

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS IN LEIBNIZ'S THEODICY: PHILOSOPHICAL EXCOGITATIONS

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Abstract

The problem of evil has remained one of the most intractable, enduring and perennial problems in philosophy dating back to the ancient period. This is so because more often than not, certain things which are considered to be good are perpetually evil in disguise while certain goods have presented themselves as an apparent evil. The problem of evil is the challenge of reconciling the existence of evil in the world with the existence of an omniscient (all knowing), Omnipotent (all powerful) and perfectly good God. Human beings often wonder why they face certain challenges in the form of calamities that is beyond their control, yet they are being assured in religious circles of an all loving and all powerful God who cares for them. Evil therefore remains a major source of perplexity in human existence and has also remained a strong argument against the goodness of God. However, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz who sees things from a different perspective or dimension in his theodicy absolves God of any guilt in relation to the world full of evil and suffering and argues that God willed to create the best possible world and through His supreme power, He produced the best possible world. Not one evil event or act could be removed without making the world less perfect, because that which exists is based upon the total perfection of the world in question. This paper therefore attempts a philosophical analysis of the standpoint of Leibniz. It seeks to establish the validity and justifiability or otherwise of Leibniz's claims. While it will accept in the final analysis certain positions of Leibniz's theory, it will however not agree entirely on some of his postulations as he has not been able to give a categorical and cogent account of physical or natural evil which is beyond human comprehension or control.

Keywords: Evil, Leibniz, theodicy, philosophical, determinism, freedom, excogitations

Introduction

The problem of evil is one of the most enduring and perennial problems in philosophy in general and philosophy of religion in particular. It basically revolves around reconciling the existence of evil in the world with the existence of an omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful) and perfectly good God. According to The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: The argument

from evil focuses on the fact that the world appears to contain states of affairs that are bad, or undesirable, or that should have been prevented by any being that could have done so, and it asks how the existence of such states of affairs is to be squared with the existence of God; (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/>).

It is mainly the atheistic argument that the existence of such evil cannot be reconciled with, and so disproves, the existence of such a God. According to Adams McCord (1999:5): "the epistemic question posed by evil is whether the world contains undesirable states of affairs that provide the basis for an argument that makes it unreasonable to believe in the existence of God".

Theism claims both that God created the world and that he sustains it. It claims that God knows all things and is capable of all feats. It also claims that God is perfectly good, and wants only the best for his creation. If each of these claims is true, then it is difficult to see why God allows evil in the world to persist. The evil in the world thus appears to be at least strong and perhaps even conclusive evidence that at least one of these central claims of theism is false.

David Hume, the 18th century philosopher, as cited in Craig Lane (1990: 80) questions the logical problem of evil when he inquired about God, "Is He willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" When the sceptic challenges belief in God on the basis of the logical problem of evil, he is suggesting that it is irrational or logically impossible to believe in the existence of both a good and all powerful God and in the reality of evil and suffering. Such a God would not possibly allow evil to exist.

Eleonore Stump (2010:4) explains that "It has become customary to divide evil into natural evil and moral evil...But so-called natural evil would not raise the problem of evil if there were no sentient creatures who suffered from hurricanes, viruses, and the rest. It is the fact of suffering, not its origin that raises the problem of evil in connection with so-called natural evil." She goes on to show that the same fact is also true of moral evil. That is, in the cases of both natural evil and moral evil, "what is in need of justification is God's allowing suffering." So, the problem of evil primarily concerns the suffering of sentient beings.

A lot of philosophers have attempted to reflect on the problem of evil, but our research is basically on the Leibnitz theory of evil and the best possible world.

He attempts to solve, the problem of evil which is, essentially, how an all-knowing, Omni-benevolent, all-powerful God could create a world in which there is evil of all kinds. In his *Theodicy*, he attempts to demonstrate that this world in which we dwell in is the best of all possible worlds, in spite of the evil in it that we cannot escape or even explain. In his words:

Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. Metaphysical evil consists in mere imperfection, physical evil in suffering, and moral evil in sin. Now although physical evil and moral evil be not necessary, it is enough that by virtue of the eternal verities they be possible. And as this vast Region of Verities contains all possibilities it is necessary that there be an infinitude of possible worlds, that evil enter into divers of them, and that even the best of all contain a measure thereof. (Huggard 1985: 136)

According to Leibniz, God, through his omniscience and divine wisdom knew which, of the infinity of possible worlds, the best was. Through his goodness, God willed to create the best possible world, and through His supreme power He produced the best possible world. This possible world includes all the finite creatures that are found in its idea. Each of these creatures, in each possible world, has a complete idea in the mind of God which includes its entire spatio-temporal possible existence, including, for rational creatures their thoughts and actions. God, knowing all possible worlds, with all possible creatures and all their possible actions, knows which of those possible worlds is the best, and declares that this world exist. From that point on, he simply keeps it in existence – preserving the being of each thing in it. For God to interfere significantly with the being of anyone contingent thing would, essentially be to choose an entirely different world (which would contain less perfection than the best possible world). Therefore, God preserves each being (animate or inanimate), each action or event, guaranteeing that they each accomplish or live out their complete idea. According to Leibniz, and based on his principles and definitions, and especially based on his theory of possible worlds, we are living in the best possible world. Not one evil event or act could be removed without making the world less perfect, because that which exists is based on the total perfection of the world in question.

The Historical and educational background of Leibniz

According to Arthur Lovejoy (1936:182), Gottfried Leibniz was born on July 1, 1646, towards the end of the Thirty Years' War, in Leipzig, Saxony, to Friedrich Leibniz and Catharina Schmuck. He was baptized on July 3 of that year at St. Nicholas Church, Leipzig; his godfather was the Lutheran theologian Martin Geier. His father died when he was six and a half years old, and from that point

on, he was raised by his mother. Her teachings influenced Leibniz's philosophical thoughts in his later life.

Leibniz's father had been a Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Leipzig, and the boy later inherited his father's personal library. He was given free access to it from the age of seven. While Leibniz's schoolwork was largely confined to the study of a small canon of authorities, his father's library enabled him to study a wide variety of advanced philosophical and theological works – ones that he would not have otherwise been able to read until his college years. “Access to his father's library, largely written in Latin, also led to his proficiency in the Latin language, which he achieved at the age of 12. He also composed 300 hexameters of Latin verse, in a single morning, for a special event at school at the age of 13”, Arthur Lovejoy (1936:182).

In April 1661, he enrolled in his father's former university at age 15, and completed his bachelor's degree in Philosophy in December 1662. He defended his *Disputatio Metaphysica de Principio Individui* (*Metaphysical Disputation on the Principle of Individuation*), which addressed the principle of individuation, on June 9, 1663; Arthur Lovejoy (1936:183). He earned his master's degree in Philosophy on February 7, 1664. He published and defended a dissertation *Specimen Quaestionum Philosophicarum ex Jure collectarum* (*An Essay of Collected Philosophical Problems of Right*), arguing for both a theoretical and a pedagogical relationship between philosophy and law, in December 1664. After one year of legal studies, he was awarded his bachelor's degree in Law on September 28, 1665. His dissertation was titled *De conditionibus* (*On Conditions*).

In early 1666, at age 19, Leibniz wrote his first book, *De Arte Combinatoria* (*On the Combinatorial Art*), the first part of which was also his habilitation thesis in Philosophy, which he defended in March 1666. His next goal was to earn his license and Doctorate in Law, which normally required three years of study. In 1666, the University of Leipzig turned down Leibniz's doctoral application and refused to grant him a Doctorate in Law, most likely due to his relative youth according to Robert Adams (1994:10). Leibniz subsequently left Leipzig.

Leibniz then enrolled in the University of Altdorf and quickly submitted a thesis, which he had probably been working on earlier in Leipzig. The title of his thesis was *Disputatio Inauguralis de Casibus Perplexis in Jure* (*Inaugural Disputation on Ambiguous Legal Cases*). Leibniz earned his license to practice law and his Doctorate in Law in November 1666. He next declined the offer of an academic

appointment at Altdorf, saying that "my thoughts were turned in an entirely different direction"; Robert Adams (1994:12)

Leibniz's philosophical thinking appears fragmented, because his philosophical writings consist mainly of a multitude of short pieces: journal articles, manuscripts published long after his death, and many letters to many correspondents. He wrote only two book-length philosophical treatises, of which only the *Théodicée* of 1710 was published in his lifetime.

The problem of evil and the best of all possible worlds in Leibniz's theodicy
Leibniz's Theodicy offers a simple solution to the problem of evil: that this is the best of all possible worlds. Among his many philosophical interests and concerns, Leibniz took on this question of theodicy: If [God](#) is [omnibenevolent](#), [omnipotent](#) and [omniscient](#), how do we account for the suffering and injustice that exists in the universe? Historically, attempts to answer the question have been made using various arguments, for example, by explaining away evil or reconciling evil with good.

Leibniz outlined his *perfect world* theory stating the argument in five parts as articulated in *Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew (1991:53-55)*:

1. God has the idea of infinitely many universes.
2. Only one of these universes can actually exist.
3. God's choices are subject to the principle of sufficient reason, that is, God has reason to choose one thing or another.
4. God is good.
5. Therefore, the universe that God chose to exist is the best of all possible worlds.

To further understand his argument, these five statements can be grouped in three main premises. The first and second statements state that God can only choose one universe from the infinite amount of possible ones. The third and fourth statements state that God is a perfect existence, and he makes decisions based on reason. The final statement, which is the conclusion, says that the existed world that is chosen by God is the best of all.

Leibniz used Christianity to back up the validity of all the premises. For the first premise, God's existence and role as the creator of the world was proven by the [Bible](#); the "one universe" argument does not necessarily mean that only one world could exist, that one can extend "universe" to mean the set of multiple

worlds, which God is supreme over, and that this world is the best of all possible worlds. The second premise is proven since "God acts always in the most perfect and most desirable manner possible. Therefore, His choice will always be the best, and only perfect existence can make perfect decision throughout time. Since all the premises are right, then Leibniz concluded; the universe that God chose to exist is the best of all possible worlds"; *Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew (1991:53-55)* To set his argument, Leibniz wrestled with the problem of sin and evil in the world that obviously exists and is considered as the imperfection of the world. Leibniz as cited in *Colin Temple. (2004:9)* :

I do not believe that a world without evil, preferable in order to ours, is possible; otherwise it would have been preferred. It is necessary to believe that the mixture of evil has produced the greatest possible good: otherwise the evil would not have been permitted

In other words, if a world without evil is more perfect in any way, then evil would have not happened, and the world without evil would be our world instead. God put evilness in the world is for us to understand what goodness, which is achieved through contrasting it with evil. Once we understood evil and good, it gives us the ability to produce the "greatest possible good" out of all the goodness. Evil fuels goodness, which leads to a perfect system.

The Variety of Problems of Evil in Leibniz

Without doubt, the problem of evil perplexed Leibniz as much as any philosophical problem. In this segment, we will address two main species of the problem of evil which Leibniz addresses. The first, "the underachiever problem," is the one raised by the critic who argues that the evil in our world indicates that God cannot be as knowledgeable, powerful, or good, as traditional monotheists have claimed. The second, "the holiness problem," is one raised by a critic who argues that God's intimate causal entanglements with the world make God the cause of evil. God is thereby implicated in the evil at the expense of his holiness.

The Underachiever Problem

The core of Leibniz's solution to the underachiever problem is quite straightforward. Leibniz argues that there is no underachieving involved in creating this world since this world is the best of all possible worlds. Many thinkers have supposed that commitment to the claim that this world is the best of all possible worlds follows straightforwardly from monotheism. Since God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, there is certainly nothing that can

prevent God from creating the best world. And God's goodness further obliges God to create the best world. Thus, the actual world is the best world.

Leibniz's reasoning to his conclusion does not, however, follow this straightforward path since, it is not clearly cogent as it stands. A number of seventeenth century scholars recognized that God would not be obliged to create the best if there were no best world. There might be no such best world if the series of possible worlds formed a continuum of increasingly good worlds without end. And if there were no such best world, we cannot fault God for failing to create the best since to do so is as impossible as, say, naming the highest number. There is no such number of course, and likewise no such world. Thus, while God may be obliged to create a world which has at least some measure of goodness, he could not be obliged, on this view, to create the best. Thus, God simply chose arbitrarily to bring about one among the range of morally acceptable worlds.

Leibniz was aware of this argument which denied God's obligation to create the best, but he was firmly committed to rejecting it. The reason for this is that a central principle of Leibniz's system, the Principle of Sufficient Reason, forced him to reject it. According to this principle, any state of affairs must have a reason sufficient which explains why it and not some other state of affairs obtain. When it comes to our world, then, there must be some reason which explains why it, and not some other world, obtains. Clearly, however, there can be no such reason on the view that the goodness of worlds increases without end. Thus, Leibniz held that there must be no such. According to Leibniz, the underachiever problem cannot get off the ground unless the critic is able to defend the claim that this world is not the best possible world.

The Holiness Problem

The main problem here is that God's character seems to be stained by evil since God knowingly and causally contributes to the existence of everything in the world, and evil is one of those things. According to Michael Murray (1995: 75-108): the standard solution adopted by medieval thinkers was to deny something that Leibniz affirms, namely, that evil is a "something." Evil, they claimed was not a positive reality, but a "privation" or "lack." As a result, evil has no more reality than the hole in the centre of a doughnut. Making a doughnut does not require putting together two components, the cake and the hole. Instead, the cake is all that there is to the doughnut. The hole is just "privation of cake. Thus, it would be silly to say that making the doughnut requires something to cause

the cake, and then something to cause the hole. Causing the cake causes the hole as a "by-product." Thus, we need not assume any additional cause for the hole beyond that assumed for the causing of the cake.

The upshot of our pastry analogy is simply this: since evil, like the hole, is merely a privation, it needs no cause on its own. Thus, God is not a "knowing causal contributor to evil" since evil per se has no cause at all. But since God does not contribute to evil, God cannot be implicated in the evil. Thus, the holiness problem evaporates.

In a short piece titled *The Author of Sin*, he explains why he thinks the privation response to the holiness problem fails. Since, Leibniz argues, God is the author of all that is real and positive in the world, God is, by extension, "author" of all of its privations; in his words:

It is a manifest illusion to hold that God is not the author of sin because there is no such thing as an author of a privation, even though he can be called the author of everything which is real and positive in the sinful act. (Edward 2000:10)

The reason, says Leibniz, can be gleaned from an example. Consider a painter who creates two paintings, one a small scale version of the other. The details of the pictures are identical in every respect, only the scale is different. It would be absurd, Leibniz remarks:

to say that the painter is the author of all that is real in the two paintings, without however being the author of what is lacking or the disproportion between the larger and the smaller painting. . . . In effect, what is lacking is nothing more than a simple result of an infallible consequence of that which is positive, without any need for a distinct author of that which is lacking. (Edward 2000:11).

Thus, even if it is true that evil is a privation; this does not have as a consequence that God is not the author of sin. Since what is positively willed by God is a sufficient condition for the evil state of affairs obtaining, willing what is positive makes God the author of that which is a privation as well.

Leibniz's Theory of Possible Worlds

According to Leibniz, there is infinity of possible worlds. These possible worlds are all found in God's ideas – the realm of the possible. These possible worlds are, in themselves, complete and coherent, yet, quite obviously, they cannot coexist, as the existence of one possible world implies the non-existence of every other possible world. Therefore, only one possible world could be made actual.

But the questions remain: why does this particular possible world exist? Why are there certain possible things that don't exist?

The actuality of this particular world

Leibniz gives answers to these questions; one is based on the world itself, and the other on God. First of all, this world is real based on the definitions of possibility, perfection and existence. Possibility for Leibniz is the principle of essence, and perfection (which is the degree of essence) is the principle of existence. According to Leibniz (1985:138):

All possible, that is, everything that expresses essence or possible reality, strive with equal right for existence in proportion to the amount of essence or reality or the degree of perfection they contain.

Therefore, that possible world that is made actual is the world that contains the greatest amount of perfection or degree of essence. In other words, out of all of the possible worlds realizable, this world is the best possible world. We might attempt to imagine a world that is more perfect, but, according to Leibniz's definitions, if such a world was possible, this would be it.

The second reason, the ultimate sufficient reason, why this world is the best of all possible worlds is that God chose this world out of all the possible worlds. God's choice, flowing from his infinite wisdom, was made by *decision rule* and based upon *the principle of fitness*. The principle of fitness concerns "the degree of perfection that these [any and all possible worlds] worlds contain," Leibniz (1985:138).

That world is fit for existence which contains within itself, and the composition of all of its parts, the greatest degree of perfection. Now, decision rule demands that God create that world with the greatest degree of perfection, or, as Leibniz says elsewhere, that world that is at the same time the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena. In other words God creates that world that has the greatest amount of "agreement or identity in variety, which contains the greatest variety together with the greatest order," or "which is the most appropriate," and "best". God, in fact, chooses to bring into existence that possible world which contains the most power, knowledge, happiness and goodness. Leibniz explains, that, through God's wisdom He knows which possible world has the greatest degree of perfection, through His goodness He chooses to create it, and by His power He produces it. God, then, for Leibniz, is the ultimate sufficient reason for the existence of things.

However, the question remains: is there not something else that could be the ultimate sufficient reason for the existence of this universe? Something else that answers the question: why the world exists and why it exists the way that it does? Leibniz has an answer to this question as well. If God, a being that is not a part of the universe, is not the sufficient reason for the existence of this world, then what could take His place? One answer that has been given throughout the history of philosophy is: Matter. Leibniz, in the *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on reason*, takes this answer head on. He claims that matter (or energy, protons, neutrons or electrons), could not possibly be the ultimate cause (reason) of the existence of all things, because it is absolutely indifferent to motion or to rest. Pure matter is unable to be the ultimate sufficient reason as itself is in need of a sufficient reason to be either in motion or at rest. Regardless of how far back we go in the spatio-temporal states of the universe, we will never find a reason, coming from matter, why things are the way they are and not otherwise. Therefore, the ultimate sufficient reason for the why there is something rather than nothing cannot possibly be matter.

There is a constant flow of spatio-temporal, contingent, states of the universe. Leibniz addresses this issue in much the same way that he addresses the question of matter. He says that this answer, positing an infinite regress of finite, or contingent, beings, or spatio-temporal states, still does not give us an ultimate sufficient reason for the existence of this world. Why is this? First of all, the reason for an unchanging thing (a persisting thing) is its own nature or essence. However, the reason for a contingent thing (or even an infinite series of contingent things) is the superior strength of certain inclinations, that is, the strength of its striving for existence. But its striving for existence does not give it existence as it is still only possible until it receives existence. Therefore, the ultimate sufficient reason for the existence of the universe, the compilation of contingent essences, cannot be found in any one contingent essence, or in the total compilation of contingent essences. Therefore, Leibniz concludes that the ultimate sufficient reason for the existence of the universe must depend on something which is: not contingent, nor part of the contingent universe. Such a being, would, according to Leibniz, would by its very essence, that is to say, it would be an entity whose essence is existence.

Possible Worlds and the Problem of Evil

The question that we just finished answering, in Leibniz's terms, brings us to the problem of evil, or the problem of suffering. The problem of suffering is that it seems that if there is a God that is all-knowing, omnibenevolent, and all-

powerful, then it seems that God should actualize that world in which there is the least amount of suffering. If God was such as described above, then He would have created that world, instead. Therefore there cannot possibly be a God, at least as described above. At best, if there is a God, in order to create such a world as this, He couldn't possibly be either all-knowing or omnibenevolent or all-powerful, or all three. This is the problem of evil.

According to Leibniz, God, through his omniscience and divine wisdom knew which, of the infinity of possible worlds, the best was. Through his goodness, God willed to create the best possible world, and through His supreme power He produced the best possible world. This possible world includes all the finite creatures that are found in its idea. Each of these creatures, in each possible world, has a complete idea in the mind of God which includes its entire spatio-temporal possible existence, including, for rational creatures their thoughts and actions. God, knowing all possible worlds, with all possible creatures and all their possible actions, knows which of those possible worlds is the best, and declares that this world exist.

From that point on, He simply keeps it in existence – preserving the being of each thing in it. For God to interfere significantly (unless His divine action in contingent affairs is a part of the best possible world) with the being of any one contingent thing would, essentially, be to choose an entirely different world (which would contain less perfection than the best possible world). Therefore, God preserves each being (animate or inanimate), each action or event, guaranteeing that they each accomplish or live out their complete idea. This means that, according to Leibniz, and based upon his principles and definitions, and especially based upon his theory of possible worlds, we are living in the best possible world. Not one evil event or act could be removed without making the world less perfect, because that which exists is based upon the total perfection of the world in question.

The Problem of Evil and the Best of all Possible Worlds in Leibniz's Theodicy: A Philosophical Appraisal

We have attempted to expose the basic ingredients of Leibniz's theodicy and his views on the problem of evil. This section is basically a reaction to Leibniz's position on the basis of our discussion so far. Leibniz has put forward a theodicy whereby he argues that this world remains the best possible world and that the evil in the world is compatible with divine goodness. As already canvassed, Leibniz holds that God, through his omniscience and divine wisdom knew

which of the infinity of possible worlds was the best. Through his goodness, God willed to create the best possible world, and through His supreme power He produced the best possible world. This possible world includes all the finite creatures that are found in its idea. But to what extent can Leibniz theory be justified amidst vagaries, sufferings, facticities and other existential problems of man in this planet earth. We therefore wish to attempt a further examination of this theory albeit critically.

The dilemma of best possible world with absolute suffering

Leibniz posits that God is a necessary Being and therefore He knows all the possible worlds to create. According to him, God knows this because the knowledge of possible worlds is innate in His mind because He is omniscient. He has foreknowledge of all future contingents. Before creation, God knew all possible worlds. God had to know the blueprint of everything within each possible world. The predicates, or possible worlds, are contained within the subject, God. This knowledge allows God to choose the possible world He wanted to create. Leibniz holds that His choice of anyone of these worlds is a completely free action on God's part because He could exist by Himself. Leibniz argues that we live in the best of all the possible worlds because since God is all-good and all-knowing, He would have to choose the best of all of these.

However, according to Arthur Schopenhauer, This is the worst of all possible worlds. For possible means not what we may picture in our imagination but what can actually exist and last.

Now this world is arranged as it had to be if it were to be capable of continuing with great difficulty to exist; if it were a little worse, it would be no longer capable of continuing to exist. Consequently, since a worse world could not continue to exist, it is absolutely impossible; and so this world itself is the worst of all possible worlds. For not only if the planets ran their heads against one another, but also if any one of the actually occurring perturbations of their course continued to increase, instead of being gradually balanced again by the others, the world would soon come to an end. Thus throughout, for the continuance of the whole as well as for that of every individual being, the conditions are sparingly and scantily given, and nothing beyond these. Arthur Schopenhauer (1958: 583)

For Schopenhauer, therefore, the individual life is a ceaseless struggle for existence itself, while at every step it is threatened with destruction. Just because this threat is often carried out, provision had to be made, by the incredibly great

surplus of seed that the destruction of individuals should not bring about that of the races, since about these alone is nature seriously concerned.

Leibniz's position seems to be a misplaced thought. Maybe a best possible world does not exist. And even if it is true that the actual world is the best world, why are there so much pain, suffering and moral evil in the world? The fact that evil exists in the world would contradict this best possible world theory. Would God need to even actualize the best possible world if it were to exist?

On the other hand, the free-will theorists have come to the defence of Leibniz. According to them, the actual world, while still have evil in it, is an extremely good world. It is good because of free-will. The fact that we have free-will is better than if humans were morally all-good. For if we were all-good we would have no freedom of the will to make choices and choose good or evil. These choices are better than not having them at all.

Reacting to Leibniz's theodicy, Maria Antognazza (1990:12) considers and rejects a common reading of Leibniz's conception of metaphysical evil that entails that all creatures are evil simply in virtue of the imperfection associated with their finitude. She argues that Leibniz's notion is best understood when set against the backdrop of a number of accounts of evil that would have been well-known in Leibniz's day - in particular, those of Augustine, Aquinas, Suárez, and William King. With these in view, she discusses the ways in which Leibniz accepts and rejects elements of the then dominant Augustinian tradition, and argues that Leibniz intended the concept of metaphysical evil to capture what the scholastics would have called "natural evils", namely, those that are independent of moral considerations.

Leibniz theodicy and the concept of freewill

Leibniz seems to have trouble with the concept of free-will. His metaphysics with the theory of propositions and the possible world idea seems to contradict free-will. If God chose any world, the people in that world would have to do whatever God chose. Although their actions might be contingent, God still causally determined it to occur. Leibniz seems to think that free-will has to exist in the world because it would make all responsibility meaningless.

According to Leibniz as cited by Daniel Kolak, and Garrett Thomson (2006:151); "it is manifest that God chooses, from an infinity of possible individuals, those which he thinks most consistent with the highest hidden ends of his wisdom. Nor is it exact to say that he decrees that Peter shall sin, or that Judas shall be

damned; he decrees only that a Peter who will sin – certainly, indeed, though not necessarily but freely – and a Judas who will suffer damnation shall come into existence in preference to other possibilities. In other words, God decrees that a possible notion shall become the actual. And although the future salvation of Peter is also contained in his eternal possible notion, yet that is without the concurrence of grace; for in that same perfect notion of this possible Peter, the assistance of divine grace which has been given to him is also contained under the aspect of possibility”.

There seems to be a dilemma here for Leibniz. God’s choosing of a possible world is a completely free act and cannot err if God is all-powerful. Therefore everything we do in the actual world was known and chosen by God. Everything we do must occur but this does not mean it is necessary but rather foreordained by God. Whether Leibniz accepts this divine determinism or not he still wants to have free-will intact. The free-will theodicy must work for Leibniz in order for the problem of evil to be resolved.

On the basis of this, many philosophers have criticized the best possible world theory and God’s perfection as enunciated by Leibniz. According to Paul Edward (1989:45), Voltaire thought that the whole idea of the actual world being the best possible world or even a good world was a complete joke. It is a fiction in which the main character goes through life meeting all these evils and challenges yet continually says that this is the best of all possible worlds.

David Hume wrote a critique of Leibniz’s philosophy by attacking the design argument for God’s existence. In his work titled *Dialogue concerning Natural Religion*, he writes a dialogue between two men, Cleanthes and Philo. Cleanthes argues that this world is proof of God’s existence based on the design and wonder of the world. He says:

Since, therefore, the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man, though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed, David Hume (2007:78).

Philo then refutes Cleanthes by saying that we cannot know that God is perfect. He argues that God is imperfect because of the mistakes in the world and thus turns the argument from design on its head in relation to God’s perfection at the

very least. But if the free-will defence works, then moral evil's existence is understandable. Hume seems to attack natural evil and the fact that there are natural imperfections in the universe. Hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, et cetera, are described as natural evils.

Leibniz's philosophy has helped to solve the problem of evil to some extent but not fully. His views on how God chooses to create the world create more problems for what he was trying to solve. And Hume's objections seem to cast doubt on how natural evil can exist in the universe. The problem of evil might be a problem for Christian apologists that will never fully be solved. Perhaps the answer is so far beyond human understanding or reason. Maybe belief in God is justified regardless of this problem that is presented by atheists and sceptics alike.

Moral evil and divine concurrence in Leibniz's theodicy

Moral evil and divine concurrence in Leibniz's theodicy remains controversial and as such attracts the attention of philosophers. Donald Rutherford (1995:57) tackles the issue of "Moral Evil and Divine Concurrence in *The Theodicy*". He is concerned to dispel the thought that Leibniz presented the problem of God's moral concurrence in sin as the most difficult component in the problem of only in order to make his solution appear more appealing.

Indeed, he suggests Leibniz had more reasons to be concerned with this threat to divine justice than others, such as the fact that God created a world containing natural disasters. With this in mind, Donald Rutherford examines Leibniz's tried to deal with the problem of moral concurrence in terms of divine permission of moral evil and the difficulties that arise from his approach.

Schmaltz defends Leibniz against some of the more common charges that have been raised by commentators. The most novel part of the discussion was when he brings out the importance of another of Leibniz's concepts, that of a "deficient cause", which is Augustinian in origin. This notion once articulated, enables Donald Rutherford to argue for the thesis that it "serves to support [Leibniz's] claim that God merely permits sinful action without morally concurring in it", Donald Rutherford (1995:59)

Reacting to Leibniz's theodicy in his work *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, Robert Adams (1995:14) argues that a proper understanding of Leibniz's theodicy requires close attention to the role that the concept of the City of God

plays in Leibniz's claim that this is the best of all possible worlds. In contrast to accounts that tend to stress the quasi-mathematical conception of the world's perfection in terms of unity in multiplicity, Adams concentrates on the importance of the fact that the best world includes an optimal rational society of intelligent beings, of which God is the monarch. As he notes, this focus serves to make the problem of evil more pressing, in particular when one considers Leibniz's apparent commitment to the eternal damnation of at least some rational beings.

Adams does not suggest that Leibniz rejected eternal damnation. However, he finishes with a somewhat radical thesis: that belief in eternal damnation may have been presented as true by Leibniz because he thought of it as the "safest" means by which to ensure the maximal happiness of rational beings. Thus Adams opens up interesting possibilities for further examination of the role of pragmatic concerns in the justification of the theoretical claims that we find in Leibniz's philosophical theology and, indeed, his philosophy in general.

Conclusion

Leibniz became famous for his claim that this world was the best of all that are possible. The statement sums up Leibniz's theodicy in defence of God's goodness which explores the vexed question of how God can be good and just and all-powerful if evil, injustice and suffering exist. However, it is a point of interpretive controversy how close to perfection Leibniz believed the best world is. While some think that Leibniz considered it to be good in absolute terms, both metaphysically and morally, others think differently.

Leibniz's theodicy was deemed illogical by [Bertrand Russell](#) (1990:43) who argues that "moral and physical evil must result from metaphysical evil (imperfection)". But imperfection is merely finitude or limitation; if existence is good, as Leibniz maintains, then the mere existence of evil requires that evil also be good. Russell maintains that Leibniz failed to logically show that metaphysical necessity (divine will) and human freewill are not incompatible.

The main reason why Leibniz's solution has not proved popular is because it seems simply obvious that the world could be better than it is presently. Some think that the whole point of religion and ethical endeavour is to make the world better, which would seem to be impossible if it were already as good as it could be. Indeed, the crux of the matter of evil is that there are evils, that is, things whose removal is desirable. So why should God not remove them, resulting in a

better world? Any defence of Leibniz's solution should concentrate on this challenge. Some have also objected that if this is the best possible world then it would already be paradise and there would be no reason to hope for a better world after this, and the grace of God for salvation would be obsolete.

But this seems to be a misunderstanding of Leibniz's position. He strongly affirms the orthodox doctrines that sin is real and that grace is needed for redemption. A given day or age is not necessarily the best possible, nor is our life on earth. While the world as a whole is the best possible, improvement of individual parts is in fact at the heart of Leibniz's concern. In the sciences, in philosophy and theology, and in politics, he always aimed to improve the human condition.

Leibniz therefore made it clear that he did not mean that the best world is composed only of the best parts, just as the part of a beautiful thing is not always beautiful. While some aspects of the world may not seem good in themselves, they are part of a whole that is better than all the alternatives. No part could in fact have been other than it is, neither better nor worse, since then the world would no longer be as it is, and this world is the best, having been chosen by an infinitely wise God. According to Leibniz:

It is true that one may imagine possible worlds without sin and without unhappiness, and one could make some like Utopian ... romances: but these same worlds again would be very inferior to ours in goodness, because humans, being free to act, are able to choose between good or evil, and there is no rational creature without some organic body, and there is no created spirit entirely detached from matter, subject to pain and decay. To be free and to be both spirit and matter is good, even if this condition allows for evil and unhappiness. For sometimes an evil brings forth a good, and it is a false maxim that the happiness of rational creatures is the sole aim of God. God's creation is immense, and human beings make up only a tiny part of it, spatially and temporally; what makes us unhappy may well contribute to the good of the whole or to other creatures. Huggard (1985:138)

Leibniz's solution would certainly be significant. It provides God with a perfect excuse for the evil left in the world: the absolute impossibility of anything better. Leibniz's theory is also important for its quick disposal of the alleged incompatibility of the triad of propositions: "God is good; God is all-powerful;

evil exists. Since in the Leibniz scenario all three are true, they cannot be incompatible", Pike (1990: 38–52). It may be apt to conclude that Leibniz was being neither flippant nor unduly optimistic; rather, his optimism deserves a more careful and critical analysis, for it helps to throw more light on his understanding of science and its moral implications for humankind.

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