theodicy*.[63] It also seems to me that the other two conditions, which are effectively more important, will be satisfied if we can demonstrate that, for Leibniz, the reason principle is, above all, the originary ontological principle for the constitution of the possibles themselves, or, to employ an equivalent expression which is of direct relevance for our current

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[59] Cf. *ibi*, pp. 20-21.

[60] *Ibi*, pp. 21 s.

[61] As the already cited and much earlier article by Mathieu, *L'equivoco dell'incompossibilità e il problema del virtuale* ,might already lead us to believe.

[62] Cf. *GP II* 45, 54 s. [Eng. trans. *L-A* 49 f., 60 ff.], where Leibniz responds to an objection by Arnauld (cf. *GP II* 32 [Eng. trans. *L-A* 31 f.], to which Mathieu appears to make implicit reference in his *L'equivoco dell'incompossibilità e il problema del virtuale*, cit., p. 223.

[63] Cf. *T* 363 f./372.

concern, that the moral necessity of the divine will, as "the wise one's choice which is worthy of his wisdom",[64] does not only intervene in the choice between possibles, but is the foundation for the possibles themselves.

In a particularly significant passage in the *Theodicy*, Leibniz writes:

> One may say that as soon as God has decreed to create something there is a struggle between all the possibles, all of them laying claim to existence.[65]

The divine decree, to which Leibniz here refers, is not, obviously, the executive decree for the realisation of a series of possibles. Moreover, and more significantly, *neither is it to be understood as a decree subsequent to the constitution of the possibles. It is rather anterior thereto*. The above-cited expression from the *Theodicy* is equivalent, in other words, to the famous passage from the *De rerum originatione radicali*:

> assuming that at some time being is to prevail over nonbeing, other that there is a reason why something rather that nothing is to exist, or that something is to pass from possibility to actuality, although nothing beyond this is determined, it follows that there would be as much as there possibly can be, given the capacity of time and space (that is, the capacity of the order of possible existence).[66]

We should not here be misled by the third version given of the reason principle ("that something is to pass from possibility into actuality"). This does not simply indicate the principle of the passage from possibility into existence, but rather *the principle of possibility itself,* since, in a deeper and more originary sense than the mere logical-formal significance of being "non-contradictory," for Leibniz, as we have already seen, the possible is constituted ontologically as a "tendency towards existence" and herein lies the originary significance of being, before any actual existence. In confirmation of this, we should note that, in a famous untitled text, Leibniz explicitly states:

> 4. There is, then, a reason why existence prevails over non-existence: *the necessary Being is "existent-ifying*."
> 5. Yet the very cause that makes something exist, or that makes possibility be realised in existence, also has the effect that every possible tends towards existence, since no reason for restricting certain possibles is to be found in the universal.
> 6. For this reason, every possible can be said to "*existiturire*", inasmuch as it is founded on the actual existent, necessary Being, without whom there would be no way for the possible to be actually realised.[67]

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[64] *T* 50/74.

[65] *T* 236/253.

[66] *GP VII* 304; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess*. 151.

[67] *GP VII* 289.

In the *De rerum originatione radicali,* immediately after the passage cited above and the famous description of the "Mechanismus Metaphysicus" of the possibles, Leibniz concludes:

> And so, the ultimate reason for the reality of both essences and existences lies in one thing (*in uno*), which must of necessity be greater than the world, higher than the world, and must have existed before the world did, since through it not only existing things, which make up the world, but also possibles have their reality.[68]

Various other examples from Leibniz's oeuvre might also be cited in support of this point.[69]

Coming back, in conclusion, to the theme of moral necessity, I now believe that I have clearly demonstrated the thesis which I set out to prove. In one of its specific acceptions, in which it does not refer to the human will, but to God and, in particular, to the originary act with which God constitutes the possibles, moral necessity is therefore analogous to that which I have referred to elsewhere as the "first meaning" of the reason principle, i.e. the principle of the originary prevalence of being over nothing.[70] In this sense, moral necessity lies at the foundation of the very being of possibles, or rather of being as possibility, and therefore implies the character of originary creativity which Mathieu traced back to Plotinus.

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[68] *GP VII* 305; Eng. transl. *Phil. Ess.* 152.

[69] To give just one example, I will here quote the *Monadology*: "It is also true that God is not only the source of existences, but also that of essences insofar as they are real, that is, of the source of that which is real in possibility. This is because God's understanding is realm of eternal truths or that of ideas on which they depend; without him there would be nothing real in possibles, and not only would nothing exist, but also nothing would be possible" (*GP VI* 614; Eng. trans. *Phil. Ess.* 218). I would also, at this point, quote the *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus*: "[...] *The dependence of things on God* extends both to all the possibles, i.e. to all that which does not imply contradiction, and to all actual things.

[...] The very *possibility* of things, even if they do not exist in actuality, is really founded in divine existence, since if God did not exist nothing would even be possible, whilst possibles are as ideas in the intellect of God for all eternity" (*GP VI* 439 f.).

[70] Cf. above, Chapter Six, § 5.

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