INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI
RICE UNIVERSITY

Leibniz and The Problem of Evil: Suffering, Voluntarism, and Activism

by

Mark L. Thomas

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Mark A. Kulstad, Professor
Philosophy

Steven G. Crowell, Professor, Chair
Philosophy

Gerald P. McKenny, Associate Professor, Chair
Religious Studies

HOUSTON, TEXAS

APRIL, 2001
Copyright
Mark L. Thomas
2001
ABSTRACT

Leibniz and The Problem of Evil:

Suffering, Voluntarism, and Activism

By

Mark L. Thomas

This work elucidates elements of Leibniz’s theodicy which are non-teleological. Rather than ignoring the personal dimension of suffering, as some have charged, Leibniz actually recognizes the threat that the problem of innocent suffering presents for a perfectly good God. His theodicy goes beyond the global greater-good defense of the best possible world argument in several ways. He appeals to personal greater-goods to justify some instances of suffering, but he also invokes deontological principles in his retributive justice arguments, his response to the author of sin problem, and his constraint against damnation of infants. However, an evidential version of the problem of horrible suffering of innocents would still threaten his theodicy. This problem persists due to Leibniz’s rejection of theological voluntarism in favor of a unified system of ethics for God and rational creatures. Finally, Leibniz’s rejection of quietism provides an important resource for a response to suffering. His theodicy thus implies a moral activism whereby the good for each rational creature is bound up with the general good of others in the amelioration of the world.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my gratitude to the Philosophy Department of Rice University for facilitating the research and writing which led to this work. Many persons have assisted me throughout this process, but I would like to especially recognize Laurence Carlin, Keith DeRose, and Robert Sleigh for dialogue that has shaped the ideas contained herein. In addition, I owe many thanks to Steven Crowell and Gerry McKenny for reading and evaluating this inquiry despite already over-extended schedules. Finally, this dissertation would have been impossible without the wise counsel of my advisor, Mark Kulstad, or the steadfast support of my loving wife, Lucy Thomas.
# CONTENTS

Introduction 1

## Part I: Beyond a greater-good defense with the problem of suffering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory comments</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticisms of Leibniz's theodicy</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin and the greater-good defense</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering and the greater-good defense</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of persons and Leibniz's theodicy</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal suffering and retributive justice</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering and karma as a form of retributive justice</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding thoughts</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part II: Leibniz versus voluntarism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory comments</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God, creatures, and ethics</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leibniz's arguments against the three dogmas</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayle's metaphysical argument</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leibniz's argument on eternal truths and God's understanding</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leibniz and Descartes</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leibniz's argument on eternal truths reconsidered</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part III: Leibniz's moral activism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quietism vs. activism as related to preceding sections</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual map of versions of fatalism and quietism</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leibniz's <em>fatum Mahometanum</em></td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine vs. human causality in Islamic philosophy</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leibniz's rejections of quietism</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three in one: reconsidering the versions of quietism</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion 153

*Selected Bibliography* 160
Introduction

The problem of evil endures as a philosophical quandary from the age of the ancients to the present. This basic question is variegated and textured. It resonates like a fugue reformulated in a variety of settings; it is a recurring riff that emerges, shaped and toned by a multitude of cultural contexts. It pierces the paradigms of human understanding and motivates concern at many levels, from the practical to the emotional to the most arcane intellectual. The problem of evil is the rare philosophical puzzle that ironically unifies. Perhaps its most fascinating conceptual feature is that it bridges ὑσια as wisdom and as knowledge, philosophy as love of practical wisdom and as pursuit of rational explanation. It is a fundamental assumption of this study that philosophical inquiry is not a morally neutral act. The catalyst for my interest in the problem of evil is an ethical concern; it is a sensitivity to the reality of suffering in this world. This awareness of the existence of evil leads fairly quickly upon reflection to a theoretical problem, which is a deep tension—even an apparent contradiction—between acknowledgement of the reality of evil and belief in the existence of God. Thus, examination of the problem of evil leads one to realize the linkage between the ethical and the theological, between the practical concerns of a human being living in this world and the abstract heights toward which the mind can fly.

However, this philosophical dynamic goes even further. This philosophical Cain has a brother, and his name is theodicy. It remains to be seen whether the sibling is slain in a final sense, for many philosophers and theologians—and even perhaps some sophists and charlatans—have seen fit to resurrect this one in the name of God. These theodicies range from specific defenses against particular charges levied by versions of the problem of evil to more fully-developed positive accounts of the place of evil in a world created by a good God. At its best, though, a theodicy does not rest its case in the realm of theoretical explanation, however complete the justification of God might be. If it is to
fully achieve its goal, theodicy must to some degree address the basic origin of the problem, that is, it must provide some motivation for human beings to positively respond to the presence of evil in their world. The practical and theoretical are therefore doubly-bridged, for the dynamic that originates in a moral concern, then motivates a theoretical struggle between theism and atheism, now returns to moral action. From the ethical to the theological to the ethical again, this dynamic is characteristic of the problem of evil and theodicy. And at a different, personal level, this ethical dimension of the problem may be indicative of coalescence. From the atheistic point of view, the problem of evil merits theoretical concern because of its grave challenge to theism; likewise, for the same reason, the problem demands theological response from the theistic perspective.

Moreover, both sides would find common ground in the ethical urgency of the problem; like Dr. Rieux and Father Paneloux in Camus' novel, both might fight the plague together, albeit for quite different reasons.

Leibniz is a natural historical figure in which to ground an inquiry into the problem of evil for many reasons. At a cursory level is the often-cited fact that his *Théodicée*, whose full title is translated as *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, was the only book-length work of Leibniz published during his lifetime (not to mention the fact that Leibniz coined the very term for justification of God). Pierre Bayle was the primary philosophical catalyst for Leibniz's writing of the *Theodicy*. Bayle raises difficulties for natural theology on the basis of evil, but Leibniz says in his Preface that few persons have put as much work as he himself has into considering the challenges and responses for the relation of reason and faith in the face of evil.¹ Leibniz respects Bayle, even as—or perhaps because—he finds himself arguing in the opposite direction. Leibniz takes evil and its implications seriously; its problems are more than merely a stage for him to parade platitudes of

orthodox theology, though in the midst of some of his theodicy arguments he can give that appearance. Leibniz also takes seriously the threat of erroneous views on God and evil, for there is much more at stake than mere esoteric trivialities. He does hold that these matters ultimately come down to metaphysical concepts such as necessity and freedom, but, in employing philosophy in the service of theology, Leibniz has a wider aim than vindicating God's justice in creating this world. "There is no piety where there is not charity..." he says.² It is a primary purpose of this study to investigate the philosophical corollary of this principle for Leibniz, that there is no theodicy without a justification of human moral action in the created world.

One question that arises from consideration of Leibniz's *Theodicy* is his degree of sincerity in this published work. I shall not attempt to answer this question in any final sense. One does wonder, though, whether to take Leibniz fully at his word when he praises Bayle for his erudition even while devoting considerable effort to proving him wrong. In an ironic twist, one may even wonder if Leibniz perhaps admires Bayle's skeptical acumen a bit too much. Robert Merrihew Adams cites what is perhaps the boldest challenge to Leibniz's sincerity in *Theodicy* in discussing the Lutheran theologian, Christopher Matthaus Pfaff. Twelve years after Leibniz's death, Pfaff claimed that Leibniz had affirmed in correspondence with him that his true intention in *Theodicy* was to playfully appear to oppose Bayle's skepticism while actually confirming it. Adams rejects such a tremendous claim, but he does hold that Leibniz's sincerity can be questioned regarding some of the finer, subtler points of his system in his *Theodicy*.³

Again, it is not my intent to attempt to answer this question, but there are a couple of comments in response to it that may reveal the tone of my inquiry. On the one hand, regardless of where Leibniz actually stands on the sincerity issue, his *Theodicy* is important for an investigation of the problem of evil. If Leibniz is insincere, then we

---

should wonder at his concern with the problem. If Leibniz is sincere, then we should wonder at his answer, his theodicy. And even if Leibniz has convinced himself of the truth of his theodicy, we must realize that he would naturally find some plausibility to the problem of evil in order for it to spur him to attempt so majestic an answer. Leibniz would have good reason for admiring Bayle's skeptical arguments, even were his final word to be a rejection of them.

On the other hand, it is reasonable that there should be recognizable tensions in Leibniz's work given his larger philosophical tasks. I would suggest that his work fits into a rubric that is exemplary from medieval tradition, that of doing philosophy in the struggle between the science and theology of one's day. Leibniz notes that Bayle's view of the impotence of reason provides a general motivation for his *Theodicy*, whose "preliminary dissertation" concerns the *conformity* of faith and reason. Leibniz is obviously neither the first nor the last to struggle with such questions. Aquinas, Averroes, and Maimonides were motivated by similar concerns, and in fact, Richard Popkin even suggests that Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* be understood as a sort of new *Guide for the Perplexed*, following the intent of its original medieval author.\(^4\) We might similarly understand Leibniz's *Theodicy* as a guide for those who are perplexed by the problem of evil, inasmuch as the apparent determinism of a mechanistic natural world would seem to make God an accomplice to evil—if God is present at all—and would seem to threaten ethics with collapse. Even the sincerity of skeptics is open to question, and one may wonder whether Bayle uses his method against reason so that faith may flourish or perhaps he strikes down the wheat along with the tares. Perhaps what one sees in Leibniz's work is less willful insincerity and more a kind of transparent view of a mind working on deeply-held, conflicting assumptions, with the lofty goal of engineering a consistent system out of this material. Perhaps what comes across to some as insincerity

---


by Leibniz is akin to what comes across as intriguing ambiguity of personae in the more stylistically skilled hands of David Hume. It is no simple matter to determine what Hume's final view of theism would be based on his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*.

One of the most attractive features of Leibniz is his quest for unity—as a philosopher, as an intellectual of diverse interests, and as a person. The principle of harmony is so crucial to him that he argues that on more than one level it is established by God as part of the metaphysical fabric of the universe. He seeks this unity between natural science and natural theology, between the problem of evil and theodicy, between rational truth and practical moral action, and even between his own Christian religion and Eastern traditions, among other examples. One need only glance at the index of his *Theodicy* to realize the astounding web of connection with a diversity of other thinkers. Indeed, one of the most personally satisfying aspects of this study of Leibniz and the problem of evil has been the discovery of just how manifold and rich are the connections between Leibniz's philosophical theology and figures and issues from Judaism, to Islam, to Manicheism, to Zoroastrianism, to Buddhism, to Taoism, to Confucianism, to Hinduism. I shall investigate some of these fascinating connections in the text and footnotes that follow.

However, granting and even celebrating Leibniz's systematic quest for philosophical harmony, I should make it clear that I do not intend to offer a monistic interpretation of him in these pages. There will be nothing like the claim of entailment of Leibniz's metaphysics from his logic à la Louis Couturat and Bertrand Russell. Nor will there be an attempt like that of Donald Rutherford to excavate the foundational notion—in his case the rational order of the natural world—that underlies the single edifice of Leibniz's philosophy. Despite his intentions, Leibniz's philosophy is too pluralistic and varied. Still, it is not my purpose in this work even to argue for this kaleidoscopic view. My goal is much more modest; it is to explore and amplify several important non-teleological themes of his theodicy which have heretofore been overlooked or under-
appreciated by most interpreters of Leibniz. These themes include the significance of persons beyond mere components of the best possible world and the tension between the global and personal levels of Leibniz's theodicy. In another sense, I am tracing out the ethical concerns of the problem of evil even in the midst of the theological theodicy that he develops. This study of Leibniz's theodicy begins and concludes within the framework of the problem of evil, which itself is a theological problem that is motivated by an ethical concern and ultimately also has moral implications.

I must make one additional caveat regarding the approach of this thesis. I have no pretense that my treatment of Leibniz will meet the criteria of "pure" history of philosophy. While it is dubious that it is even possible for a historian to completely immerse herself within the point of view of a historical context not her own, the approximation of that standard may well be a legitimate governing ideal. However, while I am concerned with placing Leibniz's theodicy in philosophical, religious, and historical context in various ways, this historical aim is not my overriding end. I do hold respect for the text as a standard to be met in interpreting it. But the problem of evil is an enduring philosophical problem, ancient and contemporary. Likewise, the impulse toward theodicy is a perennial one, even though Leibniz was the first to name it. Therefore, I do not hide the fact that my selection of texts and historical connections is motivated by a prior philosophical concern with the problem of evil, nor do I rescind my right to adopt a critical stance toward Leibniz's arguments--though we are separated temporally by nearly three centuries and geographically by several thousand miles of land and sea. As for the philosophical nexus which humbly links me with this "universal genius," mediated by the written word, it is time for me to explain the terms and concepts which color my vision of his theodicy.
Terms and concepts: Kinds of evil

If one is concerned to ask the question, "Does Leibniz solve the problem of evil with his theodicy?" there is a subsequent question that immediately follows. This next question is, "Which problem of evil?" There are actually multiple problems of evil, and it is not just contemporary philosophers who recognize this point. Though Leibniz does not speak in terms of "problems of evil" or even of a "problem of evil," he does distinguish between explanations of different kinds of evil. Leibniz emphasizes three kinds of evil in his *Theodicy*: metaphysical, moral, and physical. I shall also discuss natural evil as it relates to these other categories. The definitions that follow are indebted to Leibniz as noted, but they also include my own comments on the respective concepts.

*Metaphysical evil*, then, is mere imperfection according to Leibniz. He sometimes means apparent irregularities within the otherwise orderly universe, what he and Malebranche term "monstrosities." At a deeper level, there is an argument that anything created by a perfect God must be evil in this sense, for God could not simply duplicate God in creating, so the creation would necessarily be imperfect in contrast with its divine source. In this way, Leibniz's account of the ultimate origin of evil is essentially Augustinian in that evil is a privation or limitation of good, as I shall elaborate in the section on basic theodicy strategies below.

The second kind of evil is *moral evil*, which Leibniz defines as sin. Sin is moral wrongdoing in a theological context; it is being in an ethically wrong relation with God. Sin also often--perhaps even always--has moral reference to other creatures as well, but it is the theological dimension that moves it beyond a mere ethical wrong. In contrast with other types of evil, another distinguishing characteristic of moral evil is that it proceeds from a rational will. In the Augustinian tradition, it is this positive willing combined with privation which brings evil into actual existence. Thus, human beings can cause moral

---

6See, e.g., Malebranche's *Dialogues on Metaphysics* (Ninth Dialogue, IX) and Leibniz's *Theodicy*, sect. 241, p. 276.
evil, but other rational creatures, such as angelic or celestial beings, could do so as well, as some have implausibly argued. Furthermore, in principle God too could commit moral evil, and in fact Leibniz takes quite seriously the problem of whether God might be the "author of sin."

The third type of evil is physical evil or suffering according to Leibniz. Suffering is related to pain but is quite distinct from it. The genesis of pain is in physical sensation, and while it often gives rise to suffering, it need not do so. Furthermore, suffering—even in extremely intense versions—may occur independently of pain, through fear, memories, psychological imbalance, or many other forms of mental anguish. One may define suffering in a hedonic sense as the non-morally bad state of being, a state of experiencing displeasure. In his extensive survey of the problem of evil and theodicy, John Hick defines suffering more basically as a mental state in which we "...wish violently or obsessively that our situation were otherwise."7 Hick's definition evokes the original denotation of suffering as bearing or enduring something; suffering signifies one's passive experience in the world, as opposed to the active willing which corresponds to the ethical dimension of existence and which leads to moral evil as it goes awry. While a rational being actively causes moral evil, suffering always forces itself on one passively—even in the not insignificant number of cases when one causes oneself to suffer. This distinction between the two kinds of evil is crucial. Since each kind is problematic, one cannot resolve the problem of physical evil simply by justifying the existence of moral evil in the world. Furthermore, as suffering varies in intensity, duration, and number of occurrences, these variables impact the severity of a given specific formulation of the problem of evil, as I shall discuss below.

---

Finally, *natural evil* is a fourth kind of evil which is sometimes confused with suffering. However, natural evil is distinct from physical evil, for certainly not all suffering results from natural evil, and, further, some natural evil may not involve suffering. What is distinct about natural evil is that it does not have a rational will as its proximate or efficient cause. Much suffering is a consequence of moral evil, though it is certainly coherent to conceive of a sin that causes no suffering. Moreover, much suffering is the result of non-volitional events in the world, such as natural disasters like tornadoes, or from organisms that cause disease. Furthermore, death is an example of a feature of existence that may be considered a natural evil but that does not necessarily involve suffering. Natural evil, then, is a non-volitional event in the world that often causes suffering but more generally involves an undesirable or flawed aspect of the world. In this latter respect, interestingly enough, natural evil would come close to Leibniz's categorization of metaphysical evil as a monstrosity in the world.

**Problems of evil**

At its essence the problem of evil involves a tension between the existence of God along with the existence of evil. The problem is theological, for it casts doubt upon the rationality of belief in the existence of God, but it is also significantly ethical, for it does not arise in its more tenacious versions without a moral sensitivity to the existence of evil. Further, to articulate this basic problem in any detail is to formulate a specific version of the problem. One manner in which to formulate different versions would be to structure the problem according to the kind of evil under examination, so that by the above criteria there would be at least four different problems of evil. A different taxonomy of problems would result from variations in the precise definition of God, since there is an inverse correlation between the degree of specificity of theism and atheism. If evil were the ground for disproof of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly-good God, then the resulting atheism would be weaker than the version that would result from
consideration of God simply as a benevolent deity. This principle is important for the development of a significant theodicy strategy which I shall discuss below. Finally, a means by which contemporary philosophers typically delineate distinct problems of evil is by contrasting the existence of evil per se with the existence of specific examples of evil and by varying the degree of tension between evil and God. Thus, most recent debate has focused on either the logical problem of evil or the evidential problem of evil.

It is not readily apparent how to relate this contemporary parsing of the problem to Leibniz's understanding of evil which motivates his theodicy. In Western tradition, the basic formulation of the logical problem goes back at least as far as Epicurus, and there are certain features of Leibniz's discussion which fit this version. However, Hume is considered to be the first to articulate the evidential problem, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*; nevertheless, Leibniz's treatment of evil does share some points in common with this version. I shall turn to a more detailed explanation of each of these main versions of the problem, along with the more specific problems of the author of sin and the suffering of innocents, which follow respectively from the logical and evidential problems. These two special problems are crucial for understanding the non-teleological strands of Leibniz's theodicy.

*The logical problem of evil*

The logical problem is a deductive argument with two especially salient characteristics in its most common formulation. First, this problem is generated based on the existence of any evil at all, and second, the argument claims that the tension between the existence of any evil and of God is as strong as it could be. The claim is that there is a contradiction between the existence of evil and the existence of God. Any evil is problematic, but what kind of God? The typical logical problem defines God much as would Leibniz. The problem is expressed through the following statements.
(1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.

(2) God exists.

(3) Evil exists.

The argument claims that these three premises are incompatible; taken together, they entail a contradiction. (Some philosophers have seen it necessary to include an additional supposition that God creates the world, but one might argue that the character of God implies the creative activity. Of course, from Anselm's point of view in his ontological argument, if the first premise were properly stated then even the second premise would be superfluous!) At this stage, however, the contradiction remains implicit. One must add additional premises which interpret the attributes of God in order to make the contradiction explicit. Therefore, the argument presents these further statements as putatively convincing specifications of the divine character.

(4) A perfectly good being would always prevent or eliminate evil so far as it could.

(5) An omniscient being would know whatever could be known about any evil.

(6) There are no limits to what an omnipotent being is able to do.

At this point the contradiction ensues. This God would know of the existence of any evil in the world, or, perhaps more importantly, this God would know of the potential evil in any possible world that could be created. Moreover, this God would wish of any evil that it would not exist. And, of course, this God would be able to accomplish whatever God wished to do. Thus, there is a contradiction between the existence of any evil and the existence of God. The argument is atheistic based on the assumption that it is obviously more plausible to relinquish belief in this God in order to resolve the contradiction.

The subsidiary premises bear most of the logical weight of this argument, so that a response to the argument would naturally seek to challenge one or more of these assumptions about the divine attributes. I shall return to this point below in the section on
basic theodicy strategies. Focusing specifically on premise (4), it is apparent how quickly this theological problem begins to involve a debate over basic ethical concepts, which is characteristic of the problem of evil. A further general observation about the structure of this argument is that by altering its basic variables one will produce different formulations of the logical problem. The articulation above is the most prevalent version, but it is by no means the only possible one. All versions of the logical problem of evil require a claim of contradiction between God and evil. But one may vary the problem significantly by changing the definition of God or by considering evil in different senses. The most violent attack may be the easiest to defend; by restricting the argument to specific amounts of evil or to a specific kind of evil—rather than arguing from the existence of any evil at all—one could construct an especially menacing version of the logical problem.

Author of sin taken as a logical problem of evil

Leibniz certainly finds what he calls the "author of sin" problem to pose a serious threat to the goodness of God. I shall investigate this problem in the context of Leibniz's theodicy in the first main section of this thesis, but as an introduction to the concepts I shall ahistorically consider the problem as an example of a logical problem of evil. The main features of the author of sin problem are as follows.

(1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.
(2) God causally contributes to any efficacious action of creatures.
(3) God exists.
(4) Some efficacious actions of creatures are sinful.

On a parallel with the version of the argument above, this set of premises would entail a contradiction, based on these additional principles.

(5) If one causally contributes to a sinful action, then one sins.
(6) A perfectly good being would never sin.

The presence of sin in the world contradicts the existence of this God, whose description includes causal contribution to the actions of creatures. The challenge of responding to
this problem lies in explaining how one could causally contribute to sinful actions without sinning. As we shall see, Leibniz is one who attempts to meet this challenge, but even further, his very consideration of the problem reveals a non-teleological strand of his theodicy.

*The evidential problem of evil*

Strictly speaking, the only difference between the evidential and logical arguments lies in the strength of the inferential claim (inductive vs. deductive). The evidential problem of evil claims that the existence of God is improbable based on the existence of evil under consideration, whereas the logical problem claims a contradiction between the two. Taking the presence of sin in the world as evidence, one could even formulate the author of sin problem in an evidential form, arguing in some way that the existence of the sin makes God's existence unlikely to some degree. However, Leibniz's treatment of author of sin arguably links with the logical form, since Leibniz assumes that a perfectly good God would be constrained from sinning at all.

In addition to its inductive quality, the typical evidential problem of evil is also empirically specific. Such an argument is usually based on particular kinds or amounts of evil in the world. Thus, one might argue that because evil is so pervasive in the world, the tri-perfect God is not likely to exist. Or one might argue that because there are intense and widespread evils such as the Nazi Holocaust or the Killing Fields of the Khmer Rouge, the existence of such a God is unlikely. Again, one could formulate these terrible examples into a logical version of the problem, so why not proceed with the stronger claim of contradiction? It is important to understand that the evidential claim that the existence of God is improbable is a charge of unreasonableness. The greater the degree of improbability, the less reasonable is the belief that such a God exists. This point explains why evidential arguments normally rely on specific kinds or amounts of evil rather than on the mere fact that evil exists; particular kinds of empirical evidence increase the degree of improbability. Furthermore, one must remember that the evidential
argument is generally more troubling for theistic belief than is the logical argument. In order to rebut the charge of contradiction, the theist need only establish the possibility of a connection between God and evil, but to repel the claim of improbability, she must bear the greater burden to show that God would be probable given those circumstances. 

The problem of suffering of innocents

Perhaps the most intractable version of the problem of evil results from the horrible suffering of innocent persons. Consider the stories that Dostoyevsky's Ivan tells in *The Brothers Karamazov*, of soldiers tossing babies in the air and catching them on their bayonets, and the like.⁸ Or consider the gripping scene from Camus' *The Plague*, where the disease ravages a young boy, moment by excruciating moment. These fictional tales provide convenient and compelling examples, but the actual world is even crueler than fiction. What makes this kind of evil so thorny is the combination of degree of suffering and innocence of the one who suffers. An especially minimal grade of suffering of innocents would not make for a high level of evidential implausibility, but the astounding kinds of suffering that do in fact exist give a charge to the argument.

Furthermore, the final force of the argument also depends on the moral innocence of the victim of suffering. One could formulate this evil into either an evidential or a logical argument against God; indeed, on this basis the two main kinds of argument nearly converge. While it is most unreasonable that an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God would even permit—much less directly cause—such suffering, it is also difficult to find a plausible argument that it would be possible for a perfectly good being to allow such suffering. As we shall see, Leibniz is attuned to a version of this argument in his concern over the problem of the damnation of innocents, a suffering which would be gravely problematic not only in its intensity but also in its eternal duration.

---

⁸See especially the chapter entitled "Rebellion."
Basic theodicy strategies

Theodicy is Leibniz's own term, and I use it in this work in the general sense of a justification of God in the face of evil, with reference to any attempt to answer a problem of evil. Some contemporary philosophers distinguish between a defense, by which they mean an answer that merely negates the challenge of a particular problem of evil (such as the contradiction claim of the typical logical problem), and a theodicy, by which they indicate a more extensive attempt to articulate the positive purposes of God and evil in the world. However, I shall not employ this distinction within this inquiry. What I shall do is map out several basic types of theodicy for the purpose of illuminating which strands do and which do not fit with Leibniz's justification of God.

Theological dualism

Beneath the versions of the problem of evil discussed above is the basic assumption of monotheism. One could mitigate each of these problems by positing the existence of two (or more) deities, one good and one evil. One could also understand this theodicy as relinquishing the concept of God's omnipotence, which will be discussed as a separate strategy below. If the evil in the world is explained by reference to an evil being, then the existence of the good god would not be directly challenged by the existence of that evil. Manicheism is one example of a religious tradition which propounds such a dualism, and it has its roots in Zoroastrianism and also some elements of Hinduism. Manichean mythology involves two primal, independent principles of Light and Darkness, Good and Evil. It is likely that this dualistic thought influences the development of the concept of Satan in the Jewish and Christian traditions.

Augustine is known for his personal and theological encounters with Manicheism, and Leibniz too is intent to distinguish his theodicy from this dualistic approach. The orthodox approaches of each philosopher involve the assumption of the ultimate and sovereign nature of goodness. In the final sense, there is but one value, and that is goodness. Even Manicheism belies a total dualism by assuming a rational preference for
good over evil and constructing an ethico-religious scheme whereby the devoted may escape the shackles of evil. The basic challenge for philosophers like Augustine and Leibniz is to explain the incongruity of the existence of evil at all given the pure and ultimate goodness of Being.

*The unreality of evil*

Accepting the assumption of a singular omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God, there are two basic strategies for a theodicy to take: denial of the actual existence of evil (or revision of the concept of it); and revision of the concept of God with regard to evil (or denial of the existence of God as conceptualized). Obviously, the contradiction of the logical problem would be resolved if evil were to turn out to be unreal. A more specific example would be Leibniz's denial that animals actually suffer, because they lack the faculty of self-reflection, apparently in order to squelch what would be a tremendous mushrooming of the problem of innocent suffering. And while a naive denial of evil would formally resolve the problem with something from little to no plausibility, other, more sophisticated axiological views are also possible. For example, Spinoza's claim that good and bad are modes of thought, without a primary metaphysical status, would seem to silence complaints against God. Of course, Leibniz is unwilling to pay such a ransom for what would be a hollow redemption of an amoral deity.

However, Leibniz does follow in Augustine's footsteps by understanding evil to ultimately be a privation of good. This definition of metaphysical evil is essentially a denial of the reality of it. It is not that evil does not exist; rather, its existence is only secondary or parasitic on the prior existence of good. For Augustine, God is entirely good. And the creation of God is good, too; each creature, considered in its place, is good. Evil does not exist at this basic, direct level of God's purposes for creation. Evil only appears with one's misunderstanding of one's rightful place, with one's skewing of the rightful purposes for good creatures. The notion of metaphysical evil as imperfection in the sense of being limited, in contrast with the perfect and unlimited goodness of the
creator, is also an account of the metaphysical unreality of evil. And Leibniz’s argument that evil ultimately originates in the unavoidable limits which inhere in the various sequences of combinations of possible creatures prior to creation is also a fundamentally privative account. Good has full, independent, positive existence (e.g. God), while evil only exists in the metaphysical sense as a limitation of good. In other words, there is no unlimited, eternal evil (which is another reason that the damnation of infants is repugnant to Leibniz, though, curiously, not to Augustine).

*The unreality of God*

Of course, one could also resolve the tension of the problem of evil by relinquishing belief in the existence of God. Not surprisingly, this "solution" would be unsatisfactory to most if not all theists. This point is not entirely frivolous, for it reveals more of the logical texture of the problem. In fact, much creative work in theodicy is actually a more moderate modification of this strategy of denial of God’s existence.

*The unreality of this God, or revising the conception of God*

Many of the more compelling theodicies focus their work on revising the definition of God which is invoked by the problem of evil. From a different point of view, these theodicies reject the existence of the spurious God as defined within the problem for the sake of arguing for an existing God rightly conceived. In this way, even a theist could take some versions of the problem of evil as vehicles that rationally guide her toward a truer understanding of God.

As an example, we may reconsider the typical logical problem of evil. As stated, the argument assumes a God who is both perfectly good and omnipotent. Further, the argument specifies the attribute of goodness in terms of a principle vis-à-vis evil. This principle states that such a God would always prevent or eliminate evil so far as God could do so. One may develop a couple of compelling theodicies by challenging this principle in various ways. First of all, a perfectly good being might well permit or even cause some kinds of evil, not out of a defective character but on the contrary out of
goodness. This type of theodicy is a greater-good defense, which I shall define further below. Several strands of Leibniz's theodicy fit into this category, including the appeal to the global level of the best possible world. Like administering bitter medicine to a child, there are coherent conceptions of goodness that would require doing some evils, provided those evils were necessary for obtaining a greater good. A variation of this sort of justification is the soul-making theodicy, developed by John Hick, whereby one understands evil as a necessary obstacle to be overcome for the development of a genuinely mature moral character.

Second, from a quite different ethical perspective, one might reject the principle out of a commitment to retributive justice. Leibniz also argues from this point of view in developing his theodicy. It is coherent to claim that a perfectly good being might well cause some evil--namely some kinds of suffering--in order to punish creatures for wrongdoing. If one accepts this moral framework, then such evils would not contradict the goodness of God. It is interesting to note that a retributive justice theodicy may also be developed along the lines of the Hindu-Buddhist doctrines of karma and samsara. Joining the karmic version of retributive justice with the doctrine of rebirth, one engineers a potentially powerful theodicy. Such a theodicy would even provide an explanation for apparently innocent suffering of persons or animals by its claim that these beings suffer just retribution for the moral wrongs of a prior life. Whatever the specific form, these two types of theodicy, greater-good defense and retributive justice, remove the contradiction of the logical problem by revising and clarifying the conception of God's goodness.

There are additional kinds of theodicies which we may understand as revising the conception of God's power. The standard logical problem of evil invokes a principle to explain God's omnipotence as it does for God's goodness. God's power means that there are no limits to what this being is able to do. However, there are several ways that theodicies advance different conceptions of God's power. There are theodicies which
defend God against evil with the claim that God is not in fact omnipotent. There are ancient Greek conceptions of creation, for example, whereby God does not create ex nihilo but instead constructs a world out of pre-existing matter, with all its limitations and flaws.\textsuperscript{9} Such a view preserves God's goodness by explaining the existence of evil on the basis of a limitation of God's power. Leibniz modifies this strategy by taking the limits on what God is able to create to be not physical limitations on God's power but rather logical limitations on what constitutes a possible world.

Furthermore, there are contemporary process theodicies whereby any traditional claim to God's omnipotence is relinquished in favor of an understanding of God acting and interacting in accord with the free actions of human beings.\textsuperscript{10} Process theodicy accepts that there are limits to what God is able to do within the ken of relationship with free beings. In a sense not at all trivial, process theodicy allows that the target of the logical problem does not exist, but from this point of view it is not belief in God but rather belief in the tri-perfected God that becomes untenable.

There is another type of theodicy characterized by a revised understanding of God's omnipotence as having logical limitations. Like process theodicy, the free-will defense is based on the crucial notion that human beings are created with a faculty of free-will. However, unlike the process approach, the free-will theodist typically maintains that God is omnipotent in a robust sense. The strategy is to argue that even an omnipotent God must act within the basic constraints of logical possibility. If God seeks to create genuinely free rational creatures, God cannot accomplish this end without allowing those creatures a certain volitional space which restricts God's power to some degree. In other words, God cannot compel genuinely free beings to act in particular ways; an individual's action cannot be externally constrained by God in order to be free. The free-will defense is also a version of the greater-good defense mentioned above, so

\textsuperscript{9}For example, see Plato's Statesman (273b-c).

\textsuperscript{10}See, e.g., David Ray Griffin, Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations.
that with respect to God's goodness God allows the moral evil that results from human free-choice in deference to the great goods of morally right actions and freedom itself. Augustine is noteworthy for his seminal use of free-will to account for evil, and Leibniz too invokes a basic free-will theodicy in order to justify the existence of moral evil.

Some theologians have even extended this free-will defense in order to account for natural evil. Those theists who posit the existence of unseen created agents such as angels or demons have argued that it is possible that their moral evils are the causes of the events that appear to us as natural evils. Natural evil would then in effect become a subset of moral evil. As with human free-will, this theodicy would justify God by arguing that there is a morally good reason for God to create such free beings, even with the result that the freedom would at times be misused.

**Theodicy and basic ethical assumptions**

One of the main themes of this work is the importance of ethical issues to Leibniz's theological construction of a theodicy. Thus, I shall be examining connections between his theodicy and his arguments against theological voluntarism and also his arguments for moral activism. Furthermore, moral concepts are important for understanding even the more theological aspects of Leibniz's theodicy; as is evident from the discussion above, the success or failure of a theodicy (or of a problem of evil argument) often turns on the way one understands the right or the good. It will be instructive, then, to consider some crucial ethical concepts for the inquiry into Leibniz's theodicy which follows.

Two contrasting ethical terms that relate to my entire argument in this thesis are *global vs. personal relations of God*. From the standpoint of the problem of evil and of theodicy, God's relation to the creation is a moral one. The problem of evil assumes as much by charging God with wrongdoing on the basis of evil in the world, and theodicy does likewise as it legitimates the plausibility of the charge by defending God's relation as
just. However, God may relate to the creation at quite different levels. Deism, for
instance, would hold that God interacts with the universe in the highest global sense in
creating it, but God does not relate with individual creatures as the world functions
according to natural laws. At the other extreme, some devotional forms of religion
promote a view of God in continual interchange with individuals over what may even
seem to be trivial concerns. God, then, may be in relation with individual creatures alone,
with subsets of those creatures of various permutations, with the entire created order as a
global whole, or in any combination of these kinds of relation.

These differences become crucial for theodicy, for some versions of the problem
of evil would require merely a global justification of God, while others demand more
personal vindications. Since the typical logical problem is based on the existence of mere
evil, an account of God's goodness that assumes only a global concern would suffice, but
the problem of suffering of innocents demands a solution that understands God as taking
account of individual suffering on the most personal level. As we shall see, Catherine
Wilson argues that Leibniz's theodicy is pitifully defective because its vision of God is
too impersonal, while Donald Rutherford establishes on the contrary that Leibniz sees
that a just God must take account of the happiness of rational creatures.

The distinction between global and personal issues in theodicy also relates to two
other important conceptual distinctions. The second main section of this work will focus
on the debate over voluntarist vs. rationalist accounts of ethics. The voluntarist view
grounds ethics in the will of God; by willing the right God gives being to it. The
rationalist view of Leibniz, however, argues that ethics fundamentally is based as moral
truth in the wisdom of God. Accordingly, ethics for Leibniz thus becomes global in one
sense but personal in another. A rationalist ethics is global in that it is accessible to any
rational mind, even created ones. With voluntarism, God would stand in a special a
priori relationship to moral principles, but it is not so with a rationalist justification.
There is an inherent respect for persons in taking ethics to be, at least in principle,
available for understanding by all minds, not just by God. However, there is also a
ger general tension for Leibniz between these global and personal concerns of his theodicy.
This tension surfaces at this point because the justice which is made personally accessible
to all rational creatures is one which in at least one strand focuses on global goodness.

Leibniz will thus call upon human beings to discover that their personal good is
etwined with the global good of the world. Leibniz puts his own spin on the paradoxical
dictum from the Gospels that one who wishes to save his life will lose it, while one who
loses his life will save it. Does this point imply that Leibniz is insensitive to the problem
of suffering? Does it mean that the individual ultimately has no legitimately autonomous
interest? Consideration of various strands of Leibniz's theodicy will provide a negative
answer to both questions. And the second question in particular connects with another
important moral distinction, that of moral activism vs. quietism. This dichotomy
indicates another way that Leibniz's theodicy involves a respect for persons, for he argues
for a metaphysics whereby individuals are substantial in themselves and for an ethics
which is not only rationally available to personal minds but also makes a claim of action
for personal contribution to the common good.

A final distinction which is of the utmost importance to this inquiry is the division
of theodicy into teleological vs. deontological strands. A teleological theodicy is one
which purports to justify God's action regarding evil by connecting it with some good end
or result of the evil. This type of theodicy is also termed a greater-good defense. The
moral principle is that God may cause a putative evil if in doing so there would be greater
good than would otherwise obtain in the absence of that evil. From a consequentialist
point of view, things would actually be worse were God not to cause the putative evil--
which would in fact not be evil at all, because of its production of good ends. On the
contrary, a deontological theodicy is one which claims to vindicate God's action regarding
evil by explaining the rightness of the action itself, without primarily relying on the
production of goodness.
It is important to note that Leibniz's larger theodicy has both teleological and deontological strands. And while this distinction is related to the discussion of God's global or personal relations to creation, it is also significant that the two distinctions are not parallel. The problem of suffering of innocents presents a challenge to any theodicy that would be viable. Is Leibniz's theodicy sensitive to the problem? Does his theodicy adequately answer the problem? It is not enough for answering these questions to simply show that Leibniz's theodicy involves a respect for the happiness of persons, nor is it enough to argue that there are deontological strands in his theodicy. One may empower the legitimacy of personal happiness through a teleological theodicy, and a deontological theodicy may well be insensitive to the forceful cry of innocent suffering. Leibniz at times argues that suffering may be justified by its relation to global greater goods, while in other places he recognizes that such impersonal goods give no final answer to the complaint of personal suffering. Still, this suffering might be justified by reference to personal greater goods, ends that are good for the person who suffers and that may not be actualized without that suffering.

Furthermore, Leibniz also argues for a deontological justification of some kinds of suffering, by invoking a principle of retributive justice that takes the suffering to be legitimate punishment for a prior moral wrong. The crux of the matter then becomes, how would Leibniz justify the horrible suffering of innocent persons? The fact of their innocence would eliminate the possibility of a theodicy of retribution. Could Leibniz legitimately use a greater-good defense in response to innocent suffering? Leibniz clearly does invoke a deontological constraint in his treatment of moral evil, for he argues that were God to sin, one would not be able to justify it through its generation of greater goods. Perhaps it is the same with the most horrendous examples of suffering of innocent persons, as it is plausible to consider that a perfectly good God would be constrained against inflicting such suffering even in order to produce fantastic goods indeed. Ruthlessly teleological theodicies may find such a constraint implausible. But what
makes the question intriguing for Leibniz is that his theodicy is not exclusively teleological, much less ruthlessly so. It is time then to turn to Leibniz's own discussion of the horrible suffering of innocents, which in his particular version concerns the damnation of infants. Such an example is important for demonstrating the degree to which Leibniz is morally sensitive to personal suffering in his theodicy. After investigating this question, I shall pursue the threads of the personal and ethical in his theodicy by investigating the importance of his foundational rejection of voluntarism. Finally, I shall take up his rejection of quietism for a robust conception of moral activism. This activism is important in that it demonstrates a dimension of Leibniz's theodicy that is not strictly theoretical, and it provides an additional mode of responding to the stubbornly enigmatic fact of evil in the world.
Part I: Beyond a greater-good defense with the problem of innocent suffering

Introductory comments

Evil has posed difficulties for philosophical and theological systems in many different traditions, both Eastern and Western. As I have shown in the Introduction, even in the Western philosophical tradition the problem of evil has not been singular but has been a set of multiple problems of evil, depending on basic terms of definition, emphases, and types of arguments. Again, the tension which is basic to all theological versions of the problem is that between the simultaneous existence of evil and God. At the heart of the problematic is the intuition or claim that there is an inconsistency between God's existence and evil's existence. The dominant version of the problem of evil in this tradition was essentially articulated at least as early as Epicurus. This problem stems from an inconsistency between God with particular perfections and evil. If God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good, then how could evil exist? Because of perfect goodness, God would always wish to prevent evil. Because of perfect knowledge, God would be aware of all possibilities of evil. And because of perfect power, God's good will to prevent all instances of evil would be fully efficacious. Therefore, either God, with these perfections, does not exist, or evil does not exist. Since evil does exist, God, with these perfections, therefore does not exist.

As we saw above, one way that these considerations about the problem of evil can be made more complex is by a more definite specification of evil. For Leibniz, there are three kinds of evil: metaphysical, moral, and physical. Metaphysical evil for Leibniz is mere imperfection. One argument on this line is that since God cannot simply replicate himself in creation, what is created will necessarily be limited and imperfect in contrast to God. However, the two further types of evil pose more persistent problems. Moral evil for Leibniz is sin, and physical evil is suffering.
The statement above about multiple problems of evil is amplified by the particular difficulties posed by moral and physical evil. Sin and suffering each present distinct problems; in fact, each of the two is problematic in more than one way, depending upon its particular sense and context. Moral evil or sin is problematic in at least two senses relevant to the present investigation. First of all, there is a prima facie problem with the co-existence of God and sins committed by creatures. A second, separate problem results from consideration of whether God also directly commits sin. Furthermore, physical evil or suffering is distinct from sin in at least two relevant ways—and it therefore raises further difficulties. If we consider the range of creaturely sins, the first significant point is that not all instances of suffering appear to follow from sins of creatures. This sort of suffering has been called natural evil, and an example of it would be one's burning to death in a fire originating from a lightning-strike. The second and wider distinction between the two kinds of evil is grounded in the fact that, even in cases where suffering is caused by a creature's moral wrongdoing, the suffering of the one wronged is logically distinct from the action of the wrongdoer. Even if it were the case that all sins led to sufferings, and all sufferings followed from sins, there would still be two separate problems: the moral evil as problematic for the sinner and the physical evil as problematic for the sufferer.\(^\text{11}\)

There are two main philosophical movements in the midst of this investigation of Leibniz. The first is the expression of the problem of evil. The second is the attempt to create a theodicy in response to the problem. This term, "theodicy," results from Leibniz's conjunction of two Greek terms: \(\theta\epsilon\omicron\sigma\), or God, and \(\delta\epsilon\iota\kappa\tau\iota\), or justice.

\(^{11}\)On the deepest level all theological versions of the problem of evil ultimately stop at the station of wrongdoing by God. Given Leibniz's ethical views, it is appropriate to consider such wrongdoing in terms of God sinning. Therefore, there is a sense in which the theological problem of evil is always a problem of sin committed by God. This point is apparent in terms of natural evil, where the absence of (morally relevant) creaturely causation is evidence that God is morally responsible for the suffering, but it is also evident in the case of the problem of sin of rational creatures, for the problem ultimately involves the relation of God to that creaturely sin. The problem is that God himself is apparently a wrongdoer. It is for these reasons that to raise the theological problem of evil is to raise an ethical complaint against God.
justification. Leibniz's theodicy is his attempt to justify the ways of God in light of the existence of evil in the world. Because both the problem of evil and theodicy are thus intertwined—as *prima facie* judgment about God and attempted response to that judgment—any consideration of Leibniz's theodicy must consider the various problems to which Leibniz is responding in doing his theodicy. In order to evaluate the assessments of his theodicy proffered by commentators, it is instructive to examine ways in which Leibniz struggles with the problem of evil. Therefore, in the following investigation of Leibnizian texts and interpretations, I shall emphasize different problems of evil considered by Leibniz, and I shall attempt to draw conclusions about the nature of his theodicy on the basis of its character as an answer and on the basis of the problems to which it is given as an answer.

In contrast to the placement of this work in the context of the perennial nature of discussions of the problem of evil, much of the interpretive claim about Leibniz is actually new. Robert Sleigh is another interpreter who is currently working in the same area of Leibniz's theodicy, and the genesis of some of my ideas to follow is owed to conversation with him. In the discussion to follow, I shall first introduce two distinct evaluations of Leibniz's theodicy: the first being that Leibniz's theodicy is a greater-good defense, and the second being that Leibniz ignores the problem of personal suffering in his theodicy. I shall then focus on the greater-good question, first with regard to Leibniz's treatment of the problem of sin in his theodicy, and then in relation to Leibniz's attempt to overcome a version of the problem of suffering. From this examination of the suffering of innocents, I shall return to the question of Leibniz's regard for personal suffering, and I shall add some final thoughts about the relation between the two issues, the greater-good defense and the personal level of suffering.
Criticals of Leibniz's Theodicy

At this point I would like to turn more directly to Leibniz's theodicy, in particular to two related critical interpretations of it. The first line of interpretation is mentioned in this larger section's title; one may be willing to argue that Leibniz's theodicy is essentially a greater-good defense. This interpretation is not devoid of textual support. Leibniz argues in the *Theodicy* that "God has a far stronger reason, and one far more worthy of him, for tolerating evils. Not only does he derive from them greater goods, but he finds them connected with the greatest goods of all those that are possible: so that it would be a fault not to permit them."12 Leibniz is here arguing against the claim that the existence of evil is inconsistent with God's perfect goodness, since the existence of evil leads to a greater good than would otherwise occur in the absence of the evil. Robert Sleigh specifies the definition of a greater-good defense as follows:

...an agent is not morally culpable with respect to permitting (and, indeed, actually causing) the occurrence of some evil state of affairs \( \alpha \), if there is some state of affairs \( \beta \) such that the joint occurrence of \( \alpha \) and \( \beta \) exceeds in value the non-occurrence of both, and the agent cannot bring about the occurrence of \( \alpha \) without bringing about the occurrence of \( \beta \).13

If God's goodness is understood in this teleological sense, then, not only is it possible for the existence of evil to be consistent with God's perfect goodness, God's goodness could actually require him to cause the existence of evil. In fact, Leibniz here seems to hold not just a greater-good defense but a greatest-good defense. Leibniz assumes that every feature of a possible world is essential to it in the sense that, to change one element of a possible world would be to introduce a different possible world. Furthermore, Leibniz argues that a perfectly good God must create the best world he possibly could. Therefore,

---

it follows on the basis of this greater-good defense that God would be obliged to create 
every instance of evil which is part of the best possible world, because to create the best 
world is to do the greatest good, and because God could not bring about the best possible 
world without therefore creating every particular evil which is associated with it. 
Furthermore, given Leibniz's argument that the actual world is the best possible world, it 
follows from this greater-good defense that God is obliged to cause the existence of every 
evil which is part of this world.

It is in response to this latter conclusion that some have made a related criticism of 
Leibniz's theodicy, so let us turn to this second consideration of the personal dimension of evil. The most troubling version of the problem of evil is the problem of suffering or physical evil, and there is a personal impact of such suffering which seems to be just ignored by this greatest-good defense. Consider the following exchange between two of the parties of David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*:

[Demea says] I shall venture to affirm, that...there scarce is one of those innumerable writers, from whom the sense of human misery has not, in some passages or other, extorted a complaint and confession of it. At least, the chance is entirely on that side; and no one author has ever, so far as I can recollect, been so extravagant as to deny it.

There you must excuse me, said Philo: Leibniz has denied it; and is perhaps the first, who ventured upon so bold and paradoxical an opinion; at least, the first, who made it essential to his philosophical system.

It is unclear to which element of Leibniz's philosophical system Philo is referring, but it is clear that he takes Leibniz as denying the existence of human misery or suffering. It is plausible that Philo is referring to the supersession of particular physical evils by the general goodness of the best possible world.

---


Perhaps following the lead of Hume's characters, contemporary historian of philosophy Catherine Wilson likewise takes Leibniz to the philosophical woodshed for the themes of his theodicy.\textsuperscript{16} Wilson sharply criticizes Leibniz's theodicy in general as "wishful thinking" which is unaccountable to the realities of experience,\textsuperscript{17} and she notes that in this century his \textit{Theodicy} arguments have been considered at best invalid or unsound and at worst a vulgarization of his philosophy unworthy of careful attention.\textsuperscript{18} Wilson more specifically criticizes Leibniz's theodicy for its lack of attention to--and ultimately for its irrelevance to--suffering as it impacts individual persons (what tends toward the existential, as opposed to the merely intellectual, problem of evil).\textsuperscript{19} She says, "To one caught in present suffering, it is not cheering to think that there are millions of other beings, all of them busier and happier. The perfection of the louse and the flea is no consolation either....If the existence of things has become \textit{de trop}, the bee nymph is not a solution but part of the problem."\textsuperscript{20} Questions of personal justice cut against the grain of any argument for the maximization of goods on a global scale. This argument of Wilson comes in response to a strain of Leibniz's theodicy in which he argues that it is more plausible that good outweighs evil in our world and that, for all we know, there may be regions of the universe populated only by blessed creatures. Wilson is right in stressing that such a response alone does nothing to vindicate a personal charge of injustice taken on its own terms.

\textsuperscript{17}Wilson, p. 272. Compare Zarathustra's diatribes against the afterworldly in Nietzsche's \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra} (First Part; "On the Afterworldly").
\textsuperscript{18}Wilson, p. 271. Contrast Donald Rutherford's claim, with which I am sympathetic, that "A significant weakness of many modern studies of the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz has been the negligible role they have assigned to the project of theodicy...." (\textit{Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature}, p. 1.)
\textsuperscript{19}By \textit{intellectual} problem of evil I mean the theoretical difficulty of reconciling the existence of God with the existence of evil. This version of the problem has two formulations: the logical problem of evil charges that the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God is incompatible with the existence of evil; the evidential problem of evil charges that the kinds and amounts of evils in the actual world make it improbable that such a God exists. By \textit{existential} problem of evil, I mean the more personal difficulty of affirming the meaningfulness and value of one's own life in the face of encounters with evil.
\textsuperscript{20}Wilson, p. 292.
Further, the objection on behalf of personal suffering can also be directed toward Leibniz’s *a priori* argument that our actual world is the best one possible (Leibniz repeatedly makes this argument, in *Theodicy* and also in S.3 of *Discourse on Metaphysics*, which has as a central premise an assumption about the goodness of God\(^{21}\)), inasmuch as that argument focuses on the issue of the value of the whole universe (and not on the value of individuals *per se*). And Wilson does criticize his theodicy from this angle, too. She concludes her chapter with the image of "...a God who has made a doll-house full of dangers, in which he sets his subjects to play. That his special mirrors allow him to turn the result into something decorative makes it only more grotesque."\(^{22}\)

**Sin and the Greater-Good Defense**

In the shadow of these criticisms of Leibniz’s theodicy, let us return to the question, "Is his theodicy merely a greater—or even greatest—good defense?" In seeking an answer from Leibniz’s theodicy, it will be helpful to consider it according to some of the different aspects of the problem of evil outlined above. First, I shall put the question to Leibniz within the framework of his treatment of the problem of sin, concerning the possibility of sin by both God and creatures. Second, I shall focus on a strand of Leibniz’s arguments concerning the problem of suffering in order to attempt an even deeper understanding of his theodicy.

How then should we answer this question? For those who have already tired of these matters, turning to Leibniz’s position on God and sin gives us a short-cut to a

\(^{21}\)I reconstruct Leibniz’s best possible world argument from section 3 of *Discourse on Metaphysics* as follows:

1. If what God has made (the world) is not of the highest perfection, then God acted imperfectly in creating the world.
2. But God is perfect (and so cannot act imperfectly). *Therefore*, what God has made (the world) is of the highest perfection.

\(^{22}\)Wilson, p. 303.
definitive answer. One could examine Leibniz's theological assumption on this point and then simply drop the inquiry. Leibniz says, "And as for evil, God wills moral evil not at all...."\(^{23}\) Given that moral evil is sin for Leibniz, he is here claiming, rather unsurprisingly, that God does not sin.\(^{24}\) Therefore, the quickly drawn conclusion to our question is "No, Leibniz's theodicy is not merely a greater-good defense." It is enough to show that Leibniz holds that God's range of possible action is morally constrained by a prohibition on sinning. However, might one respond that Leibniz does not really have in mind here any sort of deontological constraint on God? Might one respond that what Leibniz really means by his claim that God does not sin is just that God always follows the principle of effecting the greatest good, and, through following this teleological principle, God in fact never actually has need to sin in order to bring about the greatest good.? Or perhaps one might respond that what Leibniz means by God's not sinning is just that God follows the principle of the greatest good. It seems to me, however, that Leibniz does in fact intend that God is bound by an external moral constraint in this case. Later in the Theodicy he says that it would be against both reason and piety to hold that God's understanding "...does not find the eternal rules of goodness and of justice among its objects, or again to say that he has a will such as heeds not these rules."\(^{25}\) The reference to rules of justice in addition to rules of goodness suggests that Leibniz understands these rules as constraints independent of the considerations of goodness.

It may be helpful in understanding Leibniz's view to work further by turning to his argument about God in relation to the sin of rational creatures. Leibniz holds that God should not—and in fact does not—sin; yet he also accepts that there is sin in the actual world. Leibniz employs a version of the free-will defense in arguing that the existence of

---

\(^{23}\)Theodicy, sec. 23, p. 137.

\(^{24}\)One might well claim a sort of voluntarist view that it is not true to say that God sins because, though God grounds the wrongness of sin, sin is not self-referential to God; in effect, sin does not apply to God because of God's relation to sin, and ethics in general. I do not take Leibniz to be aiming at this point, because of his arguments that God is bound by the same system of ethics as are rational creatures.

\(^{25}\)Theodicy, sec. 177, p. 238.
sin is due to the moral agency of rational creatures rather than God. But what is God's relation to these sins of rational creatures? Leibniz argues that God does not directly will the existence of such sins—for God must not sin—but that he merely permits them. Why is it that for God to permit a sin is not to actually commit a sin?26 Is Leibniz here reverting to a greatest-good defense in his explanation of the existence of creaturely sins? Consider the following striking passage from the *Theodicy*:

It [sin or moral evil] 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.27

The terms of the discussion have shifted from a conflict of goods to a conflict of duties. Leibniz has argued that God must not commit any sin. He would likely accept a further principle, that God in general should not permit sin, with one important qualification. The qualification is that there is the possibility of conflict between the two principles; in particular, it may be the case that God would have to actually sin directly in order to prevent certain sins from being committed by others. In such cases, God's higher duty would always be to refrain from directly sinning. Therefore, because of the possibility of incompatibility between duties, a logical space is created for the permission of sin by God in conjunction with the maintenance of God's perfect goodness.

Leibniz's argument on the permission of sin is actually much stronger, but his strengthening of the argument leads to some difficulties. Leibniz not only argues for the possibility of duties which are in some sense greater than the duty to prevent the

---

26. The author of sin problem may also run in the direction of asking how it is, given the doctrine of God's concurrence in the actions of creatures, that God does not directly sin. See William of Ockham's *Commentary on the Sentences* (III, Question 12) for a fascinating discussion of the problem (especially pp. 698-700 in Hyman & Walsh, *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*).

commission of sin by others; he argues that God has, in effect, a single greatest duty.

Leibniz says,

It is in this sense that God permits sin: for he 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 not that which is absolutely the best notwithstanding the evil of guilt, which is involved therein by the supreme necessity of the eternal verities.²⁸

Because each sin involved in the best possible world is essential to that world, and because God's obligation to create the best possible world will override any prima facie duty to prevent a particular sin from being committed by a rational creature, God is justified in permitting all moral evils which are part of the best possible world.

Again, Leibniz is speaking in terms of duty and no longer strictly in terms of a greatest-good defense. However, one can question whether Leibniz is employing a substantive rejection of a simple greatest-good defense in his treatment of the permission of create rely sin. One might sketch the following interpretive picture in order to emphasize that Leibniz holds more than a teleological understanding of God's goodness. According to Leibniz, God has multiple prima facie duties. One such duty is to refrain from sinning. Another such duty is to prevent the commission of sins by others. A third duty is to maximize goodness in creating a world: if a world is created, it should be the best world possible. Further, on this interpretation, the first duty is never contravened. However, with regard to some sins of creatures, the second and third duties are in tension. Therefore, God's duty to maximize goodness in creating the best trumps his duty to prevent commission of sins by others, when the two duties conflict.

One might object, restricting our concern to God's permission of moral evil, that Leibniz is actually employing a greatest-good defense, though he is couching it in the terminology of duty. First of all, one of God's duties here is a duty to maximize

---

²⁸Theodicy, sec. 25, p. 138.
goodness. Taken alone, a duty to maximize goodness actually grounds the right in the
good and in giving priority to goodness exhibits a consequentialist ethical framework.
However, the above supposed interpreter could respond that this duty is not to be taken
alone for Leibniz; rather, it is flanked by the duty to prevent commission of sins by
others. The response to this line of interpretation is that, in cases of conflict, the duty to
maximize goodness by creating the best possible world is never superseded by the duty to
prevent others from committing sins, so the duty to create the best is not really
constrained by any concern about the prevention of sins of creatures. With regard to the
moral evil of creatures, the deontological language seems to collapse back into a greatest-
good defense.

One final point is that the foregoing argument is not precisely consistent with
Leibniz's account of God's moral activity in creation of the world. According to Leibniz,
God selects the best possible world for creation from a series of possible worlds. Given
that at least one other possible world would involve the commission of sin by a rational
creature, one could argue that the duty to prevent creatures from sinning does function
robustly even alongside the duty to create the best world possible. In creating the best
world, God is preventing those sins which would have occurred had some other world
been created. However, even though there is some plausibility in such a specification of
the duty to prevent the sins of others, it is still the case that such a duty would never
surpass the duty to create the best in cases of conflict—precisely because there would be
no additional conflict. Another point is that such a duty with reference to the non-
actualized worlds would be superfluous in that the duty to create the best possible world
would itself eliminate or prevent the commission of sins by creatures in the lesser
possible worlds.29

29For the preceding sections on the greatest-good defense and conflict of duties with regard to God's
permission of the sin of creatures, I am indebted to Robert Sleigh for introducing the conflict of duties issue
to me. Also, many of the points of this discussion are the result of a conversation with Mark Kulstad,
Laurence Carlin, and Terry Horgan. However, I should add that what there is of perfection in this
Suffering and the Greater-Good Defense

It seems that with regard to moral evil, there is a sense in which Leibniz relies on more than just a greatest-good defense, for God could not directly sin even if such a sin were necessary to the best possible world. Yet there is another sense, with regard to God's permission of the moral evil of rational creatures, in which Leibniz does, despite his terminology, rely on a defense in terms of the greatest good. Let us now turn to the problem of physical evil or suffering for Leibniz. Is it the case that within the parameters of his treatment of suffering he merely relies on a greatest-good defense? Leibniz does after all say of physical evil that God often wills it "...as a means to an end, that is, to prevent greater evils or to obtain greater good."\(^{30}\) Furthermore, it will be instructive to examine Leibniz's account of suffering in order to address the second question of whether Leibniz adequately accounts for personal suffering in his theodicy.

*The Damnation of Innocents*

In putting the greater-good question to Leibniz's theodicy with regard to the problem of suffering, it will be helpful to give a focus to the investigation. The most troubling kind of suffering is the horrible suffering of innocents—even though there are many other problematic features of suffering—so it will be economical in a sense to explore how Leibniz might handle such extreme cases in his theodicy. Leibniz raises the following question: "...whether this tendency [toward sin] in a man who has not been regenerated by baptism suffices to damn him, even though he should never come to commit sin, as may happen, and happens often, whether he die before reaching years of discretion or he become dull of sense before he has made use of his reason."\(^{31}\) The connection between this text, and others where he discusses the issue of the damnation of

---

\(^{30}\) *Theodicy*, sec. 23, p. 137.

\(^{31}\) *Theodicy*, sec. 92, p. 173.
the unsaved, and the issue of innocent suffering is made explicit in a later section of *Theodicy*, where he discusses an account for "...the greatest physical evil, which is damnation."\(^{32}\) If damnation is the greatest physical evil, then it deserves careful consideration, for a fertile theodicy must at the very least address the greatest threat of physical evil (while the fact that I have sprained my thumb or that the registrar's office has made an error in my course registration could be considered trivial).

Leibniz distinguishes himself from the Scholastics who mitigate the damnation of innocents by interpreting it as subsistence in a realm of Limbo where the damned do not positively suffer but are only deprived of the beatific vision of God. For innocents to be damned would be for innocents to suffer physical evils. And Leibniz more forcefully rejects the position of Augustine as outrageously harsh and without foundation in either reason or the scriptures: the position that infants who die unsaved are damned to eternal suffering.\(^{33}\) Leibniz rejects this position for the very reason that it would be a damnation of innocents; it would be to cause innocents to suffer, and that would be unjust. Pierre Nicole makes what Leibniz terms "rather a poor apology" for the damnation with the defense that there are other accepted dogmas of Christianity which appear harsh, and Leibniz's rejoinder is that such other positions, like the eternity of punishment in general, are "...only harsh and unjust to outward appearance, while the damnation of children dying without actual sin and without regeneration would in truth be harsh, since it would be in effect the damning of innocents."\(^{34}\) The crucial issue is whether or not such children are really innocent, and Leibniz accepts that they are.

The physical evil of damnation cannot in this case be tied to a human agent through desert. If the one suffering were innocent, then there would be no sin to justify the suffering as right punishment. God would certainly be responsible for the damnation

---

\(^{32}\) *Theodicy*, sec. 266, p. 290.

\(^{33}\) *Theodicy*, sec. 93, p. 174.

\(^{34}\) *Theodicy*, sec. 93, p. 174.
and therefore for the existence of unjust suffering, and the latter would be incompatible with God’s perfect goodness. So Leibniz rejects the claim that such innocent creatures are damned.

While Leibniz quite clearly rejects the damnation of innocents, one might raise broader questions about the justice of the physical evil of damnation. In fact, Leibniz considers an objection against eternal damnation made by Ernst Sonner, who argues that "...there is no proportion between an infinite punishment and a finite guilt."35 Even among those rational agents who are morally mature and who have done moral wrongs, one may question the propriety of eternal suffering as recompense for a finite number of moral evils committed.36 Further, one may raise questions about the propriety of the proportion of physical evils to moral evils during an individual’s earthly life, as is mentioned above.37

Leibniz concisely responds to Sonner’s objection by noting that "...it was enough to say that the duration of the guilt caused the duration of the penalty. Since the damned remained wicked they could not be withdrawn from their misery...."38 In other words, Leibniz rejects the assumption that eternal suffering recompenses finite wrongdoing and guilt. One might infer that Leibniz would further reject complaints about suffering during earthly existence, for if one is deserving of the greatest physical evil, which is damnation, then lesser physical evils lose their force. However, Leibniz has here only addressed the

35Theodicy, sec. 266, p. 290.
36John Hick argues that hell, eternal sin and suffering, is an untenable notion and even is incompatible with theodicy. Hick argues not from the impropriety of relating eternal suffering to finite sins but rather from the general impropriety of eternal sin and suffering to God’s broader purposes of good. See his Evil and the God of Love, rev. ed., pp. 341-345. Also, Marilyn McCord Adams argues that the principal current problem of evil threat for Christians is the doctrine of hell as eternal horrible suffering for some creatures. She claims that attempting to justify God in the face of evil while simultaneously maintaining the existence of hell is at best incongruous and at worst disingenuous. See her "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians" in Reasoned Faith, ed. Eleonore Stump.
37One might explore the issue of temporal constraints on retribution. One could argue that a physical evil should not precede the moral evil to which it is linked, or that within relevant sequences of time (e.g. one’s earthly existence versus one’s existence after death) suffering should be appropriately proportioned to moral wrongdoing. I owe the genesis of these ideas to a discussion with Mark Kulstad.
38Theodicy, sec. 266, p. 290.
propriety of the duration of suffering. It is a separate question, and it remains open, whether the intensity of a physical evil such as damnation is in harmony with the intensity or degree of moral wrongdoing and guilt.

Returning to the question of infants, one might similarly attempt to justify their damnation by arguing for the presence of an enduring guilt.\textsuperscript{39} One might deny that they are fully innocent, though they may still be innocent in a weaker sense of the term, in that it is highly implausible that one would venture to argue that infants commit moral wrongs.

One way to maintain that infants are in some sense guilty would follow Augustine in asserting that such infants participate in original sin. Perhaps such persons in their earliest stages of development have already participated in some sense in the wrongdoing and culpability of a forebear. Immanuel Kant describes this account of the origin and pervasiveness of moral evil as the most incept of all.\textsuperscript{40}

Another attempt might assert that infants are guilty, not via participation in the sin of an ancestor, but rather through the presence of either an unmanifested or a manifested sinful desire (or its analogue). A variant of this possible attribution of guilt to infants can be based on Kant's discussion of the propensity to evil in human nature. He defines a propensity as "...the subjective ground of the possibility of an inclination (habitual craving, \textit{concupiscentia}) so far as mankind in general is liable to it."\textsuperscript{41} The propensity to evil is characteristic of humankind in general and is "rooted in humanity itself."\textsuperscript{42}

Further, such a propensity is "...a subjective determining ground of the will which

\textsuperscript{39}It is worth noting that for Leibniz such infants would of course be characterized as metaphysically evil, but such a level of evil as mere imperfection is not sufficient to engender guilt or punishment. This point is one indication that moral and physical evils are more theologically threatening and that, while metaphysical evil may be necessary for an account of the other two, it is not sufficient.

\textsuperscript{40}"Concerning the Origin of Evil in Human Nature" in \textit{Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone}, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, p. 35. Leibniz expresses his own view that Augustine is sometimes apt to exaggerate in the heat of controversy (Preface, \textit{Theodicy}, p. 70).

\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Religion Within the Limits}, pp. 23-24.

\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Religion Within the Limits}, p. 28.
*precedes all acts* and which, therefore, is itself not an act."\(^{43}\) It is this aspect of the propensity toward evil which may make it attractive for a defense of some guilt of infants. Since the propensity is not an act but rather is a basis which underlies all moral actions, the rejoinder that infants cannot be blameworthy is forestalled.

However, even though it is unclear whether Kant means for this propensity to apply to infants, there would be two substantial difficulties for one attempting to make such a connection. First of all, Kant distinguishes a separate, second sense of "act": the free adoption of maxims or incentives toward particular actions by the will.\(^{44}\) Kant claims that the propensity toward evil is an act in this sense, even though it is not an act in the sense of the free performance of particular actions. It is this involvement with a type of free action for which Kant renders the propensity to evil blameworthy. Regarding infants, it is implausible to claim that they have a sufficiently developed faculty of will in order to bear the burden of these free acts of maxim-formulation. A second related difficulty is that, even if an infant were to have some sort of innate propensity toward moral evil, lacking the capacity for free determination would seem to remove the ground for blame. A morally mature person may well be culpable for a propensity toward wrongdoing, particularly if she has in some sense brought the propensity upon herself. However, infants lack the requisite capacities of self determination. I find both alternatives, original sin and propensity, highly implausible, especially given the work they would have to do in justifying damnation.

Another possible response to objections to damnation of innocents would be to pursue the line of the Scholastics mentioned by Leibniz. The harshness of the case would be reduced tremendously by positing a realm wherein such innocents would only be

---

\(^{43}\) *Religion Within the Limits*, p. 26 (italics are Kant's).

\(^{44}\) *Religion Within the Limits*, p. 26.
deprived of God’s presence in some sense. However, the substantive difficulty would remain; these creatures would be undergoing punishment which, though certainly less severe than other alternatives, would remain unjust and groundless. One might question whether such a limbo state would really be unjust, given that it would not involve positive infliction of pain or suffering. However, the limbo realm would involve deprivation of communion with God, the foundation of the bliss of heaven. One could respond that creatures have no right to such a good, that God only bestows it as a matter of grace. To push the discussion this far would perhaps involve forging a different sense of damnation, one not involving direct suffering. Perhaps Leibniz could accept the possibility of damnation of infants in this sense. However, I take the primary importance of Leibniz’s discussion to be its concern with whether direct suffering of innocents, through damnation, could be allowed as consistent with God.

On the other hand, Leibniz could have argued for the similarities between the case of infants and the case of non-rational animals or beasts. He might argue that, like the beasts, pre-rational animals such as infants do not actually suffer because they lack reflection at that stage of development. Of course, such a move would clash with any intuitions that developing rational creatures have a higher moral status than non-rational creatures. One could point to the presence of ethical potentialities as a distinguishing mark of infants. Furthermore, if infants were accorded the same status as beasts, inasmuch as they do not suffer according to Leibniz, then it is not at all clear why they should be "damned" or "punished" in the first place. For if infants are innocent in the

\[\text{45Interestingly, Jonathan Kvanvig explores a conception of hell in which its suffering is privative, involving deprivation of the goodness of union with God and the heavenly community. See his work, The Problem of Hell, p. 137.}\]

\[\text{46An interesting area for further exploration is whether for Leibniz physical evils are essentially privative in nature, as are metaphysical evils. If so, then the limbo state of deprivation of a great good would be relevantly similar to other instances of suffering which would be commonly considered positive afflictions.}\]

\[\text{47Compare Augustine’s insistence that the suffering of unbaptized babies will be "extremely mild." See Christopher Kirwan, Augustine, p. 143. Here I also recall claims from folk sources that practices such as circumcision do not really cause infants to suffer.}\]
sense that animals are—as amoral creatures—then the question of punishment would not even arise. One would need to devise an independent reason for the presence of such creatures in a hell.

*Suffering of Innocents in the Actual World*

Leibniz of course argues none of these possibilities but rather states that innocents are not damned. Even though his position involves both a sensitive treatment of the problem of evil on the personal level and the removal of a serious objection, by slightly altering the details of the case one may have an objection which is fatal to Leibniz's theodicy. Even though eternal suffering at an intense level would be the greatest physical evil, there are nonetheless great physical evils which are highly problematic. One needs only to consider the instance of an infant who lives through several days of intense suffering, perhaps by being badly burned, and then dies. Really, from one point of view, such instances of suffering may be even more problematic than cases involving damnation, although they do at least involve a shorter duration of suffering. Such instances gather their special force from the actual world; they are not hypothetical at all (as is the damnation controversy). Given the case of damnation of innocents, Leibniz simply denies that damnation occurs. But it is not so simple to deny the actual suffering which occurs in the case under consideration. It seems that Leibniz would be left with an instance of unjust suffering of an innocent creature. And so God's perfect goodness would be sullied. Further, such an instance of suffering would be especially sharp if it were to stem from natural evil and not from the action of a rational creature, as I noted above. Given assumptions about God's omnipotence and control over the world, he would, morally speaking, be directly responsible for such natural physical evil, without the buffer of a rational creature created with free-will. Actually, one could attempt to defend God against a direct linkage of moral responsibility for such an instance of suffering by positing the existence of non-human rational creatures, such as (fallen) angels. Although such a position is possible and would preserve the buffer of free-will, it
is implausible and further would do nothing to mediate the basic difficulty which stems from instances of physical evil which are apparently unjust for the creatures who suffer.\textsuperscript{48}

It should be noted that the greatest force of the objection comes from its supposition of a type of deontological moral framework. A strict utilitarian might be able to absorb the objection quite handily (which would be either a virtue or a vice depending on one's point of view). Further, one would be tempted to introduce an eschatology here, to point along with Leibniz toward greater future instances of happiness for such a creature.\textsuperscript{49} However, it seems plausible to take the position that horrendous physical evils such as the one under consideration are just wrong.\textsuperscript{50} If one tends toward an absolute constraint on such types of suffering, then it is not an open possibility that such instances of suffering might be positively compensated, no matter how pleasurable the future states of the creature might be.\textsuperscript{51}

Before characterizing this objection as completely external to the system of Leibniz's theodicy, I would argue that one viable reading of his rejection of the damnation of innocents rests not upon the eternity of that proposed suffering nor upon its intensity (or else he would have reason to side with the Schoolmen). Rather, Leibniz may well reject such suffering because the act of damning an innocent would itself be unjust. And so an omnipotent God who performs or allows such horrible instances of physical evil would be less than perfectly good.


\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Theodicy}, sec. 241, p. 276.

\textsuperscript{50}Two of the more eloquent expressions of this sort of intuition are by Ursula K. Le Guin, who gives it a social emphasis in her short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's Ivan, who gives it a theological emphasis in the "Rebellion" section of Book V of \textit{The Brothers Karamazov}.

\textsuperscript{51}As the objection is formulated, it would also not be possible to argue that such physical evils might have some reason, such as being a condition \textit{sine qua non} for some great good, which is unknown to us as creatures. So Stephen Wykstra's CORNEA principle would be of no use as a defense against the objection. See his "The Humane Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance'" in \textit{The Problem of Evil}, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams.
Suffering and the Greater-Good Reconsidered

From Leibniz's rejection of the damnation of innocents, we can return to the question of the greatest-good defense. Just as one can argue that God is morally constrained not to commit sin, so one can argue that for Leibniz God is morally constrained not to cause innocents to suffer through damnation. Therefore, from this case, one can conclude that not all instances of physical evil could be justified by appeal to a greater-good defense, so with regard to suffering, as with sin, Leibniz employs more than a greater-good defense. This point is actually made even stronger by Leibniz's insistence that in many instances suffering of a creature follows directly and straightforwardly from sin of that creature. (At some places, such as the end of his Monadology, Leibniz argues for a stronger harmony between nature and grace whereby it seems that all pleasure and suffering is strictly apportioned to the past moral goods and evils of creatures. This stronger argument is in tension with Leibniz's admission in the Theodicy that some instances of suffering do not follow from one's own moral wrongdoing, so that the notion of eschatological compensation is introduced.) To treat suffering as an instance of retribution is to treat it in a non-teleological way; there is no appeal by Leibniz to the greatest good on the global level of the best possible world. Furthermore, even Leibniz's claim that some sufferings will be compensated by future goods evidences a break with a mere greatest-good defense in an important way. Though Leibniz is attempting to justify some suffering in a kind of teleological way, by appealing to eschatological compensation, there is still an implicit assumption that such suffering must be answered on the level at which it begins, on the personal level. There is no appeal even here to a greatest global good.

---

52 One place Leibniz presents this sort of isomorphic relation between moral evil and physical evil is Theodicy, sec. 241, p. 276.
The Significance of Persons and Leibniz's Theodicy

The greatest-good issue is therefore related to the second criticism of Leibniz mentioned above: the criticism that Leibniz's theodicy ignores or is irrelevant to the problem of personal suffering. If Leibniz were merely employing a greater-good defense, then such a charge would be merited. For one to simply move from the personal level of suffering to the global level of goodness of the best possible world would involve a sort of turning one's back on the terrible reality of the suffering. To revisit Wilson's metaphor, such a house of mirrors would be grotesque indeed.

However, I would argue that, while there is textual support for this sort of metaphor in *Theodicy*, Wilson's account gives an incomplete perspective on Leibniz's overall theodicy. One of my basic claims is that, taken with respect for its own terms and some charity of interpretation, Leibniz's theodicy is relevant to the issue of individual suffering--though I do not hold that his theodicy is entirely unproblematic. A greatest-good theodicy is eminent in Leibniz's writings on the problem of evil, but there are other important elements of his theodicy. Furthermore, Wilson's criticism may properly apply to Leibniz's theodicy only inasmuch as it utilizes as an element a type of aesthetic theodicy; even just considering Leibniz's arguments that the world as a whole is the best possible, Leibniz certainly has more significant standards of perfection before him than mere decorative splendor.

Though rejecting the interpretation that Leibniz's theodicy involves merely a greater-good defense is intimately related to rejecting the interpretation that Leibniz's theodicy ignores the personal problem of suffering, it is also the case that there can be links between the consideration of personal suffering and a revised understanding of the global good in Leibniz's theodicy. A representative text from Leibniz acknowledges that simple arguments that this world as a whole is the best possible provide a vulnerable and incomplete theodicy:
"...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."\textsuperscript{53}

Leibniz here realizes that the problem of evil functions on a personal level, so it is not enough to defend God by arguing that the good components of the universe outweigh the evil ones, or by giving aesthetic arguments that God uses evils in parts considered by themselves for the great good of the whole. Leibniz also indicates in this text one way in which personal goodness can be related to general goodness; through love of God rational creatures can appreciate and delight in the larger good designs of God (and even if Leibniz were to hold that the happiness of rational creatures is a simple function of their perception of the goodness of the world, he would still be acknowledging that creaturely happiness has special moral weight).\textsuperscript{54} In addition, this text gives a glimpse of another important issue in understanding Leibniz on evil, the implications of Leibniz's theodicy for the appropriate response of rational creatures to the presence of evil (and here is a further, distinct way in which Leibniz's theodicy is relevant to the impact of suffering on persons). The individual rational creature's good can follow in some sense the general good, but also the general good, in the sense of the good of other creatures considered as a community, can follow the individual good of those who love God. In other words, an individual's good becomes enmeshed with a concern for the good of other creatures.

\textsuperscript{53} Theodicy, sec. 217, p. 263.

\textsuperscript{54} One relevant question is whether rational creatures have the capacity to appreciate goods on a truly global scale such as the good of the entire created universe. Obviously, when the universe is considered as continuous through time, creatures could not comprehend such large-scale goods (if for no other reason than that we do not know future events).
Personal Suffering and Retributive Justice

As mentioned above, Leibniz separates problematic evil into three types in his *Theodicy*: metaphysical, moral, and physical.\textsuperscript{55} Although Leibniz tends to treat moral evils as posing the most serious threat to God's goodness, it seems to me that physical evils are actually the most menacing. There is a plausible candidate for defense of moral evil, or sin, in the value of the free-will of rational moral creatures. There is a fairly straightforward response to physical evil, or suffering, also, which involves linking suffering to the moral character of the one who suffers and introducing an eschatology of retributive justice. However, even though free-will theodicies are not unproblematic, attempts to address physical evil must squarely face terrible instances of suffering, and such suffering gives the greatest impetus to ethically sensitive problem of evil arguments against theistic belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God.

Within the range of physical evil, it seems that the thorniest problem for a theodicy is the suffering of innocents, for this type of suffering cannot be justified by an obvious and traditional appeal to the moral fault of the creature who suffers (though there are also problems with such an appeal even regarding creatures who are culpable). This problem of innocent suffering will serve as a framework for the two central desiderata of this section of the thesis. First of all, the isomorphic, eschatological model of the relation between physical evil and moral evil may be a straightforward and partially satisfying solution, but it is not particularly philosophically creative or unique, in addition to facing the menace of innocent suffering. This problem, along with its grounding in the isomorphic model, can serve as a lens through which to focus on significant primary texts of Leibniz's theodicy. One may find in Leibniz either a somewhat unique variation of this standard response to physical evil or perhaps a more sophisticated position than the

\textsuperscript{55} *Theodicy*, sec. 21, p. 136.
simple isomorphic model. At the very least, there are some internal tensions within his theodicy regarding the employment of this justification of suffering.

The second desideratum of this section involves further situating my interpretation of the essentials of Leibniz's theodicy amongst other secondary interpretive views. This goal will continue to track alongside the innocent suffering issue also. As I have argued, Leibniz's theodicy has been oversimplified and misunderstood, and it is more complex than just a greatest-good theodicy. In particular, I have argued against some criticisms by Catherine Wilson that Leibniz's theodicy is insensitive to the problem of evil on the personal level (which is just the level on which the problem of innocent suffering is most forceful). However, even though Donald Rutherford presents a more sophisticated understanding of Leibniz's theodicy, in focusing upon Leibniz's emphasis on the virtue and happiness of rational creatures, the isomorphic model for which Rutherford argues remains problematic. This problematic rests not only on the more external formulation of the problem of suffering such as in Wilson's criticism of Leibniz, but it also stems from the further claim that there are strands of Leibniz's theodicy which are not neatly bound by Rutherford's systematic interpretation.

Rutherford's Position Sketched

Leibniz's arguments that this world is the best one possible are familiar. But Rutherford, in Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature, rightly argues that Leibniz's theodicy involves not only considerations of the perfection of the world at large but also involves a concern for the virtue and happiness of rational creatures. Central to the link between virtue and happiness, or on a parallel level, between moral evil and physical evil, is the issue of God's retributive justice. Rutherford, speaking in Leibniz's voice, says that

---

56 Donald Rutherford, Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature, ch. 3.
"We may therefore be confident that in any world God chooses to create, virtue is rewarded with proportionate happiness, and vice punished with proportionate suffering."\textsuperscript{58} One can take Rutherford's position to be that for Leibniz God can be justified in light of deontological moral considerations regarding suffering because all instances of physical evil or physical good in the lives of rational creatures (taken to be the relevant moral community) correspond to respective vice or virtue in those creatures. In other words, the physical evils which afflict rational creatures are deserved by those creatures.\textsuperscript{59} One text from the \textit{Theodicy} itself which can support this interpretation of isomorphism between moral goodness and suffering is the following: "Now at last I have disposed of the cause of moral evil; physical evil, that is, sorrows, sufferings, miseries, will be less troublesome to explain, since these are results of moral evil."\textsuperscript{60} However, I shall shortly turn to the difficulty that, especially regarding the suffering of innocents, the problem of physical evil is not so easily solved for Leibniz.

Even though Rutherford insists that the happiness and virtue of rational creatures are taken seriously by Leibniz's theodicy, he nevertheless still gives a sort of philosophical priority in his interpretation to God's concern with the overall perfection of the world. God creates the most perfect and harmonious world possible by maximizing

\textsuperscript{58}Rutherford, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{59}Strictly speaking, Rutherford's presentation of Leibniz's use of retributive justice in his theodicy actually leaves open the possibility that some instances of suffering are problematic. As stated, Rutherford's claim is that all vices are punished by proportionate sufferings, not that all instances of suffering are results of proportionate vices. It would not help if Leibniz were to hold that all states of rational creatures are either virtuous or vicious; Rutherford's claim about Leibniz would still not entail that all suffering is in proportion to corresponding vice. There could still be an excess of suffering that would spill beyond the vicious states of character.
\textsuperscript{60}\textit{Theodicy}, sec. 241, p. 276. It should be noted that this text, while tending toward the isomorphic model, could actually support more than one interpretation of the relation between suffering and goodness. One question which arises from this statement by Leibniz is whether he is claiming that \textit{all} physical evils result from moral evils or that some or most physical evils result from moral evils. I think that Leibniz would make the stronger claim, because of his commitments to the principle of sufficient reason, the significant role of the ethical, and the causal responsibility and efficacy of God in relation to the actual world. I also think Leibniz would tend toward the stronger claim because of its apparent fecundity in theodicy to account in some way for all cases of physical evil. However, the danger in this stronger claim is that, once the hard cases of suffering of innocents are considered, it could support the argument that in some cases the moral evil in question would most likely be God's.
the metaphysical perfection of the world, and considerations of the metaphysical ranking of possible worlds are independent of considerations of the moral ranking of possible worlds. Rutherford's basic position is that there is no conflict for Leibniz between the goal of creating the best world in terms of metaphysical goodness and the goal of creating the best world in terms of moral goodness. However, Rutherford presents the basic structure of Leibniz's theodicy as being tightly unified, and according to Rutherford the maximization of the happiness and virtue in a world intimately follows the metaphysical perfection of that world, since happiness is essentially intellectual and contemplative, reaching fruition by means of the intricate order and variety of beings of the universe.

*Suffering and the Significance of Persons Revisited*

Even though Rutherford's interpretation of Leibniz's theodicy does introduce an importance for the happiness and virtue of rational creatures, his account leaves untouched the significant question about justification of certain instances of physical evil or suffering. In some sense, the real challenge for a theodicy is not carving out a theoretical space for the *happiness* of rational creatures but rather in giving a justification of *suffering*, especially the hardest cases of suffering. Even were Rutherford to successfully maintain that Leibniz's theodicy consistently combines arguments that God maximizes perfection and the happiness and virtue of rational creatures in creating the best possible world, I would paraphrase Catherine Wilson's claim and say that knowing that happiness has been maximized is not cheering to one entangled in present suffering! Arguments that happiness has been maximized in a global sense simply float past the real problem if one finds compelling a substantial personal dimension of suffering.

Actually, this problem of suffering persists for the Rutherford interpretation even if one does not wholly reject teleological justifications of some kinds of suffering. Obviously, were one to hold that God is constrained from permitting or causing some

---

61 Rutherford, p. 22.
kinds of suffering, such as the suffering of innocents, then one would not be able to
generate a complete theodicy by arguing that God maximizes the general happiness of
rational creatures. However, one can apply teleological principles not only to
communities but also to individuals. One could hold that the happiness of an individual
person should either be maximized or should have some positive value over the lifetime
of that person. In the presence of evil, such a principle would maintain that an instance of
suffering in one's life is justified only if it has some integral connection, such as being a
condition *sine qua non*, with the overall happiness of that one's life. Such a principle
could allow for consequentialist compensation for states of suffering, but it would not
appeal to the global maximization of happiness in order to justify personal suffering.
There is a presumption of the importance of an autonomy of justice for an individual life
even in allowing for eschatological compensation of present suffering.

Therefore, not only do deontological objections to certain kinds of suffering fall
outside the boundaries of Rutherford's account of Leibniz's theodicy, but this kind of
teleological response to suffering also lies beyond the ken of the maximization of
perfection, happiness, and virtue, which would appeal to merely global greater goods.
And Leibniz clearly makes such claims about the connection of one's suffering with one's
own future happiness. He says, "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."\(^63\) It should be noted that Leibniz
does end this statement with a plural pronoun, so there is some slim evidence to argue
that he means that such sufferings are bound to a greater global happiness. However, the
more plausible reading is that Leibniz means that such sufferings prepare for *each of us* a
greater happiness.

\(^63\) *Theodicy*, sec. 241, p. 276.
Whether one takes the stronger position, that some kinds of suffering of innocents are not compensable and that God would be constrained from allowing them in creation of a world, or the weaker position, that some kinds of suffering are permissible only if compensated within the structure of the life of the one suffering, Rutherford's tightly unified interpretation of Leibniz's theodicy ignores such questions. Were Rutherford's picture of Leibniz's theodicy complete, then Wilson's criticism would regain its force. *Metaphysical Goodness and Variety for Rutherford*

There is a certain danger in reconstructing a philosophical system as complex as Leibniz's theodicy. That danger is that, in the zeal of seeking the unity of the system which the philosopher intended, one may overlook some complexities and complications present in the work. At this point I shall turn to a second question about Rutherford's interpretation, one which arises even if we set aside concerns with the problem of suffering. There is at least one section of Rutherford's argument where his insistence on maximization of metaphysical perfection of the world as the central and unifying principle may not be warranted.

Rutherford focuses on a text in which Leibniz characterizes creation of the world in terms of an emanation of God's perfections; creation involves a kind of instantiation of various analogues of God's infinite perfections by combining them with limitations of finitude. Rutherford concludes that with such an account of creation of the best possible world God is primarily concerned to actualize the world of the greatest metaphysical goodness. He then makes the following argument:

For Leibniz, this will also necessarily be that world which contains the greatest variety of beings. This result follows given two further assumptions. The first is that variety is only realized at a fundamental

---

64 Rutherford, p 25. Compare Catherine Wilson's presentation of Leibniz's second type of creation account, whereby possible creatures tend toward existence in proportion to the degree of reality or perfection they contain, in her *Leibniz's metaphysics*, pp. 277-278.
level through a varying of degrees of perfection. To say that two things are different in kind is just to say that they have different degrees of perfection. The second assumption is that any given type of being, defined in terms of a certain degree of perfection, can only be instantiated once in the world. Accepting these points, we can see that to maximize perfection, God will be obliged to create as many different substances as possible, each representing a unique degree of perfection.\textsuperscript{65}

One might call this view of the best possible world an egalitarianism of being, for each being is in one sense just as important as another to the overall perfection of the world. However, I do not think Rutherford's conclusion, that the world with the greatest metaphysical goodness will also be the world with the greatest variety of beings, follows from his two additional assumptions alone.

Consider the following counter-argument. God has the most perfection. God is more perfect than any possible world, yet he is also a single substance according to Leibniz. Therefore, could not God in principle maximize creaturely perfection, and therefore the metaphysical goodness of the world, by simply creating another individual substance containing all the perfections God has minus one degree of perfection? Could not God create another being just one notch below himself on the continuum of perfections? Such a possibility would certainly better fulfill a principle of parsimony than a world of varied distinct substances, and the one substance world would also seem to have a much higher degree of unity on its side. Rutherford may want to argue that greater harmony of a world for Leibniz is not achieved by tighter unity in terms of simplicity,\textsuperscript{66} but if he does then such a principle needs to be made explicit in the argument for variety. Further, if this counter-argument is valid, and if one assumes Leibniz would have foreseen it or a similar possibility, then the argument pulls against Rutherford's interpretive position that a simple maximization of perfection is what is primarily operative for Leibniz in God's creation of the best possible world.

\textsuperscript{65}Rutherford, pp. 25-26.
\textsuperscript{66}Rutherford, pp. 22-23.
Rutherford could respond to my argument above with a dilemma argument. He could ask whether the proposed one-substance world is infinitely perfect or finitely perfect. If the metaphysically great creature turns out to be infinitely perfect, then it would be God (and a working assumption is that God cannot duplicate himself; the created world has limits of perfection). If on the other hand the proposed being is finitely perfect, then more particular substances could be conjoined with it to make a world of even greater perfection.

However, I do not take this objection to be fatal, because the same argument could be run against any possible world which has gaps in the cascade of being. The same argument could be directed against Rutherford's world of the greatest multiplicity of beings. Given the assumptions that (1) there is more than one possible world, (2) there is no transworld identity, (3) the principle of identity of indiscernibles would hold across possible worlds, (4) variety is only achieved through varied degrees of perfection, and (5) any given being, with its particular degree of perfection, can only be instantiated once in the world, it follows that no possible world has a perfect cascade of being, with no ontological gaps. Further, if Rutherford were to argue not that the world of greatest multiplicity has no ontological gaps but rather that it has no possible gaps of being, then why could not the same thing be said of my proposed world of one substance? What is the argument that differentiates between his case and mine?

Also, if the world is conceived in terms of a continual progress of perfection, then there would be no real space to improve the world by adding another finite being. If the one-substance world were created and gradually progressed upward toward infinite metaphysical perfection, it would not be a world of infinite perfection, but it also would not really be improved by addition as would a world of static perfection.

Part of the appeal of the one-substance possible world comes from the example of God. God is a single unified substance with infinite perfection; therefore, it seems that a work of God which is to approximate his perfection in some way would also involve the
characteristic of singular unity, unless some principle is operative which supports a difference between God and the world in this respect. Rutherford's reconstruction of Leibniz's position on metaphysical perfection and variety of beings must utilize an implicit assumption about the intrinsic goodness of variety itself. It seems that there is an operative principle of plenitude. If there is such an additional principle at work, then Rutherford's insistence on the singular primacy of the principle of maximization of metaphysical goodness is threatened.

*Possibilities of Retribution for Suffering*

One point where expansion is appropriate to this discussion of physical evil is in respect to the moral community under consideration. In addition to a concern to create the best possible world taken as a whole, Leibniz argues that God has special moral relationships with particular groups of creatures, in particular with rational creatures. The task of theodicy is made simpler and more efficient by restricting the range of such special relations and obligations. However, I would argue that non-rational animals do have some significant role in the moral community which is relevant for theodicy. Briefly, I would argue that the suffering—and hence physical evil—which non-rational animals undergo is problematic for God. It would be difficult to defend such suffering on the grounds that such creatures deserve it in the sense in which rational creatures might deserve punishment. A recognition of this difficulty apparently motivates Leibniz to assert that beasts, or non-rational animals, do not suffer miseries because they are incapable of reflection.67

A further readily apparent difficulty which arises for Leibniz's linkage between moral character and physical evil is that in our world there are many cases where one who is *(prima facie)* good suffers disproportionately much, while one who is *(prima facie)* evil enjoys undeserved prosperity. In the *Theodicy*, Leibniz himself notes a variation of this

---

common objection just a few lines below where he asserts the connection between moral and physical evil. In the text quoted above, he raises the question of those who suffer through the evil actions of others, having no part in the offense which causes their suffering. His brief response is that such sufferings are a preparation for a greater happiness. Leibniz gives a fairly straightforward response to the objection by introducing an eschatology to account for instances where personal virtue and physical evil do not seem to be appropriately proportioned in this world. On the basis of this text and the instances of apparent disharmony which it cites, one can see that it is not enough for a theodicy to attempt to answer problems of physical evil by simply positing a direct relation between moral evil and suffering, for there are too many serious cases where suffering is not in balance with goodness. An eschatology must accompany such a theodicy of a linkage of moral and physical evil as Leibniz's, for the challenging question is not just why a perfectly good God allows or causes suffering but how a perfectly good God could allow the good person or the innocent to suffer. And in the cases of suffering of innocents it is not so simple or straightforward to justify God by reference to eschatological compensation.

Further, for this counter-example involving apparently undeserved suffering to have force it is not necessary that the suffering proceed from moral wrongdoing on the part of a rational creature, as is assumed in the case in the text of Leibniz mentioned above. One could generate an equally forceful (or perhaps more forceful) example from what can be termed natural evil, suffering which does not proceed from a (created) moral agent. The additional force of an instance of suffering involving natural evil does not come from additional questions about the justice of the suffering but rather from apparently direct causal line to God. An instance of suffering which proceeds from the

\[\text{Theodicy, sec. 241, p. 276.}\]

\[\text{The above-mentioned danger becomes evident in this discussion, where the assumption that all instances of suffering have some moral cause collides with the observation of some cases of suffering which are not apparently caused by any created moral agent.}\]
action of a created moral agent is just as troubling as a physical evil as is an instance which proceeds from a natural cataclysm such as an earthquake. However, the latter sort of suffering also brings the additional threat of a charge of moral evil to God as the proximate cause of the suffering-causing event. Also, one might question the overall justice of Leibniz's scheme; one might refuse on a deeper level to accept suffering which is in proportion to sin as just. I shall not pursue this broader objection, for problems arise even if the more limited objection is argued.

*Kant's Moral Argument for God*

Immanuel Kant takes up a discussion of the moral attributes of God and the problem of evil in a rich and fecund section in *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*. This passage is relevant to the present discussion of Leibniz's theodicy, innocent suffering, and the general relation between physical evil and moral evil. Kant here argues for a straightforward isomorphic relation between virtue and happiness, a framework which is markedly similar to the schema Rutherford reconstructs from Leibniz. However, Kant focuses his discussion toward an intriguing argument, an argument for the existence of God on the basis of injustice in the actual world.

Kant argues that the concept of God is a moral concept; it achieves its force and is in fact necessary from the moral point of view. His argument is as follows:

1. If morality has objective reality, then true happiness is proportionate to virtue.
2. Morality has such an objective reality.
3. Happiness is not always proportionate to virtue during this earthly existence.
4. Happiness must be rightly proportioned to virtue after this earthly existence.
5. God would be a being who could ensure the right proportion between happiness and virtue after this life.

Therefore, God exists.⁷⁰

---

As noted elsewhere, however, it is not enough to vindicate God’s goodness to simply argue for a proportion between virtue and happiness and between vice and suffering (and Kant is here only treating the relation between the first two). One must further respond to any possible unjust instances of personal suffering. Kant does not address this further point in this section, but his above argument is in part interesting because of its radically different conclusion from an argument which shares some similar premises, namely the problem of physical evil argument against the existence of God:

1. God would be a being who would ensure a just world, ensuring both a proportion between virtue/vice and happiness/suffering and an absence of any instances of unjust suffering.
2. There are such instances of unjust suffering, and virtue/vice and happiness/suffering are not proportioned in this world.

Therefore, it is highly improbable that God exists.

In Kant’s argument, the support for the existence of God comes largely from the existence of injustice in the actual world. In this other argument, the support against God’s existence likewise is largely provided by the existence of injustice in the actual world.

There are questions about the soundness of Kant’s moral argument for God’s existence. One problem is that God would seem to be sufficient but not necessary to ensure the right proportion between happiness and virtue. The most that Kant’s argument establishes is that there must be some recompensing in a future realm of existence of the imbalance between happiness and virtue in this world. The felt need for such retributive justice is surely a primary motivation behind the Hindu and Buddhist notion of karma. Karma is the principle that there is a straightforward causal relation between right actions and good effects and between wrong actions and bad effects, if not in this life then in a future incarnation. A system of karma would also be sufficient to account for the proper balance between virtue and happiness, and it would be part of the very metaphysical nature of the world and would not require a divine moral agent as dispenser of justice.
Perhaps Kant has some significant implicit assumption about the nature of morality and moral agents, such that it would be necessary for there to be a moral agent to dispense the retributive justice.

Interestingly, Leibniz holds that such justice inheres in the very nature of the world in a way rather similar to the notion of karma, but, because of the fundamental attribute of the world as created world, God is required in Leibniz's system to select the ordered world and to actualize it. Leibniz says:

"Here [in the community of all minds] there is no crime without punishment, no good action without proportionate reward, and finally, as much virtue and happiness as is possible. And this is accomplished without disordering nature (as if what God prepared for souls disturbed the laws of bodies), but through the very order of natural things, in virtue of the harmony pre-established from all time between the kingdoms of nature and grace, between God as architect and God as monarch."[71]

Furthermore, Leibniz's presuppositions about the need for God to sustain the created world in being would prevent an interpretation of his position in terms of a radical deism. However, taking Kant's above argument alone, such a position would also be sufficient to account for the need for future retributive justice; God could create a self-sustaining world with a natural order of proportion between virtue and happiness and then either cease to exist or remain aloof from the created world.

Suffering and Karma as a Form of Retributive Justice

Given a recognition of an inequity in this life between moral evil and physical evil, between one's vice and wrongdoing and one's suffering, and also between one's virtue and right action and one's happiness, an alternative is to employ a past-oriented explanation rather than a future-oriented one. One can advance a doctrine of karma and

claim that there is a metaphysical principle of moral order in the world, such that right actions always lead proportionately to good results for the doer of the actions and wrong actions always lead proportionately to suffering for the doer. In order to work most effectively as a metaphysical response to *prima facie* injustice and suffering, karma as a general principle of moral causality is combined with the doctrine of *samsara*, or rebirth. Individuals are repeatedly reborn into an ever-changing world in accordance with their actions in their previous lives and the law of karma; the supposition of reincarnation enables the general principle of karma as a moral order to be particularized with regard to individuals and their goodness of character and happiness or suffering.

This karma-rebirth view has two salient features with regard to these concerns with large-scale justice and suffering. First, the karma position emphasizes an independent moral order and so provides an alternative to the conclusion of the Kantian argument. Second, the karma view takes up all instances of present suffering as fitting into this moral order or system of justice. Therefore, there is no need to introduce an ethical notion of compensation for suffering.

With regard to the first feature of karma, there is an interesting twist. I have been advancing karma as a distinct alternative to the Kantian argument and conclusion, that the imbalance between personal suffering and wrongdoing, personal happiness and goodness, gives good reason for belief in God. More precisely, I am arguing against the conclusion that only God as guardian of retributive justice could account for both our sense of ethics and the actual imbalance observed in the world. However, one must make an intriguing qualification here, inasmuch as some have argued for a theistic perspective even given, and in fact on the basis of, a principle of karma. Bruce Reichenbach, speaking from the perspective of a theistic system of Indian thought in order to explain it, says, "Since the law of karma is inactive and non-intelligent, there must be some being which is

---

responsible for seeing to it that cosmic justice is done, that the law of karma is implemented. God...controls the process of reincarnation according to the law of karma.... On this model there are three significant elements at the level of universal justice. There is the moral law of karma. There are the actual particulars of individuals' moral character and degree of happiness. And there is God, who bridges moral ought to actuality to ensure that any state of existence of any individual is in accord with that individual's moral stature (which depends upon the individual's previous actions and character). Surprisingly, karma is used to argue for God in a fashion similar to the Kantian argument, though the present argument appeals to the power of God to actualize the law of karma with respect to the present and the past—as opposed to actualizing a just balance between the present and the future.

Though this understanding of karma complicates and enriches the discussion, it does not entirely subdue the force of the original alternative to the Kantian argument. It remains a lively philosophical possibility to advance a slightly different version of karma, one which does not defer to God at all but rather holds that certain moral causal connections are part of the world in a similar way to physical causes and effects. Furthermore, this non-theistic version is not merely a dialectical possibility, but it has been advanced by other schools of thought in the Indian tradition. Reichenbach highlights this more common understanding of karma when he says that "With the exception of certain theistic systems, about which we shall speak later, karma is held to operate in a naturalistic fashion. That is, prior events effect subsequent events without the intervention of any supernatural agent." In particular, one such non-theistic employment of the law of karma occurs in Theravada Buddhism.

---

74 Reichenbach, p. 79.
75 Reichenbach, p. 66.
I shall not attempt to argue which version of karma is more plausible; it is enough to broaden the discussion of different responses to *prima facie* imbalances between moral character and happiness. Yet, this notion of karma, whether theistic or non-theistic, can advance our discussion along the line of concern with innocent suffering. One of the appeals\(^{76}\) of a system of karma is that it provides the theoretical framework for a response to the problem of innocent suffering which is not held afloat by a conception of compensation for suffering. Rather, karma enables an explanation of suffering in this life in terms of wrongdoing or character flaws in the past, so that all instances of suffering are deserved. In particular, given the karmic framework, the suffering of one *prima facie* innocent, such as an infant or an animal, could be taken as a just moral consequence of some way of being in a previous lifetime.\(^{77}\)

This past-oriented defense contrasts with the typical future-oriented response within the Christian tradition that undeserved present sufferings will be counter-balanced by future happiness. In particular, the karma-response sidesteps the concern that innocent suffering is not of the moral species which can justly be balanced out by future states of affairs. The karma-response in effect denies that one suffering is ever wholly innocent; in this respect it is similar in intent to arguments for the presence of original sin. In being directed toward hidden past actions, the karma-defense is also similar in some respects to the position of some in the Christian tradition that the suffering of innocents is caused by the actions of non-human, unseen agents (such as angels). However, the two hypotheses are actually quite divergent in that they are potential responses to different versions of the problem of evil. The karma explanation serves as a response to the problem of physical

---

\(^{76}\)The degree of appeal may well depend upon one's distance from actual suffering and therefore the level at which one is engaging with suffering. To one who is primarily existentially rather than theoretically engaged with innocent suffering, such a clean response could very well lose its appeal.

\(^{77}\)A.L. Herman expresses the point by saying, "The effectiveness of Samkara's rebirth solution lay in its ability to meet the single most devastating attack against which all Western and non-rebirth theodicies had previously founndered." This devastating attack is an emphasis on the apparently undeserved sufferings of innocents. See his "Karma and Evil in Indian Thought," in *The Dimensions of Karma*, ed. S.S. Rama Rao Pappu, p. 223.
evil or suffering; situated with respect to God it advances a reply to the problem of God's causing of sin, inasmuch as one would hold that to cause deserved suffering is not to sin. On the other hand, while the unseen-agent explanation may likewise serve to clear God with respect to causing sin, there would remain the problem of God's permission of the sin of the unseen agent and also the problem of suffering just considering the effects upon the innocent who suffers.

Leibniz and Karma

This discussion of theories of karma and rebirth does not stand simply as an excursus from Leibniz's own philosophy. Perhaps one should not be surprised that Leibniz himself actually discusses closely related issues! In his Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese, Leibniz devotes most of his philosophical enthusiasm and approval for the ancient Chinese writers and sages such as Confucius. However, he also refers to Buddhist concepts and followers of Buddhism, though not under that term. Leibniz does not employ any explicit reference to karma in this Discourse Chinese, but he does introduce the closely-related notion of rebirth in a discussion of souls. He says, "Now let us see how Father de S.-Marie speaks about it (p.40): the Chinese have various errors concerning human souls. Some believe that they do not die at all, that they simply move on and proceed to animate different bodies, human and animal, where they are reborn." Though there is no mention of principles of justice serving to govern the process, Leibniz here raises the possibility of rebirth from one lifetime to another; again,

---

78 This potential problem would persist if a doctrine of divine concurrence in creatures' actions were also held.


80 For instance, see Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese, sec. 34a and footnote 106, in Cook & Rosemont, p. 107, where Leibniz refers to the "...Spirit or the God which the Bonzes venerated under the name of Foe...." This name refers to the Buddha, according to Cook & Rosemont.

81 Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese, sec. 64a, p. 129. Cook & Rosemont stress that this view is Buddhist (note 162).
the doctrine of reincarnation is important for its function as the means of actualizing karmic consequences.\textsuperscript{82}

On an initial reading of this text, it may appear that Leibniz is endorsing the positions of Father Antoine de Sainte-Marie.\textsuperscript{83} And, given Leibniz's Christianity, one might reasonably expect him to agree with this missionary that the belief that souls are reborn is in error. However, Leibniz in general argues against the view of Father de Sainte-Marie that the Chinese tradition of philosophy and theology is incompatible with Christianity,\textsuperscript{84} and there are other fascinating texts which suggest that Leibniz would at least not coarsely dismiss a doctrine of rebirth. Further, these texts are notable because they introduce a conception quite similar to karma, though there is no comprehensive statement of the principle in terms of universal moral law as discussed above.

Leibniz says,

\begin{quote}
Without making too much of a comparison between the opinions of the Christians and the pagans, one could nevertheless say that there is something approaching this in the life of St. Conrad, a Bishop of Constance, whose biography is published in the second volume of my collection, where it is recorded that he and his friend St. Udalric discovered souls in the form of birds condemned to the waterfalls of the Rhine which they saved by their prayers. So too, perhaps, according to some of these Chinese literati, ancient or modern, souls deserving of punishment become spirits destined to lowly stations, guarding doors and tending kitchens and furnaces until they have expiated themselves.\textsuperscript{85}
\end{quote}

This surprising statement invites reflection on two points. Though the text refers to the Chinese belief in the wandering of souls and not strictly to a concept of rebirth, it is clear

\footnote{\textsuperscript{82}Though reincarnation has historically been paired with karma, there is no necessary connection, for karma could function in other models even without any sort of pre-existence of the individual.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{83}Cook \& Rosemont conclude that the man to whom Leibniz refers under this name is the Spanish Franciscan missionary to China, elsewhere called Antonio Caballero a Santa Maria. Antonio Caballero wrote about the mission to China, and Leibniz had the work's French translation, \textit{Traite sur quelques points importants de la Mission de la Chine} (pp. 14-15 and notes 41 and 43).}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{84}See \textit{Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese}, sec. 1, pp. 75-76, and also the editors' introduction, p.15.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{85}\textit{Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese}, sec. 67, p. 132.}
in the account from St. Conrad's biography that the soul-wandering under discussion is not of a disembodied sort but rather involves souls which migrate by being reincarnated. Furthermore, Leibniz moves beyond the notion of rebirth alone to introduce an ethical dimension. The souls are not just arbitrarily enfleshed as birds; that form has been given to them as a means of condemnation. And Leibniz further entertains the instances from Chinese tradition wherein souls are incarnated in particular ways as a kind of punishment. Admittedly, there is no fully-developed expression of karma here, but I contend that the essential core of this doctrine of justice, that one's present state of suffering is due to one's prior wrongdoing, is present. Furthermore, it is remarkable that Leibniz is even considering such a model of retributive justice through rebirth, though there remain too many uncertainties to conclude that Leibniz really accepts a version of karma. It is further remarkable that Leibniz introduces these versions of karmic justice and rebirth by examples from Christian figures. Was Leibniz perhaps motivated to take seriously versions of karmic justice from both the Christian and Chinese-Buddhist traditions because of their explanatory fecundity in response to surds of suffering? I can merely speculate that the answer is affirmative, for Leibniz concludes his treatment of these models of justice and rebirth with the rare admission that "We are not sufficiently

---

86 In his overarching intent to argue for compatibilities between Chinese tradition and Christianity, Leibniz could be interpreted as holding the weaker claim that karmic justice and rebirth are quite similar to ideas found within the Christian tradition, taken broadly.

87 Leibniz gives another comparison between Chinese and Christian figures in a separate passage. Regarding one whom Leibniz describes as "a certain Chinese Doctor Michael," he cites his belief that "...an incarnate angel subsists before birth and after death..." Leibniz then says that "This doctrine is in accord with that of Plato and Origen." (Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese, sec. 60, p. 126.) In their footnote (note 158) amplifying Leibniz's comment, Cook & Rosemont say, "Origen in particular 'was led by his strongly Platonic leanings to affirm [the soul's] pre-existence and explained its confinement in a body as a punishment for sins committed in its previous incorporeal state.' Article on 'Soul,' The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p.1273." (p.127) Origen's position nicely illustrates the point, mentioned above, that the karmic version of justice can take several forms and may or may not be conjoined with a doctrine of reincarnation. On Origen's model, one could attempt to justify suffering in this life, in the spirit of karma, by reference to sins of a prior existence. However, this karmic retribution is accomplished through incarnation rather than reincarnation.
conversant with the doctrine of the scholars on these matters to go into detail about them."

Concluding thoughts

It is clear, however, that there are important features of Leibniz's theodicy which are deontological rather than teleological. Leibniz accepts such a constraint against commission of sin by God, and he allows God's permission of sin by creatures only in cases of conflict with the higher duty to avoid sinning directly. Leibniz also invokes a deontological principle of retributive justice in order to account for some instances of suffering. Moreover, Leibniz clearly recognizes the problem that suffering presents on a personal rather than global level, and he is willing to invoke the promise of greater personal goods in the form of future happiness in order to justify some kinds of suffering. What about cases of horrible suffering of innocents, though? Leibniz holds that it would be unjust for God to cause innocent persons to suffer damnation, but what of horrible innocent suffering during this earthly lifetime?

If one takes the damnation of innocents to be unjust because of the nature of the suffering inflicted and the fact that it targets an innocent person, then one could plausibly extrapolate Leibniz's position to constrain God from causing innocents to suffer terribly in this world. However, if one takes the problem with innocent damnation to inhere in the eternity of the suffering, then perhaps Leibniz would allow teleological justification of even exceptional cases of innocent suffering of a limited duration. Like God's permission of sin in cases of conflict, perhaps God would allow such innocent suffering were it a necessary condition of the best possible world, with the additional proviso that the suffering must entail even greater personal happiness.

88Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese, sec. 67, p. 132.
However, such a case serves as intuitive evidence of the limits of teleological theodicy. The tension between the global and personal dimensions of Leibniz's theodicy leads to this Scylla of an unconvincing explanation or the Charybdis of an insoluble problem of dysteleological suffering. Can Leibniz's theodicy steer clear? In the next section, I shall explore more of the ethical context that allows the problem to linger; that context is Leibniz's rejection of theological voluntarism for a rationalistic, unified system of ethics. And then I shall turn to Leibniz's arguments that, even in the best possible world, human beings must not be passively resigned to the existence of horrible instances of suffering.
Part II: Leibniz versus voluntarism

Introductory comments

Given that the problem of evil is a tension between creatures and God, it follows straightforwardly that hope for reconciliation would involve an alteration either in our understanding of creatures or of God. Concerning the particular problem of suffering, there are then two obvious deontological lines of theodicy open for an attempted response. First of all, on the side of creatures, one could make the argument considered in detail above in the first section, that the suffering of creatures is deserved, that their suffering follows from their moral character. The second type of response would be to argue that there is a morally sufficient difference between God and creatures, and this difference could blunt what would otherwise be a reasonable charge of wrongdoing or injustice based on suffering.

I have argued in the preceding section that there is a lingering problem of suffering of innocents—for Leibniz’s theodicy and for theodicy in general. However, the second kind of response may perhaps open up more promising ground for answering the problem. In this section, then, I shall step back from a direct focus on innocent suffering and raise a larger theological and ethical question: is God bound in some sense by the same sort of moral requirements as are rational creatures? The problem of innocent suffering in particular, and the problem of evil in general, amounts to an ethical complaint against God, against God’s actions and character. If one were to hold that God is not bound by the same ethical system as are rational creatures, then the complaint based on innocent suffering would lose its force, for it is grounded in intuitions about the rightness

---

89 A distinct strategy, which also centers upon our understanding of the virtue and well-being of creatures, is to argue that the suffering creature will be "compensated" for the suffering by some future state of bliss. This strategy is essentially teleological in form, as is the more global greater good defense (or aesthetic theodicy) which argues that individual suffering is justified because necessary for some more important good in the world.
of actions of rational creatures.\textsuperscript{90} And more to the point, it will be instructive to examine Leibniz's position on this issue in order to reevaluate the threat of innocent suffering for his theodicy. Furthermore, the ethics of God questions are a part of a larger set of metaphysical positions Leibniz takes regarding the relation between the understanding of God and the will of God. Leibniz's stance on the role of each is crucial to his theodicy. His position on God's will and understanding is important not only for this question about the similarity of ethics for God and creatures but also for questions concerning the origin of (metaphysical) evil. Therefore, this section will focus on a series of generally related issues concerning God's will versus God's understanding and theodicy.

We shall first encounter the subject in terms of ethics and God with a slant toward physical evils, then later in terms of moral evils and metaphysical evils. One might engage a voluntarist view, emphasizing the primacy of God's will for ethics, in order to account for suffering in the world (or at least to shift the positive charge of a problem of suffering to a more neutral claim that we simply do not or cannot know that God is wrong in allowing innocent suffering). Leibniz, however, does not pursue this sort of justification of evil but rather argues extensively against voluntarism. So far, then, the problem of suffering would seem to remain for Leibniz. However, Leibniz does attempt to use the opposite view, emphasizing God's understanding rather than God's will, in order to account for evil. I shall examine Robert Sleigh's presentation of Leibniz's argument in \textit{Confessio Philosophi}, where Leibniz attempts to account for moral and physical evils. Leibniz himself ultimately drops this theodicy argument as unsatisfactory, but he does employ a similar argument in \textit{Theodicy} in order to account for metaphysical evil alone. Once again, it seems that a problem of innocent suffering still lingers.

\textsuperscript{90}Of course, another straightforward way to respond to the problem of innocent suffering would be to deny the sort of deontological constraint on inflicting suffering on which it is based. I am assuming in this discussion the reasonableness of such a principle, and also for the sake of consideration of ethics and God I am bypassing questions about whether or not a unified system of ethics for rational creatures exists.
God, creatures, and ethics

Regarding God's relation to ethics, one can readily find philosophers who espouse the claim that ethics is not for God what it is for creatures. Hume's Philo, in discussing the problem of evil, implies such a view in raising the following question: "And is it possible, Cleanthes, said Philo, that after all these reflections, and infinitely more, which might be suggested, you can still persevere in your anthropomorphism, and assert the moral attributes of the deity, his justice, benevolence, mercy, and rectitude, to be of the same nature with these virtues in human creatures?"91 Further, a contemporary voice for such a position can be found in Richard Swinburne, who argues more directly that God has a right to inflict harm on creatures without their consent, a right which rational creatures do not have.92 These two instances are not meant to be comprehensive, and I shall examine a third position distinct from Leibniz's—that of Descartes—in somewhat more detail below. A general point of emphasis to keep in mind is that one might deny the claim that justice is the same for God as creatures for different reasons. In fact, the positions of Descartes, Hume's Philo, and Swinburne are all significantly distinct, but they all disagree with Leibniz by denying that God and creatures follow the same system of ethics.

Leibniz devotes a significant and intriguing series of sections of his *Theodicy* to the subject of the goodness of God. And his discussion here is important not only because of the innocent suffering objection I have been raising in the first section but also

---

91 *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, part X, p. 108. Philo's claim seems to be motivated by an emphasis on the difference and unknowable nature of God. Therefore, one might insist that Philo is simply placing an epistemological restriction on assertions about the similarity of human and divine virtues, rather than positively arguing that God's ethics is different. However, the import of either position for theodicy is similar.

92 Swinburne, pp. 216-218. One might raise the metaethical question, considering the reasons Swinburne gives that God has such a right while creatures do not, of whether Swinburne is claiming (as Philo seems to be) that the nature of God's ethics is different from creatures' ethics or that simply there is a right such that God is the only being who can in fact claim it. I think that since Swinburne is proposing a right which it would be impossible for creatures to claim, it is fair to conclude that for him God's ethics is relevantly different in a substantive way from the ethics of creatures.
because of its relation to the larger framework of his theodicy and also to larger metaphysical positions. At the most general level are Leibniz's views about God's understanding and will. Leibniz's arguments at this level are interesting in several ways. They are obviously of general theological interest in their account of God's perfections and character. Also, they are of general metaphysical interest because, for instance, his position on God's understanding and will is related to his positions on created substances and the structure of the world. These arguments are of historical interest for the way in which they diverge from those of other prominent philosophers. Furthermore, there are more specific questions which follow from the more general arguments about understanding and will. Whether ethics is the same for God as for creatures is one of these questions, and the yet more specific questions about implications for the problem of suffering follow still.

Leibniz distinguishes three claims concerning God and morality. He says,

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.\(^93\)

Leibniz devotes most of his argument (and quotation of Pierre Bayle) to the first and third dogmas. I take position (2) to be a straightforward denial of God's perfect goodness, a view of God Leibniz would obviously reject. Position (3) is the claim I have been considering, that God's justice or ethics is different from the ethics for creatures. Further, though distinct from (2), (3) is similar to (2) in an important respect for Leibniz. Given Leibniz's assumption that one system of justice is fixed and binding for creatures and for God, dogma (3) would amount to the claim that God does not observe the true system of justice or ethics. (2) is the explicit claim that it is possible that God will not observe the

\(^93\)Theodicy, sec. 177, p. 237.
system of justice by acting unjustly, and (3) is the claim that it is possible that God will not observe the system of justice by observing some independent, purported "system of justice," which, given Leibniz’s position on justice, amounts to acting unjustly. I take position (1) to be what is called a divine-command or voluntaristic theory of ethics.

Though dogma (3) is the one most obviously relevant to the discussion at hand, Leibniz’s extensive treatment of dogma (1) is also relevant to the problem of innocent suffering. The first claim is different from the latter two in that it significantly allows for the possibility that God and creatures are bound by and are following the same system of ethics. However, questions about the establishment of a system of ethics are distinct from questions about whether God and creatures are following the same system. If one holds the view that God determines what is right and what is wrong solely by an act of God’s will, then one could also consistently be a double-voluntarist and hold that by will God establishes two sets of ethics, one for creatures and one for God. One could likewise hold that God creates only one system of justice, binding on both creatures and God. Still, even if one’s view is the latter, if the nature of justice/morality is dependent upon an arbitrary decree of God, then God would stand in a fundamentally different relation to that justice/morality than would creatures. God would be related to the system of justice in two different ways, as founder of justice and as follower of justice. It would be open to God to suspend a moral command in a way in which it would not be open to creatures. Since God would have established the moral constraints by God’s will and command, it would be open to God not to follow them (for some sufficiently weighty consideration, or perhaps even for some whimsical consideration from Leibniz’s point of view [Since the ethics would be arbitrarily established in the first place it could be arbitrarily suspended.]). Therefore, for the innocent suffering objection to have full force, a divine-command ethics would have to be ruled out. Of course, a double-voluntaristic

---

94 Leibniz makes this argument against a divine-command theory of ethics in sec. 176 of Theodicy and also in sec. 2 of his Discourse on Metaphysics.
theory would have to be ruled out because it would essentially involve the claim that there are two systems of ethics, one for God and one for creatures. But a single-voluntaristic theory would have to be defeated also, because of the relation of God to the system of ethics. One who holds a single-voluntaristic position on the foundations of ethics could respond to even a deontological charge of injustice by arguing that such an incident is a case where God has justifiably suspended or transcended a particular moral prohibition (though the plausibility of such a response is a separate issue).95

Leibniz clearly rejects each of these three dogmas concerning God's goodness. He more extensively argues against claim (1), but the claims are related, and his rejection of (1) has implications for (3) and its rejection. In presenting (1), Leibniz seems to be assuming what I am calling the single-voluntarist position. However, if (1) is taken in the double-voluntaristic sense, then a rejection of (1) on the grounds that there is really only a single system of justice would entail a rejection of (3), and vice versa. Furthermore, Leibniz notes that the motivation for seriously holding either (1) or (3) is a deference to the power of God. He notes that some have felt that for God to be properly exalted, God must not be subject to any sort of moral law with respect to creatures.96 I again assert that raising the problem of evil in general and the problem of innocent suffering in particular is in part a complaint of possible moral wrongdoing by God, working against this sort of

95One could argue that this possibility of suspending or transcending a particular aspect of the moral system is enough to entail that there are really two distinct systems of ethics even on the single voluntaristic view. 96Theodicy, sec. 178, p. 238. This sort of exaltation of God over creatures could take different forms. On the one hand, one might be motivated by the view that there is nothing good which is not dependent upon God's will. This motivation could lead to dogma (1), the single-voluntaristic position, while still assuming that creatures and God follow a similar moral path. On the other hand, one might be motivated by the belief that God is so superior that creatures and God cannot inhabit the same moral spheres. This second motivation could lead to dogma (3) or perhaps to the double-voluntaristic version of dogma (1). Leibniz in this section of Theodicy refers to those theologians who hold that "...the Creator is bound by no laws of any kind with respect to the creature." The second type of motivation seems to be operative in this claim. The most extreme manifestation of this motivation would lead to something like dogma (2), with only one system of justice which only creatures would follow. Leibniz notes in this same section that some imply that God is bound by no moral laws whatsoever, but he distinguishes this position from those who "...will not have denied that God owes to himself what goodness and justice demand of him." This latter view presupposes a system of justice which pertains exclusively to God, leading to dogma (3) or the double-voluntaristic version of dogma (1).
deference to God's authority. Further, a similar concern for God's power motivates arguments that ethical precepts depend on God's will for their truth. And Leibniz notes the related concern some have that if it is the goodness of things external to God which determines God's action, then God will not be free.\(^7\) It is worth stressing that Leibniz does not take the above-mentioned track in his theodicy; he does not defend God against the creaturely charge of wrongdoing by denying that the creature can ever legitimately raise the complaint. God and creatures are within the same moral system according to Leibniz.

Up to this point I have examined the three dogmas, and I have stressed that Leibniz rejects them in favor of a singular system of justice. What arguments does Leibniz make against these alternative accounts of the foundations of ethics? A cursory reading of the *Theodicy* may lead to the impression that Leibniz is boldly rejecting philosophical positions while unsystematically referring to his own positions, all the while flitting from one citation of a philosopher or theologian to the next. Further, it may be tempting to link criticisms of the work with the fact that it was published for exoteric examination. It is true that in one section Leibniz quickly covers an impressive list of authorities who agree with him in arguing that justice is not simply a product of God's will, including Calvin, Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, Cicero, and Plato.\(^8\) While it is true that Leibniz's ken is far-reaching in this work, he provides many substantive and interesting arguments throughout. In fact, Leibniz gives multiple arguments relevant to the foundation of the system of ethics.

Perhaps it would be useful to pause once again in order to maintain clarity about the distinctions and relations between various levels of Leibniz's position. I have been discussing two primary alternatives to the metaethical view of Leibniz that there is one

\(^{7}\) *Theodicy*, sec. 180, p. 239. Leibniz in response invokes his distinction between merely moral necessity and metaphysical necessity.

\(^{8}\) *Theodicy*, sec. 182, pp. 240-241.
system of ethics for both God and creatures. Leibniz presents many distinct arguments (though some are closely related, also) against the three dogmas discussed above. Inasmuch as there is a dichotomy between Leibniz's account of the foundations of ethics and the two principal alternatives of dogmas (1) and (3), any arguments Leibniz makes against these dogmas will further serve as arguments for the monistic ethics. Furthermore, Leibniz's position on ethics for God and creatures involves a deeper-level position, that the system of ethics is grounded as moral truths in the understanding of God (rather than in God's will). Likewise, this position on moral truths is related to Leibniz's position that eternal truths in general are grounded in the understanding, rather than the will, of God. The arguments rejecting the three dogmas and for his monistic view of ethics will then to an extent be linked to assertions about the grounding of moral truths in God's understanding. However, Leibniz can and does make claims about the grounding of eternal truths in the divine understanding which are independent of these arguments about the monistic system of ethics, and I shall turn to such a text below. Finally, Leibniz's most basic claims about God's will and understanding would be involved in these ethical discussions but also in other discussions such as that of the origin of metaphysical evil below.

Leibniz's arguments against the three dogmas

At this point, I shall concentrate upon arguments Leibniz makes against the three dogmas of the relation between God and ethics. Most of Leibniz's discussion is devoted to reasons for rejecting positions (1)(divine-command theory) and (3)(distinct divine and creaturely systems of justice); however, at least one of the arguments is meant to apply to all three positions. It seems that Leibniz takes position (2) (that there is only one system of justice, that it is independent of God's will, and that it is not certain that God will follow it) to be much less plausible than the other two. Perhaps Leibniz is even including (2) in the list as a kind of reductio tactic. In presuming that no reader would seriously be
inclined to accept (2), its inclusion in a grouping with (1) and (3) would tend to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the latter two.

**The argument on intuitions of evil**

Leibniz quotes Bayle's characterization of the form of most arguments that there is an essential moral good or evil which precedes the activity of God's will. Bayle notes that most of these arguments are based upon the "...frightful consequences that attend the opposite dogma." The first argument of Leibniz which I shall examine follows suit. Leibniz makes this argument against all three dogmas presented above, and the argument takes the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*. He says that "There is nothing to prevent such a God [as is presupposed in each of the three dogmas] from behaving as a tyrant and an enemy of honest folk and from taking pleasure in that which we call evil." An implicit premise of the argument is that each of the dogmas entails a singular possibility of God's action and character; that possibility is that God could with pleasure do something—for example, eternally torture an innocent person—which our moral convictions would lead us to consider as evil. Moreover, this is not just a bare possibility for God, but a possibly good action of God on the framework of the three dogmas. As Bayle says in restating this argument a few sections forward, "That is horrifying." Such a conclusion

---

100 *Theodicy*, sec. 177, p. 237.
101 The second dogma, that the nature of justice is fixed but God may not follow it, complicates the argument at this point. The dogma is ambiguous. It could mean that God is independent of the single system of justice because God acts unjustly; it could just sacrifice God's perfect goodness from the outset. However, a second interpretation would be that, while God is independent of the single system of justice, God is not unjust because God somehow transcends the realm of ethics. God is neither unjust nor bound to follow a different system of justice; rather, God is somehow independent of the ethical altogether. In either case, the implication from (2) would be that the possible action by God would not be evil, though it would not properly be good either.
contradicts the convictions about what is at the most basic level evil. Therefore, the
dogmas leading to this conflict must be rejected.\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{The reductio ad Manicheism}

Leibniz draws a distinct conclusion based on the principles of the preceding
argument. Just as on the above discussion of the dogmas it would be possible for God to
do something considered evil on the basis of our convictions, so too it would obviously
be possible for God to perform some actions considered evil and others considered good
on the basis of our convictions. This conjunction would be one simple way to abrogate
the \textit{prima facie} contradiction between God and evil; if God were both good and evil, then
there obviously would be no contradiction in the simultaneous existence of God and
evil.\textsuperscript{104} The force of this extension of the argument comes from the conflict of its quasi-
Manichean conclusion with the ultimate monism of good of Christian orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{105}

Manicheism is a religious movement that flourished to an extent in late
antiquity.\textsuperscript{106} Its doctrines bear marks of influence from Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and
Buddhism, and Judaism and Christianity. The eponym of this movement is the Persian
prophet Mani, who lived c.216 to c.276. In his extension of the above argument, Leibniz

\textsuperscript{103}Of course, it would be possible to instead reject the other article in the conflict, to reject the conviction
(which is independent of the ethical framework of the three dogmas) that the possible action of God would
be evil. Indeed, one who seriously held one of the dogmas could well respond to Leibniz that the
conviction that the possible divine action would be evil is mistaken, for the possible action would be good
within the framework of the dogma. In order to settle this dispute, one would need to turn to an
independent evaluation of each ethical system. This general tension between particular moral convictions
and moral principles and theories is expressed in John Rawls' methodology of seeking a "reflective
equilibrium." See his \textit{A Theory of Justice}, pp. 20ff.

\textsuperscript{104}This denial of the perfect goodness of God is an easy way out of the \textit{logical} problem of evil, as is the
naive alternative on the other side, which is to deny the reality of evil. However, such moves are specious
solutions in the Christian tradition of theodicy. Furthermore, the \textit{evidential} problem of evil would linger
even if God's goodness is restricted, though not if God is positively evil in relevant degrees and ways.
Compare the comment below on the distinction between Manicheism and Leibniz's consideration of a quasi-
Manicheism.

\textsuperscript{105}\textit{Theodicy}, sec. 177, p. 237.

\textsuperscript{106}Norman Cantor mentions that the Albigensian or Cathari Christian movement in 11th to 13th century
Italy and France may have been directly influenced by Manichean thought. See his \textit{The Civilization of the
Middle Ages}, pp.389-391.
is trading on one main aspect of Manichean doctrine: its ethical, metaphysical, and religious dualism. The basic idea is that there are two completely independent principles of Good and Evil in the universe, and the problematic nature of the present world results from the mixture of and struggle between these two sides. Manicheism would identify God with the Good, so the problem of evil is solved by the limits on God's sovereignty and power through this independent Evil source.\(^{107}\) Leibniz, however, in this *Theodicy* text is considering a kind of quasi-Manicheism. He is suggesting that it is consistent with the three dogmas to think of God as *both* good and evil—as the Evil principle of the Manicheans as well as the Good ideal which is common to both Manicheism and orthodox Christianity. Thus, the three dogmas would seem to offend not only the orthodox Christian view that the Good is fundamental in the universe but also the Manichean view that the universe is dualistic in terms of metaphysical being!

**The arguments on God's connection to goodness**

Leibniz, however, does not merely rely on these arguments based on the frightful consequences which follow from alternative views. While the two preceding arguments gain their force from a conviction about evil, he makes a related argument based on the nature of God's goodness. Leibniz reasons in the following way against dogma (1): "For if justice was established arbitrarily and without any cause, if God came upon it by a kind of hazard, as when one draws lots, his goodness and his wisdom are not manifested in it, and there is nothing at all to attach him to it."\(^{108}\) Leibniz seems to be making an assumption about God's goodness and actions, that for an action of God to be good, it

\(^{107}\) Perhaps the best-known follower—and then opponent—of Manicheism is Augustine. Much of Augustine's theodicy, with its emphasis on metaphysical evil as a privation of good and thus unreal as a final entity, can be placed in the context of his philosophical and religious turn away from Manicheism. He says, "They [Manicheans] used to say 'Truth, truth,' and they had a lot to tell me about it; but there was never any truth in them. They uttered false statements not only about you who really are the Truth, but also about the elements of the world, your creation." (*Confessions* III.vi [10], trans. Henry Chadwick, p.40.)

\(^{108}\) *Theodicy*, sec. 176, p. 237.
must in part be done because of God's character. Any action which is wholly arbitrary would have no connection with the character of God (Leibniz is treading on further presuppositions about the nature of good actions and character—notably that whim or arbitrariness is not an element of the morally good. He explicitly uses this premise in a different argument, which will be discussed below.). If the system of justice itself is not good in connection with God's good character, whence would the goodness of such a voluntaristic system of ethics come?

Leibniz makes a closely related argument against the voluntaristic position in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

Thus, in saying that things are not good by virtue of any rule of goodness but solely by virtue of the will of God, it seems to me that we unknowingly destroy all of God's love and all his glory. For why praise him for what he has done if he would be equally praiseworthy in doing the exact contrary? Where will his justice and wisdom reside if there remains only a certain despotic power, if will holds the place of reason, and if, according to the definition of tyrants, justice consists in whatever pleases the most powerful?\(^\text{109}\)

Again, this argument, as does the prior one, raises the difficulty in connecting acts done only on the basis of God's will with the goodness of God. Because God's will could have chosen *any* object which would therefore be designated good, it seems that the entire distinction between right and wrong collapses. Of course, the voluntarist might maintain that the distinction precisely does collapse when taken independently of God's will. However, there is a lingering question about God's character, and Leibniz may have this concern in mind in mounting this argument. If right and wrong, good and evil, are taken to be wholly posterior to the actual exercise of God's will which determines those concepts, then in what sense can the God who wills those concepts be considered good?

If God's will is wholly prior to goodness, how can God's will—which creates goodness—be considered good? As Leibniz says above, where will God's justice and wisdom reside if they cannot be grounded in his understanding and will?

Furthermore, Leibniz extends this kind of argument to dogma (3). Just below his statement of the above argument in *Theodicy*, he says that "The same would hold good more or less if his justice were different from ours, if (for example) it were written in his code that it is just to make the innocent eternally unhappy."¹¹⁰ I am assuming here that Leibniz’s phrase "the same" refers to the conclusion of the argument above (and not, for instance, just to Leibniz’s intermediary statement in the *Theodicy* text that there would be no reason to presume that God would always follow the principles of justice). Also, there is the matter of the strength of Leibniz’s "more or less" qualification. However, the general point seems to be that if there were two altogether different systems of ethics, one for God and one for creatures, then there would be no connection between God's goodness, which would be determined in relation to his own system, and our system of ethics. As a final aside in connection with the arguments of the preceding section on innocent suffering, I will note that Leibniz here grounds his argument with an example which relies on the conviction that eternal suffering of an innocent would be unjust.

**Bayle's argument on goodness**

Leibniz quotes an argument from Bayle against dogma (3), against the claim that there are two systems of justice. While this argument moves forward by means of the concept of goodness, it differs from the above arguments in focusing on the meaning of goodness in general. Bayle reasons that:

'One must not assert here...that the goodness of the infinite Being is not subject to the same rules as the goodness of the creature. For if there is in God an attribute that can be

called goodness, the marks of goodness in general must apply to him. Now when we reduce goodness to the most general abstraction, we find therein the will to do good. Divide and subdivide into as many kinds as you shall please this general goodness, into infinite goodness, finite goodness...you will find in each, as an inseparable attribute, the will to do good.¹¹¹

Unfortunately, Leibniz does not really comment on the details of this argument at all. The most he says is that Bayle speaks very well on the subject. One might interpret the affirmative introduction of the argument and the lack of any further comments to mean that Leibniz accepts the argument wholesale and that Bayle is virtually speaking for Leibniz. However, the evidence is too scarce for so strong an interpretation. Leibniz could, for instance, be refraining from detailed commentary out of some formality of respect for the author.

Let us then surpass Leibniz on this point and make some observations about the argument. The gist is that for a being to be called good, the general marks of goodness must be an attribute of that being. The most general mark of goodness is the will to do good. Both God and creatures are considered good, and this same general mark, the will to do good, is a defining characteristic of God's goodness and of creatures' goodness. Inasmuch as both sorts of goodness involve the same attribute, they are similar.

The main concern about the efficacy of this argument in supporting Leibniz's position of a monistic system of ethics is that it is too weak. The argument does reasonably conclude that if both God and creatures are considered good, then there must be some common core to the goodness of both, but the similarity between the two could end at that point. The will to do good could be taken as a formal requirement to any type of goodness, but divine goodness could be substantively fleshed out in a radically different way from creaturely goodness. This argument succeeds against the claim that God's goodness has nothing in common with the goodness of creatures, but it fails to

¹¹¹Theodicy, sec. 179, pp. 238-239.
remove the possibility of there being two distinct systems of ethics, one pertaining to God and one to creatures. For this reason alone it would be helpful to know more about Leibniz's assessment of the argument.

The happy necessity argument

This argument of Leibniz also involves the goodness of God, but in a way that responds to an objection which motivates the voluntarism. Leibniz is therefore arguing against dogma (1) and against the support given to the position by the claim that if God's will is determined to act by the goodness of something external to it, then God's will loses its freedom. Leibniz claims that, on the contrary, "It is a happy necessity which obliges wisdom to do good, whereas indifference with regard to good and evil would indicate a lack of goodness or of wisdom."\(^{112}\) The implicit argument to which Leibniz is responding is of the *modus tollens* form. If God's will is determined by an external good, then it is in some sense necessary for God to do the good action. Necessitarianism is to be avoided, and God's freedom is to be preserved. Therefore, God's will must not be determined by anything external to it but rather must be radically indifferent in its activity. Leibniz, however, argues that the moral kind of necessity,\(^{113}\) which compels a good God to exercise God's will rightly, is actually a benign form of necessity. In fact, he claims, echoing his arguments above, that if God's will were wholly indifferent to any external good then there would be no support for claiming that God's will is essentially good. Leibniz explicitly links the rejection of the indifference of God's will with the first dogma when he says that "Those who believe that God established good and evil by an arbitrary decree are adopting that strange idea of mere indifference...."\(^{114}\) Though the happy

---

\(^{112}\) *Theodicy*, sec. 175, p. 236.

\(^{113}\) Leibniz defines *moral* necessity as a constraint on God by God's wisdom and goodness (*Theodicy*, sec. 128, p. 201), and in contrast defines *metaphysical* or *brute* necessity as what follows when the contrary implies a contradiction (*Theodicy*, sec. 174, p. 236).

\(^{114}\) *Theodicy*, sec. 176, p. 236.
necessity argument can function against independently motivated arguments for the indifference of God's will, it is also clearly aimed at the voluntarist ethics. Finally, it is important to stress that for Leibniz it is nothing external to God which determines the will's good action; rather, it is the truth which is grounded in God's own understanding which determines the action of the will. Leibniz argues elsewhere that even the human mind is not determined by anything external to it but by itself.115

The principle of sufficient reason arguments

Leibniz makes another concise and powerful argument against the indifference of God's will—and therefore against voluntarism—which is based on his numerous arguments for the principle of sufficient reason. He says, "And besides, the indifference which would keep the will in a perfect equipoise would itself be a chimera, as has been already shown: it would offend against the great principle of the determinant reason."116 Leibniz is here giving an argument quite distinct from those based on convictions about evil actions or the goodness of God's character. Even supposing that a voluntarist could give an account of how God can be good if principles of justice are grounded in his arbitrary will, this argument based on a central theme of Leibniz's metaphysics poses a new challenge for the defender of the first dogma. The reconstruction of the argument is as follows. The voluntarist position involves the claim that God's will is completely indifferent to determinants. However, on the evidence of the principle of sufficient reason, any course of action of God would involve a reason for the action. This reason would be an external determinant to God's will. Therefore, God's will would not be completely indifferent in any action.

115Notes on Some Comments by Michel Angelo Fardella (1690), clarification of proposition 1, in G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays, p. 102.
116Theodicy, sec. 175, p. 236.
Leibniz is somewhat clearer in another formulation of this brief argument. He elsewhere says, "Besides, it seems that all acts of will presuppose a reason for willing and that this reason is naturally prior to the act of will."\textsuperscript{117} In this argument, the clash with voluntarism comes when an implicit premise about the assumed nature of the will is made explicit. Voluntarism presumes that God's will is prior—for instance, prior to moral reasons. Therefore, if Leibniz's premises are true, then the conclusion of the sound argument would be that the system of ethics is not grounded in God's arbitrary decrees. Of course, the voluntarist would dispute the truth of this key premise, that reasons—presumably grounded in God's understanding—are prior to the activities of God's will.

What is this principle which does the majority of the work in the above arguments, and what are Leibniz's reasons in favor of the principle itself? At this point I shall merely give a clear statement of Leibniz's principle, in a formulation which seems most relevant to questions of God's will (at times he formulates the principle in terms of propositional truth, at other times in terms of events or actions). Leibniz says that metaphysics makes use of "...the great principle, little used, commonly, that nothing takes place without sufficient reason, that is, that nothing happens without it being possible for someone who knows enough things to give a reason sufficient to determine why it is so and not otherwise."\textsuperscript{118} On the extreme voluntaristic position which Leibniz is attacking, it is claimed that God's choice of ethical principles is arbitrary, so obviously one could not give an account of why one system of ethics is willed into being rather than another. If Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason is true, then at least this extreme form of voluntarism would be untenable. Then, at least, we have pushed Leibniz's rejection of the first dogma to a deeper level. We have moved from a more theological argument to one of Leibniz's central metaphysical principles, and we have at least shown that Leibniz's

\textsuperscript{117}Discourse on Metaphysics, sec. 2, in G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{118}principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason, sec. 7, in G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays, pp. 209-210 (italics provided by Leibniz).
rejection of voluntarism complements a major strand of his metaphysics. However, it would be intriguing to explore the connection between Leibniz's rejection of voluntarism and the principle of sufficient reason from the opposite direction; in other words, it would repay the study to investigate just how much influence these theological motivations, positions, and arguments have on the supporting arguments for the principle of sufficient reason itself.

**Bayle's metaphysical argument**

The final argument against any of the dogmas I shall consider is once again quoted from Bayle, against the voluntaristic first dogma. Bayle calls this argument a more direct and metaphysical one against claim (1), in distinction from the "frightful consequences" arguments. Bayle says that,

>'One thing is certain, that the existence of God is not an effect of his will. He exists not because he wills his existence, but through the necessity of his infinite nature. His power and his knowledge exist through the same necessity. He is all-powerful, he knows all things, not because he wills it thus, but because these are attributes necessarily identified with him. The dominion of his will relates only to the exercise of his power, he gives effect outside himself only to that which he wills, and he leaves all the rest in the state of mere possibility. Thence it comes that this dominion extends only over the existence of creatures and not over their essential being.'\(^{119}\)

Once again, Leibniz says nothing more about this passage than that it is a forceful argument for the truth. Bayle's argument here is related to the previous arguments on God's goodness, inasmuch as the arguments above tend toward the assumption that God essentially is good not because God wills it so but because of God's nature. However, Bayle's metaphysical argument attempts to be neutral on this point about God's goodness,

restricting itself to the perfections of power and knowledge. The argument here relies heavily on the import of the ontological argument for God's existence. Of course, the plausibility of the first premise, that God does not will God's own existence, is not completely dependent on the ontological argument. To say that God's existence would be an effect of God's will would involve some convoluted reasoning. Even if one makes the traditional assumption that God is atemporal, of what could God's will consist if conceived as in some sense independent of existent action? In the same way, God's omniscience and omnipotence do not depend on God's will but rather follow from God's nature. At this point in the argument Bayle has reached a major break from the voluntarist position; in two steps he has argued that significant aspects of God are independent of God's will. Bayle extends the argument in another step to creatures, by the assumption that just as God's essential characteristics are independent of God's will, so too are the essential characteristics of creatures. The will does not serve as fundament for the essences or for the possibles (since God's existence is not dependent on God's will, the possibility of God is not either), so what can be the range of God's will? The domain of God's will, then, is not all the possibles but rather only what is actualized. This argument of Bayle serves as a transition to Leibniz's positive alternative to a divine-command ethics.

---

120 It would be worthwhile to examine in more detail the connections or tensions between the ontological argument for God's existence and voluntaristic theories of ethics.
121 However, it does seem plausible to claim that if God exists, then God will only continue to exist if God wills it so. In other words, God could in effect will God's "death" by ceasing to will to exist. The prima facie plausibility of this possibility would obviously conflict with the ontological argument. Still, it does seem at least more reasonable to think of God's will as a necessary condition for God's existence rather than as a sufficient condition for God's existence.
122 I am speaking here of God's actual will. Leibniz does link the "domain" of God's possible decrees to the possibles. He says, "As for the objection that possibles are independent of God's decrees, I grant it with respect to actual decrees (even though the Cartesians do not agree with this), but I hold that possible individual notions include some possible free decrees." (From the Letters to Arnauld [May 1686], in G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays, p. 71.) The relation between God's actual will and his possible will for Leibniz merits further discussion.
Bayle's metaphysical argument—which is employed without criticism by Leibniz—is complicated enough to merit further scrutiny. In fact, there is sufficient ambiguity and complexity in the argument to raise the question of what precisely the argument says. I shall turn to that modest but crucial question momentarily. In addition, there is a richness to this argument in its evocation or echoing of related issues in philosophical theology, so it would be a worthy pursuit to explore several important tangents. I have already mentioned the ontological argument. Further, Bayle's argument can be linked with two other important arguments: the argument for occasionalism based on God's conservation of creatures' existence and Leibniz's argument for God's existence based on eternal truths. With regard to the former, there are some interesting parallels between it and Bayle's metaphysical argument; with regard to the latter, there may be a tension in Leibniz's use of both arguments. Regrettably, I shall go no deeper than this brief mention of these intriguing connections in this study.\textsuperscript{123} So now let us return to the more basic question of how to take Bayle's argument.

\textit{Reconstructing Bayle's metaphysical argument}

In order to develop a grasp on this metaphysical argument, we should begin by considering its conclusion.\textsuperscript{124} Bayle argues against the principle expressed in dogma (1) cited by Leibniz, that the nature of justice is arbitrary. Bayle denies this principle as follows in the passage quoted by Leibniz: "...'there is in nature and in the essence of certain things a moral good or evil that precedes the divine decree."\textsuperscript{125} Initially, it would behoove us to ask what it means for something to precede the divine decree. At least since Augustine, the dominant theological view in the Christian tradition has been that

\textsuperscript{123}For Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence, see his \textit{Proslogion}, especially chs. I-IV, along with Gaunilo's \textit{Reply on Behalf of the Fool}, and Anselm's \textit{Apologetic} in response to Gaunilo. For the argument for occasionalism based on God's conservation of creatures in existence, see Malebranche's \textit{Dialogues on Metaphysics} (Seventh Dialogue, VI). For a discussion of Leibniz's argument for God's existence based on the reality of eternal truths, see Robert Merrihew Adams' \textit{Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist}, pp. 177-191.

\textsuperscript{124}As T.S. Eliot writes, "In my end is my beginning." (\textit{Four Quartets}, "East Coker," V.)

\textsuperscript{125}\textit{Theodicy}, sec. 183, p. 241.
God is fundamentally atemporal, so, at the very minimum, there is a high probability that Bayle is not referring to a temporal priority. It seems to me that the two relevant competing senses of "precedes" refer to causal priority or explanatory priority.

Something's causally preceding the divine decree would mean that its subsistence would occur independently of any exercise of God's will. On a parallel level, something's explanatorily preceding the divine decree would mean that a comprehensive rational account could be given of its subsistence without any reference to the exercise of God's will. On either meaning, what is significant vis-a-vis the voluntarist thesis is that there are certain essential elements of reality which are independent of God's will in their being and truth.

We can raise a further question about the nature of this priority; what precisely is supposed to be prior to God's decree? In what way is God's will limited with regard to some elements of reality? Bayle's conclusion, while reasonably clear, is nevertheless somewhat ambiguous, so let us track the clarity of his claim by examining a series of possible versions--each progressively stronger than the preceding version--of anti-voluntarism.

Weak anti-voluntarism(1): Some things do not depend on/can be explained without reference to God's will.

Perhaps even most, if not all, voluntarists would be anti-voluntarists in this minimal sense. Obviously, this version is not the target of the conclusion of Bayle's metaphysical

---

126 I shall not even attempt to embark upon an explication of historical or contemporary discussions of the relation between God and time. Rather, I will only echo Augustine's intriguing comment: "What then is time? Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know." (Confessions, XI.xiv [17], trans. Henry Chadwick, p. 230.)

127 To quote Augustine again: "My condition is not good if I do not even know what it is I do not know." (Confessions, XI.xxv [32], p. 239.)

128 Of course, as is evident in his argument, Bayle premises an omnipotent God. Many philosophers argue that logical constraints on God's will do not involve any egregious limitation on God's power. In fact, this tradition may hint at a reason for favoring the rational sense of "precedes" over the causal sense above. One understanding of causal priority would be that God is actually "physically" prevented from establishing certain elements of reality through divine decree; however, the dominant anti-voluntarist tradition has steadfastly stressed that reasonable "limits" on God's power (such as that God cannot do the logically contradictory) are logical limits.
argument, but it may give a glimpse into the strategy of his argument. One example of this flabby anti-voluntarism would be the claim that God's existence does not depend upon God's will, which is precisely where Bayle begins his argument. Thus, his intent seems to be to hook the reader with an uncontroversial anti-voluntarism and then to move the reader by steps to a more substantive anti-voluntarism.

**Weak anti-voluntarism (2):** Important aspects of God's nature (i.e. God's omniscience or omnipotence) do not depend on/can be explained without reference to God's will.

As above, this version can be linked directly to a premise in Bayle's argument. While more substantive than the first version, it remains neutral to the basic question of ethics and God's will, so, once again, the ethical voluntarist may be willing to affirm this claim with alacrity.

**Strong anti-voluntarism (1):** Some moral things (e.g. God's perfect goodness) do not depend on/can be explained without reference to God's will.

Because Bayle's conclusion obviously claims that it is something morally good or evil which precedes the divine will, neither of the first two versions is a plausible account of the precedence at issue. On the other hand, because Bayle's conclusion is vague, each of these final three versions could strictly speaking be extrapolated from Bayle's statement. It is unlikely, however, that Bayle intends this version of ethical anti-voluntarism, as can be seen for a textual and for a philosophical reason. First of all, Bayle says that there is *in nature* moral good/evil which is prior to God's will. This phrase could refer rather generally to the nature of things--God's nature included. But it is somewhat more plausible to take Bayle as referring to nature in the sense of creation, so that there is some moral good/evil apart from God's character which is prior to God's will. This second reading is more plausible because of its compatibility with a related philosophical issue just under the surface. If Bayle were really to be arguing merely that God's goodness is not dependent on God's will, then the argument would be of little use to Leibniz for
rejecting dogma (1), with the straightforward assumption that dogma (1) claims that the nature of justice for creatures is arbitrary. Were Bayle attempting to establish only that God's goodness is prior, this claim would be consistent with the subsidiary claim that the rightness/goodness of creaturely ethics is logically dependent on God's will—even if God's ethics were to be the same as the ethics for creatures. All that would be needed would be the claim that God is arbitrarily (because the choice to do so is prior to any overriding reason for so doing) extending the ethical principles which essentially apply to God to creatures.

Strong anti-voluntarism (2): Some moral things re creation (e.g. the wrongness of murder) do not depend on/can be explained without reference to God's will.

Strong anti-voluntarism (3): All moral things re God and creation do not depend on/can be explained without reference to God's will.

The textual and philosophical reasons for favoring either of these two interpretations of Bayle's conclusion over strong anti-voluntarism (1) have been given above. Both positions are morally strong enough to support the view that ethics for creatures is not entirely arbitrary. Is there any evidence, however, to choose between SAV (2) and SAV (3)? Also, what is the significance of the difference in formulation between SAV (2) and SAV (3)? There is some slight textual evidence for SAV (2), in that Bayle's conclusion says that there is a prior moral good or evil in the essence of certain things. Taken to refer to certain moral (as opposed to amoral) things, Bayle's view could be that some, but not all, moral actions, intentions, persons, etc. have their goodness or badness set independently of God's will. Some morally good or bad things, however, could depend on God's will for their rightness or wrongness. Furthermore, this kind of anti-voluntarism could be set in a framework of meta-voluntarism, wherein God fundamentally arbitrarily establishes a system of ethics which initially applies to God, and then God extends the
domain of the ethics to creatures not arbitrarily but for an unwavering reason, such as that the good for creatures ultimately lies in the good for God.

However, it is equally consistent with the text of Bayle's conclusion to read it with a different sense. Bayle may be saying that among things in general (moral and amoral), there are certain things, namely the moral things (all moral things), which have their moral good or evil determined independently of God's will. This strongest version of the conclusion is significant in its difference from SAV (2) in a couple of ways. First of all, it would leave no room for the rightness or wrongness of any aspect of creaturely ethics to be determined primarily by God's will. Second, it would not only support Leibniz's anti-voluntarism but also his ethical monism, the view that God and creatures are bound by the same system of ethics. The main reason for preferring SAV (3) over SAV (2) in interpreting Bayle's conclusion can be seen in the most plausible interpretation of the gist of his reasoning. As I will explain below, the best way to understand Bayle's argument is in terms of a distinction he is making between the content of God's power—which covers God's character and all aspects of creation—and the exercise of this power, which is the proper domain of God's will. Thus, to return to the point about Bayle's strategy, he begins his argument with a minimal (or flabby) and uncontentious version of anti-voluntarism and concludes with a most robust version of anti-voluntarism.

_The Reconstruction of Bayle's Metaphysical Argument Reconsidered_

We can summarize the above comments through a more direct reconstruction of Bayle's metaphysical argument. His first premise is that

(1) God's existence does not depend on God's will. [WAV (1)]

On the contrary, God exists because of God's nature as a necessary being. What more specifically does it mean to say that this God exists? In part, it means that

(2) This God is omnipotent and omniscient.

Furthermore, as with existence, these attributes are necessary aspects of God's nature. In other words,
(3) God's omnipotence and omniscience do not depend on God's will. [WAV (2)]

At this point, one could reconstruct Bayle's argument along either of two tracks, in line with the different versions of strong anti-voluntarism above.

Track 1 (4) Likewise, God's perfect goodness does not depend on God's will.

(5) So there must be some concept of goodness which is prior to God's will.

(6) Thus, some moral things do not depend on/can be explained without reference to God's will. [SAV (1)]

The basic idea in this reconstruction-track is that the argument moves along the line of the three main perfections of God. Bayle begins with a claim about perfect knowledge and power, and the implication is that the same point would hold with regard to the perfection of goodness. Therefore, God's perfect goodness would also not depend on God's willing to be perfectly good. So, in order to understand this goodness which precedes God's willing, there must be some specific moral principles which are prior to God's will. As explained above, the problem with this reconstruction is that it does not require a strong enough version of anti-voluntarism to ensure that it is the creaturely ethics that does not depend on God's will. ¹²⁹

Track 2 (4) God's omniscience involves God's knowledge of all characteristics of both God and creatures, including moral characteristics.

(5) God's omnipotence involves God's ability to actualize or refrain from actualizing all these characteristics about which God knows, including moral characteristics.

(6) Thus, the content of all moral features of the world and God does not depend on/can be explained without reference to God's will. [SAV (3)]

¹²⁹ One twist which would push this line of interpretation to the limits of its plausibility would be to argue that God's moral goodness is contextual and relational. Even if God's goodness were understood in a counterfactual way, as involving in part what God could or would do in certain situations, there may be enough of an implication of creatures' goodness as the context for God's goodness that even on this track Bayle's metaphysical argument would lead to SAV (2) or SAV (3).
It seems that the more plausible way of reading Bayle's argument is to take him as implying that God's omniscience and omnipotence are not merely formal and empty attributes but that they must be content specific. God's omniscience involves all the truths God knows about ethics, so if God's being omniscient is prior to God's will, then all the truths about ethics must be prior to God's will also. Furthermore, God's omnipotence implies God's ability to perform specific actions. Since God has this power even if not actually exercising this power, God's omnipotence implies a range of possibility which precedes actuality. God's omnipotence extends down to particular moral details; for example, it would imply that God could create a being who commits several sins but mostly does the right thing. Thus, since God's omnipotence is prior to God's actual willing, and since God's omnipotence implies all content-specific moral possibilities, the system of ethics must also be prior to God's actual willing.

**Leibniz's argument on eternal truths and God's understanding**

We have worked through multiple arguments, both indirect and direct, which Leibniz employs to reject dogmas (1) and (3), respectively, the voluntaristic position and the dualistic ethical position. In rejecting these alternatives, Leibniz is arguing for a monistic ethical framework, wherein there is a single system of ethics for both creatures and God. However, Leibniz does not use merely this broader strategy of indirect argument. He makes independent metaphysical arguments for his conception of the relation between God's understanding, his will, and truths and essences. There are two steps involved in directing this argumentative strategy toward the conclusion that God and humans inhabit the same ethical world. First comes Leibniz's general argument on the grounding of eternal truths in God's understanding, and second comes the evidence that for Leibniz moral truths are a sub-category of eternal truths (for Leibniz does not ground all truths in God's understanding alone). I envision three reasons Leibniz would have moved toward these more metaphysical arguments, and these reasons serve as well
to motivate my examination of the arguments. First of all, Leibniz makes a much stronger case for his claims about the real universality of ethics by moving to these additional arguments. Second, he addresses one of the motivations for voluntarism, that things are dependent on God. Third, these arguments are related to other significant elements of his theodicy.

Leibniz makes a claim which complements the conclusion of Bayle's argument above, and in doing so he invokes his underlying metaphysics. Even though it is the case according to Bayle (and presumably Leibniz, for he quotes Bayle approvingly in this passage) that creatures would be obliged to follow moral laws if there were no God, Leibniz argues that eternal verities—and so, it is implied, moral truths—are not entirely independent of God. He says,

For it is, in my judgment, the divine understanding which gives reality to the eternal verities, albeit God's will have no part therein. All reality must be founded on something existent. It is true that an atheist may be a geometrician: but if there were no God, geometry would have no object. And without God, not only would there be nothing existent, but there would be nothing possible.

If all reality, even what is real in various possibilities, must be grounded in something which is existent, then possibilities could have no reality of their own accord. Without something existent as ground, there would be nothing possible. This conclusion follows validly, but a pertinent question which follows it is, "What sense of possibility is Leibniz

---

130 Theodicy, sec. 183, p. 243.
131 Just prior to his argument, Leibniz says, "The late Jacob Thomasius, a celebrated Professor at Leipzig, made the apt observation...that it is not advisable to go altogether beyond God, and that one must not say, with some Scotists, that the eternal verities would exist even though there were no understanding, not even that of God." (Theodicy, sec. 184, p. 243.)
132 Theodicy, sec. 184, p. 243. See also Leibniz's Monadology, sections 43-44. A fruitful and intriguing comparison could be made between Leibniz's claim here that the possibles must be grounded in the understanding of an existent God and Berkeley's argument for the existence of God on the basis that God is necessary as an eternal spirit or mind, functioning as substratum of all ideas. See Berkeley's The Principles of Human Knowledge, sections 6-7.
using here?" Does Leibniz mean the possibility which corresponds to what he terms
metaphysical necessity? If so, then the implication would be that without God, possibility
would imply a contradiction. However, I am not convinced that Leibniz's case is this
strong, so there remains some tension between this argument and his notions of
possibility and necessity.

Leibniz and Descartes

Leibniz's example of the atheist geometer is intriguing, largely because Descartes
uses the same illustration in his argument for a different conclusion. This example is in a
way symbolic of the broad similarity of discussion yet sharp disparity of conclusion
between Leibniz and Descartes on the subject of God's understanding and will. For
instance, Descartes makes this argument with terms strikingly similar to Leibniz's:

That an atheist can know clearly that the three angles of
a triangle are equal to two right angles, I do not deny, I
merely affirm that, on the other hand, such knowledge on his
part cannot constitute true science, because no knowledge that
can be rendered doubtful should be called science. Since he
is, as supposed, an Atheist, he cannot be sure that he is not
deceived in the things that seem most evident to him, as has
been sufficiently shown....

Descartes is rejecting the possibility that an atheist could really be a geometrician, even
though an atheist could in some sense know some of the truths of geometry.

Furthermore, Descartes fits the example into his own peculiar system; an atheist cannot
have true scientific knowledge because true science does not involve doubt. On
Descartes' system, there will always be the possibility of significant doubt at the most

\[133\] Objections and Replies II, in The Essential Descartes, ed. Margaret D. Wilson, pp. 238-239 (italics are Descartes').
basic level unless there is a good God who grounds all reality. Therefore, Descartes' comments on the atheist geometer presuppose his argument that God is not a deceiver.

Leibniz seems to take the opposite view; in fact, one interpretation of the text above is that Leibniz is responding to Descartes' claims when the former says that an atheist may be a geometrician. However, a little further in the text Leibniz says, "That, however, does not hinder those who do not see the connexion of all things one with another and with God from being able to understand certain sciences, without knowing their first source, which is in God." One might emphasize Leibniz's qualification here that atheism is not a hindrance to understanding of certain sciences. The argument would go that just as Descartes allows a kind of knowledge to the atheist while denying scientific knowledge in the fullest sense to the disbeliever, so too Leibniz is making a distinction between some endeavors which are sciences in a sense but do not involve scientific knowledge in the fullest sense. However, it seems more reasonable that Leibniz is making a distinction here between sciences like geometry, which the atheist can do, and other sciences like metaphysics, which the atheist cannot properly do without knowledge of God.

Leibniz is making a metaphysical point in using the atheist geometer example, rather than following the epistemological slant of Descartes' argument. The distinction can be seen in the deeper argument which undergirds Leibniz's comments on the example. The problem for the atheist geometer according to Leibniz is not that she will experience some sort of pervasive doubt. On the contrary, the atheist geometer is capable of genuine knowledge, but she is incapable of the deepest kind of metaphysical

\footnote{At this point, the two texts are insufficient to determine this historical conclusion. An interpretation at least as plausible is that the atheist geometer was a common problem of the philosophical discourse of the times. Further, this interpretation is neutral to the issue of whether Descartes originated the atheist geometer example. I can well imagine a scenario 300 years from now in which a historian, searching through the written remains of 20th century Western philosophy, finds two articles, both of which refer to brains in a vat with no mention of Hilary Putnam. Indeed, it is just such a historical-critical argument that leads Biblical scholars to posit the existence of a Q (quelle) source for the synoptic Gospels.}

\footnote{\textit{Theodicy}, sec. 184, p. 243.}
knowledge, for she lacks knowledge about an important part of reality. If there really were no God, then the atheist’s geometry would not be real. While Descartes’ argument that God is not a deceiver supports his comments on this example, Leibniz’s metaphysical arguments about God’s understanding as the ground of the reality of possibles, essences, and eternal truths supports his take on the issue.

Leibniz disagrees with Descartes on other points as well, notably on the issue of voluntarism which is lurking behind this discussion of the atheist geometer. Descartes is one of Leibniz’s predecessors who argues for the radical priority of God’s will over the goodness which results from God’s will. It would be reasonable to assume that the following argument of Descartes is one of the targets of Leibniz’s many arguments against the priority of God’s will over the system of ethics.\footnote{Leibniz complicates matters when he makes this claim about Descartes: “I cannot even imagine that M. Descartes can have been quite seriously of this opinion [that God is the free cause of truths and essences or that God could have established that two contradictories would be compatible], although he had adherents who found this easy to believe....It was apparently one of his tricks, one of his philosophic feints: he prepared for himself some loophole, as when for instance he discovered a trick for denying the movement of the earth, while he was a Copernican in the strictest sense.” (\textit{Theodicy}, sec. 186, p. 244.) On the basis of this text, one might think that some Cartesians are Leibniz’s real target for his anti-voluntarist arguments. However, Leibniz may also just be using a rhetorical device to exaggerate what he takes to be the implausibility of Descartes’ position.} Descartes says,

\begin{quote}
For if any reason for what is good had preceded His pre-ordination, it would have determined Him towards that which it was best to bring about; but on the contrary because He determined Himself towards those things which ought to be accomplished, for that reason, as it stands in Genesis, \textit{they are very good}; that is to say, the reason for their goodness is the fact that He wished to create them so.\footnote{\textit{Objections and Replies} VI, in \textit{The Essential Descartes}, pp. 294-295 (italics are Descartes’).}
\end{quote}

One notable element of this argument is its reference to the first creation account of Genesis.\footnote{“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Genesis 1: 31a, NRSV translation.)} Just as Leibniz appears to be answering Descartes concerning the atheist geometrician, so Leibniz also refers to the authority of the same passage of Scripture in
order to support his radically different conclusion. Leibniz says in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, "For if this [the opinion that God's works are good only because God created them] were so, God, knowing that he is their author, would not have had to consider them afterwards and find them good, as is testified by the Sacred Scriptures...."\(^{139}\) What Leibniz neglects to mention is that, given his own system of metaphysics and theology, God likewise would not need to examine the results of his creative will in order to determine whether they are good. Furthermore, neither Leibniz's nor Descartes' interpretation can be definitively favored on the basis of the Genesis text.

A second observation about Descartes' argument concerns his terminology that God directs his will toward those things which *ought to be accomplished*. This kind of wording gives the impression that there is a category of ethical truth which is independent of God's will, since his will picks out those things which ought to be. If this reading were correct, Descartes would be defeating the very voluntarism he intends to establish in this passage! Instead, for the sake of consistency with the remainder of the text, the "ought" must refer to the binding nature for *creatures* of those moral principles which God's will determines. These things ought to be accomplished, posterior to God's decree establishing them, precisely because God has determined them.

A related comment based on the terms Descartes uses is that in general it is difficult to map the dispute between Leibniz and Descartes using a key involving contemporary ethical distinctions. I am referring to the contemporary language which follows basic and by no means wholly contemporary distinctions such as that between teleological and deontological theories. In this passage Descartes says that God creates things which both are good and ought to be done. It would be troublesome, for instance, to attempt to decide from this text how to characterize Descartes' ethics in contemporary

\(^{139}\textit{Discourse on Metaphysics},\textit{ sec.2}, \textit{in G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays, p.36.}\)
terms, say either as teleological or deontological.\textsuperscript{140} (Of course, voluntaristic theories are generally considered to be types of deontological theories.)

A fourth observation about this argument is that Leibniz accepts the initial conditional statement, that reasons for good independent of God's will would in some sense determine God toward that which is best to do. Leibniz readily accepts this consequence in the happy necessity argument above. Furthermore, this conditional plays a role in Leibniz's general argument that this world is the best one possible.

Finally, I shall note Descartes' claim above that God determines himself toward those things which God's will selects for creation. We have already seen that Leibniz makes a strikingly similar claim in his \textit{Notes on Some Comments by Fardella}. Leibniz there says that the mind is determined by nothing but itself.\textsuperscript{141} In this work Leibniz is replying to objections about the freedom of the human mind, but his claim could consistently be extended to God's mind. Perhaps the primary difference between Descartes and Leibniz would be that the former means that there is nothing outside of God's will which determines it while the latter means that there is nothing outside of God which determines God (and so for Leibniz there are things outside of God's will yet still within God, namely in the understanding, which determine God's will).

\textbf{Leibniz's argument on eternal truths reconsidered}

Leibniz, in the argument based on the grounding of eternal truths in God's understanding, is making an ingenious metaphysical move which accounts for one motivation behind a divine-command theory but avoids its most obvious ethical difficulties. Leibniz rests the truths, whether moral or otherwise, fundamentally in God's

\textsuperscript{140}I do not mean either to preclude the possibility of this kind of examination of Leibniz and Descartes—for example through the interpretation of additional texts—or to argue against the value of such an examination. In fact, as should be apparent from this work, I am sympathetic to some level of relation of historical texts to contemporary discussions.

\textsuperscript{141}See footnote \textsuperscript{111} above.
understanding rather than God's will. One could say that the system of justice or ethics is dependent upon God for its reality, but its rightness is not dependent upon the will of God.

This claim by Leibniz closely parallels one of the fundamental strategies of his overall theodicy. It is also the case, according to Leibniz, that the essences of things are independent of God's will. The origin of evil, specifically metaphysical evil, is in the original essences of possible creatures. Such essences would depend on God's understanding for their reality, but since they are independent of God's will—precisely, since the origin of evil is independent of this will—God's goodness is preserved in the face of the origin of evil. Leibniz's theodicy here adopts a general strategy discussed by ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato or even the Stoics, who place the origin of evil outside of God in imperfect matter with which God must work to create the world. But such a theodicy sacrifices God's omnipotence. Since Leibniz places the origin of evil in the essences, in the possibles, which are independent of the domain of God's will, he is able to account for the origin of evil and preserve both God's goodness and God's power in doing so.\textsuperscript{142} I will turn to these issues in more detail below.

Returning to the question at hand, Leibniz clearly denies that God's will is prior to goodness/justice; he rejects each of the three dogmas presented above. Given the above arguments on innocent suffering, this position of Leibniz means that a deontological objection to the suffering of innocents still threatens the overall efficacy of his theodicy. But one could make a further attempt to defend Leibniz here, taking a cue from his discussion of God's goodness. Leibniz cites Bayle's reference to Paul's consideration of the incomprehensibility of the ways of God and says that "...it is implied that, if one understood them [the incomprehensible ways], one would find them consistent with justice, God not being able to use his power otherwise."\textsuperscript{143} Further, Leibniz refers to

\textsuperscript{142}See \textit{Theodicy}, sec. 20, p. 135 and sec. 335, pp. 326-327.

\textsuperscript{143}\textit{Theodicy}, sec. 179, p. 238.
Calvin, who acknowledges that "...the decrees of God are in conformity with justice and wisdom, although the reasons that might prove this conformity in detail are unknown to us."\textsuperscript{144} While Leibniz has argued that God conforms to the same principles of goodness and justice by which creatures are bound, creatures cannot be expected to know how each action of God conforms to such principles of goodness and justice, given their limited understanding.\textsuperscript{145}

On the basis of the incompleteness of our creaturely knowledge, then, one could argue that it is open that an act which is \textit{prima facie} wrong or unjust in our judgment is in reality not wrong or unjust. Specifically, one might argue that while instances of innocent suffering seem unjust, if one knew the larger framework of justice in the way God knows it, one would see that such instances are not unjust at all. Such a response would (if successful) certainly block this problem of evil objection formulated as a logical—rather than evidential—problem. Again, the logical problem of evil concerns the question of whether God's omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness are \textit{consistent} with the existence of evil; the evidential problem of evil concerns the difficulty of whether the actual existence of evils constitutes inductive evidence against the existence of (such a) God. However, it is again important at this point that the innocent suffering complaint is made in terms of a type of deontological framework. A utilitarian, whether rule or act, would have to admit a possible hidden justice in such suffering considering God's perspective. However, if the suffering is a straightforward transgression of a constraint on action, then it is unclear how it would be possible for such suffering to be justified without fundamentally altering the essentials of the system of justice. It is one thing to grant that there are many aspects of the world which are incomprehensible to finite human minds; it is quite another to claim that the evident injustice of an instance of

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Theodicy}, sec. 182, p. 240.
\textsuperscript{145} Such an assertion underlies Stephen Wykstra's contemporary argument using the CORNEA principle against William Rowe's evidential problem of evil argument.
innocent suffering is such an incomprehensible element of the world. Another way to respond is by utilizing the reductio ad absurdum Leibniz uses to reject the three dogmas. If it were open that such horrible instances of suffering might be in the end good and right, then the system of justice and ethics would be fundamentally unreliable and unacceptable.

Leibniz's account of the division between, and relation of, God's understanding and will is crucial to his response to the problem of evil. In addition to its relevance to the questions about ethics for God I have raised above, the understanding/will distinction underlies important positions on the origin of evil, the particular problem of God's complicity in human sin, and the framework surrounding God's creation of the world. I shall turn to a brief consideration of these issues as aspects of Leibniz's theodicy. Initially, I shall touch upon the sin problem as R.C. Sleigh defines it, and I shall then trace a linkage between this concern and Leibniz's account of the origin of evil.

Sleigh places Leibniz's work in Confessio Philosophi into the category of early intense activity based on the problem of evil. Sleigh's forthcoming article, Leibniz's First Theodicy, focuses on Leibniz's attempt to respond in his early work to what Sleigh calls the author of sin problem (discussed early in this inquiry), that God's causal contribution to the existence of human sins is a menace to God's holiness. In this work, Sleigh presents Leibniz's attempt to respond to the particular problem in Confessio Philosophi, a response which centers upon the distinction between God's understanding and God's will. Sleigh concludes that Leibniz recognizes important inadequacies involved with this response.\textsuperscript{146} I shall take up the distinction at this point and argue that Leibniz employs it for a more fundamental and much less problematic purpose, the explanation of the origin of metaphysical evil in his late work, Theodicy.

Therefore, in addition to the larger interpretive investigation into the relation for Leibniz between God's understanding and will (and in addition to the critical examination of the relation between Leibniz's position on these attributes of God and the problem of physical evil), I am moved to cautiously advance a preliminary historical claim. If Sleigh is right in arguing that Leibniz initially proffers and then ultimately rejects the understanding/will distinction as a solution to the author of sin problem in Confessio Philosophi, I would make a further claim which is consistent with Sleigh's. Leibniz does not abandon this distinction but rather puts it to a different use in his more mature work on evil, employing it at a deeper theoretical level with regard to his theodicy project.

At this point it is appropriate to turn to a brief account of Sleigh's argument on the Confessio Philosophi material. First of all, as seen in the discussion above, the author of sin problem is a specific type of problem of moral evil. Let us consider the problem from a different point of view, which stems from the metaphysics of God's concurrence in the actions of creatures. The difficulty arises from the tension between God's power and goodness in the following way. God cannot be in any way morally responsible for the commission of a sin if God is morally perfect, yet the range of God's potency would seem to extend at least to the existence of creaturely sins.\(^{147}\) God does seem to causally contribute to their existence, in particular either by directly contributing to the free elicitation of a sinful choice by a creature or by freely choosing not to prevent the free eduction of a sinful choice by a creature.\(^{148}\)

Sleigh emphasizes Leibniz's work on this author of sin problem in the context of the tradition of Scholastic philosophy. Leibniz rejects the attempt by Scholastics to argue that God causally contributes to all the physical or natural aspects of a sinful action

\(^{147}\)Of course, were God to directly sin, God's goodness would be shaken in the most problematic way. Sleigh points out that it was a commonly held premise in the Scholastic tradition that God could not author a sin in this most obvious way. ("Leibniz's First Theodicy," p. 5).

\(^{148}\)Sleigh, "Leibniz's First Theodicy," p. 5.
without contributing anything to the moral aspect of the action.\textsuperscript{149} While rejecting this attempted reconciliation as unreasonable, Leibniz advances his own resolution in \textit{Confessio Philosophi}, and his solution is centered upon the distinction between the will and the understanding of God. Even though God is the ultimate cause of sinful actions, and without God such sins would not exist, God is not the author of those sinful actions. The reason for Leibniz is that "...sins are not due to the divine will, but rather to the divine understanding, or, what amounts to the same thing, to the eternal ideas, i.e., the nature of things."\textsuperscript{150} If sins do not result from God's will, then God would not be responsible for them in a moral sense; God would not be culpable. However, Leibniz is also claiming that God \textit{is responsible} for the existence of sinful actions; they would not exist were God not to understand them. The existence of sinful actions of creatures is grounded in the existence—but not the will—of God.

Although Leibniz's resort to the will/understanding distinction initially seems to preserve both God's holiness and his causal importance with regard to human sin, there are nevertheless other threats to the reasonableness of this defense. In particular, Leibniz himself addresses two threats in \textit{Confessio Philosophi}: the objection that all things (not just sins) would therefore result from God's nature; and the objection that on this account sins would be necessary.\textsuperscript{151} Sleigh's claim is that "...Leibniz came to see the inadequacy of the \textit{Confessio} in the areas just noted [in the areas of the two objections above]."\textsuperscript{152}

Let us now turn from Sleigh's emphasis on Leibniz's early work on the problem of evil to Leibniz's mature work on evil, his \textit{Theodicy}. In particular, I want to focus on Leibniz's repeated use of this distinction between God's understanding and will in \textit{Theodicy}, a use which is quite different from that of the \textit{Confessio Philosophi}. The contrast can be framed by raising some further difficulties with the distinction as a

\textsuperscript{149}Sleigh, "Leibniz's First Theodicy," p. 9.
\textsuperscript{150}Sleigh, "Leibniz's First Theodicy," p. 11, with Sleigh quoting from \textit{Confessio Philosophi} 121.
\textsuperscript{151}Sleigh, "Leibniz's First Theodicy," p. 12, from \textit{Confessio Philosophi} 124.
response to the author of sin problem, and the project of *Theodicy* provides the conceptual ammunition for such a critique. Although the distinction is initially at least intriguing as a solution to problems of sin, it is fundamentally misguided because it intersects the problem of evil at an inappropriate conceptual level.

As we have seen, Leibniz distinguishes evil into three categories in *Theodicy*: metaphysical evil, or mere imperfection, moral evil, or sin; and physical evil, or suffering.\textsuperscript{153} Leibniz wants to claim a certain priority between these different types of evil. An important part of my first section on the problem of suffering, Leibniz at times seems to claim a straightforward priority of moral evils over physical ones, inasmuch as he wants to claim that some physical evil results from moral evil.\textsuperscript{154} Further, Leibniz also indicates an order between metaphysical evil and moral evil. He says, "For we must consider that there is an original imperfection in the creature before sin, because the creature is limited in its essence; whence ensues that it cannot know all, and that it can deceive itself and commit other errors."\textsuperscript{155} Evil at the metaphysical level has a conceptual priority over evil at the moral level; metaphysical evil is a necessary condition for the existence of moral evil.

However, in the *Confessio Philosophi* employment of the will/understanding distinction to account for sins, or moral evil, the role played by metaphysical evil is overlooked. Leibniz's schema is incomplete, given the perspective of *Theodicy*, and he moves too quickly to a linkage of moral evil to God's understanding. The problem with grounding moral evil in God's understanding is that it leaves God's will—and ultimately, therefore, God's goodness—out of the framework of the theodicy. If moral evils exist solely because they are in the nature of things grounded in God's understanding, then God's will plays no part in actualizing moral evils. However, as will be seen below,

\textsuperscript{153} *Theodicy*, sec. 21, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{154} *Theodicy*, sec. 241, p. 276.
\textsuperscript{155} *Theodicy*, sec. 20, p. 135.
Leibniz presents a radically different account of the existence of moral evils in *Theodicy*. Further, if God does not in some sense will the existence of the world, with its moral evils, then it is unclear how such a world would at all be a product of God's goodness. It seems that the solution proposed to defend God's goodness against the menace of sin would ultimately threaten to drown God's goodness in the wake of necessitarianism.

Leibniz, however, avoids these pitfalls by claiming that metaphysical evil, not moral evil, is grounded in God's understanding. He says, "The question is asked first of all, whence does evil come? *Si Deus est, unde malum? Si non est, unde bonum?* The ancients attributed the cause of evil to *matter*, which they believed uncreate and independent of God: but we, who derive all being from God, where shall we find the source of evil?"\textsuperscript{156} The imputation of evil's origin to matter makes for a simple defense of God's goodness. If the material with which God must work to create a world is in some way flawed from the outset, then the existence of evil would not indicate a defect in God's character. However, the matter-defense involves a significant breach in God's omnipotence.

Leibniz's clever answer to the question of evil's origin is in the spirit of Augustine's triumph over the dualism of Manicheism. Leibniz answers the question in several sections throughout *Theodicy*, and the following presentation is striking in the similarity of crucial terms with those in *Confessio Philosophi*. He responds:

> 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.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{156}*Theodicy*, sec. 20, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{157}*Theodicy*, sec. 335, pp. 326-327.
Leibniz's grounding of evil here is more complex than that of the ancients to which Leibniz refers above. This element of his theodicy involves a rather complicated metaphysical framework, and I shall only indicate some of its important elements. Metaphysical evils originate in the imperfections of possible creatures; the imperfection comes in contrast to God. Creatures must be substantively different from God, for it is supposed that God cannot simply reproduce God's own self in creating. Therefore, the creatures are imperfect in contrast to God because they are limited and finite. Furthermore, there is a subsistence of a realm of ideas; this realm is the region of all possibles. So these original imperfections subsist at the level of possible essences or ideas—ideas which subsist in the understanding of God.

Leibniz's account of the origin of metaphysical evil preserves God's goodness because evil is not born of God's will (just as matter as the matrix of evil would preserve God's goodness). And the grounding of evil in God's understanding preserves God's power because the realm of possibles counts as reality which is legitimately external to the domain of God's will (unlike matter according to Leibniz). Leibniz now has the makings of a theodicy.

Further, Leibniz's claim in the above Theodicy passage is more plausible than the parallel claim made in Confessio Philosophi. In his later work, he is arguing that God is not the author of essences (and, most importantly, of metaphysical evils, or the imperfections in essences), while in the earlier work he is claiming that God is not the author of sins, or moral evils. In both cases it is God's understanding that does the significant theodicean work. However, Leibniz's better developed system in Theodicy also has a ready place for God's will in relation to God's understanding and its object, the possibles. His employment of the distinction now avoids the charges of necessitarianism and the absence of a role for God's goodness which rather quickly threaten the Confessio Philosophi argument.
Once the beginnings of metaphysical evil have been accounted for, Leibniz moves on to say, "But there is nothing actual to which he has not decreed and given existence; and he has permitted evil because it is involved in the best plan existing in the region of possibles, a plan which supreme wisdom could not fail to choose."158 This additional move is crucial for Leibniz's theodicy, for it is one thing to account for the origin of metaphysical evil, but quite another to account for the presence of moral and physical evil. The latter two kinds exist in the realm of an actual world, not at the level of essences, ideas, possibles. The natural question given Leibniz's genealogy of metaphysical evil is to still ask why, given all that, sin and suffering exist. The claim that such evils are part of the best possible world is a significant step toward answering such a question. In this claim we see the greatest-good defense strand of Leibniz's theodicy. But a more complete accounting of evil demands more explanation. As I have shown, Leibniz himself acknowledges that a theodicy of merely global greater goods would be insufficient to answer the problem of suffering. And, given the unity of God and creatures in Leibniz's scheme of ethics, the moral dimension of suffering makes a claim on human beings as it does on the divine. Leibniz's global defense of evil does not imply complicity with or resignation to evil on the personal level. On the contrary, Leibniz somewhat surprisingly defends a robust ethical activism.

158 *Theodicy*, sec. 335, p. 327.
Part III: Leibniz's moral activism

Quietism vs. activism as related to preceding sections

The dynamic between the problem of evil, in its articulation of specific challenges to theism, and theodicy, in its formulation of responses to those challenges, is powered by both practical and theoretical concerns. The most challenging versions of the problem of evil are motivated by a moral concern with the kinds and degrees of wrongdoing and suffering that occur in the actual world. Without this practical concern, these versions of the problem of evil would not arise. These problems do develop in earnest because of their moral dimensions.

This dynamic reflects upon the issues under consideration in this section, in general terms the debate between quietism and activism regarding Leibniz's theodicy. In discussing quietism vs. activism I shall be following theoretical implications of preceding sections, as I shall explain in more detail below, but I shall also be motivated by a "return to the moral concern," in a sense reconsidering the practical concern which motivates the most troubling versions of the problem of evil. Having ascended to the theoretical intricacies of theodicy's reply to suffering and of voluntarism via a conceptual ladder with its base in moral concern, I shall in a sense descend again to the practical on the other side of this preceding conceptual discussion. This descent is important in two ways. On the one hand, I am asking the question, What are the implications of Leibniz's theodicy on one's living an ethical life? Does his best-possible-world theodicy leave room for an actively-engaged individual moral life? Further, does his theodicy imply a particular moral posture with relation to evil in the world? I shall argue that the answers to both questions are affirmative. On the other hand, I am working toward the question in the conclusion of this thesis, Is there any answer to the problem of evil? As we shall see, the debate between quietism and activism casts a significant light upon this second main question.
In addition to these general comments about my treatment of Leibniz's moral activism, there are several points of connection with specific philosophical arguments from preceding sections. Perhaps most obviously, there is a continuity between the discussion of Leibniz's anti-voluntarism in the previous section and the questions about quietism and activism which will follow. In arguing against a voluntarist ethics, and in declining to seize voluntarism as a natural theodicy strategy, Leibniz emphasizes the bond between creatures and God in terms of ethics. From one point of view, emphasizing this bond allows the threat which the problem of innocent suffering poses to theism to persist. The problem's matrix is the ethical milieu of the experience of rational creatures in the actual world, but its nexus to God--its persistence as a theological problem--is this ethical unity between creatures and God. From a different point of view, however, the present concern with activism and quietism emphasizes this same unity. The problem of evil in general, and the problem of innocent suffering in particular, shifts a burden of moral response to human beings, just as there is a burden placed upon the theist to justify God in light of such evil. For the philosopher, the theological response to the problem of evil may well be primarily theoretical, and it may seem that the response demanded of humans is disanalogously practical. However, as we shall see, the debate between activism and quietism certainly involves different conclusions about what it means to be human and what it means to be a virtuous human being. Furthermore, for the theistic philosopher, the theological response to the problem of evil most definitely has a practical dimension as well.

There is also a parallel between (1) this link between voluntarism and activism and (2) an interesting connection between the "author of sin" problem and activism. The "author of sin" problem arises because of questions about the extent of God's causality and the range of human causality with regard to moral actions in the world. The questions focus on whether moral responsibility for sins in the world might be shifted to
God. The discussion of activism below rests on the same questions about the intersection of divine and human causality with respect to moral action; the implications are simply drawn in a different direction. The questions of quietism and activism focus on whether moral responsibility for goodness in the world rests at all on the shoulders of human agents. Another way to put the point is that through Leibniz's reply to the "author of sin" problem, he saves a robust category of human wrongdoing,159 while through his position on activism he saves a robust category of human "rightdoing" or good action. On the one hand, human agency is metaphysically and morally necessary to explain the presence of particular sins, and on the other hand, the same agency is needed to explain specific right actions in the world. Therefore, just as the issue of a unified system of ethics serves as a bi-directional conceptual bridge between voluntarism and activism, so too does the issue of the intersection between divine and human causality serve as such a bridge between the "author of sin" problem of evil and activism.

There is one further salient connection between these three main thesis sections, and it emerges with a specific hypothetical case that was historically definitive for quietists. R.A. Knox discusses quietism and its emphasis on a disinterested love of God, with the extreme test case that one should seek death and even hell if God were to will one to suffer eternally.160 In fact, Knox argues that this question of acquiescence in one's own damnation as a result of one's love of God is the primary issue in the theological controversy, which we shall discuss further below, between Bossuet and Fenelon. For the moment I shall merely make the point that this example shows another way that quietism vs. activism relates to voluntarism and the problem of suffering. The example links

---

159To be precise, the issue in the "author of sin" discussion is perhaps whether God does wrong in addition to the sinful causal contribution of humans. However, the brief description of the (Muslim) Ash'arite position lends itself to this interpretation of making room for human sin and moral responsibility. (See Arthur Hyman & James J. Walsh, ed., Philosophy in the Middle Ages, p. 206.)

quietism with the former, since it reveals a quietist assumption of a voluntarist ethics. The example turns on assuming that (1) God could do something that would be wholly contrary to one's most basic self-interest (such as damning one to suffer eternally) and that (2) God would nonetheless remain a worthy object of one's love and devotion. God's goodness would have to follow from God's will in order for the possibility of such an extreme case of torture to be considered good.\footnote{For the example to require voluntarism, one must suppose that the damnation in question is undeserved. If one were to accept the concept of eternal suffering as just retribution, then one could quite coherently be a \textit{non-voluntarist} quietist, acquiescing in one's own eternal damnation, loving God for God's just judgment. Such a position is coherently possible but an implausible reading of the quietist example, given the assumption (with which Knox would agree) that quietists did not tend to view themselves as being in fact worthy of damnation.} Furthermore, this example relates quietism to the problem of suffering, as the damnation of infants is one example of innocent suffering which Leibniz himself considers in his \textit{Theodicy}, as we have seen above. More specifically, one can infer that in employing the example the quietist would be using voluntarism as a theodicy in precisely the way Leibniz does not. One must suppose that it is precisely because of the primacy of God's power over this or that specific ethical action that such a God would avoid blemish in sentencing devoted followers to eternal torment. The theological problem that such suffering would raise is squelched by such a God's power.

It is difficult to see how a worthy concept of love would survive such an extreme demonstration of its efficacy. And Patrick Riley certainly makes a strong case that Leibniz rejects this quietist notion of love as disinterested. Yet, this discussion of quietism, while generally serving as a foil for Leibniz's moral and theological activism, also may reveal another fault-line in Leibniz's theodicy.\footnote{Another example of such a fault line is that, while I have argued that Leibniz is to some extent sensitive to the problem of innocent suffering (certainly more sensitive than in the view of those commentators who argue that he is absolutely \textit{insensitive} to it), ultimately his theodicy does not give a satisfactory answer to the problem, and in fact the best possible world strand of his theodicy is antithetical to a resolution to the problem.} To the extent that Leibniz's theodicy emphasizes global goodness in the sense of the best possible world—or even if
Leibniz allows a qualified criterion of personal happiness to function in theodicy to the degree that it is consistent with global metaphysical goodness—his theodicy seems *prima facie* to be aligned with quietism in that goodness is ultimately to be evaluated in a fundamentally dis-interested or impersonal way. Therefore, these strands of his theodicy seem to be in tension with his ethics. To the degree that Leibniz’s theodicy has strands that do emphasize the role of persons as goods to be considered in their own right (e.g. strands that recognize the legitimacy of the problem of suffering), these aspects of his theodicy would be consistent with his ethics on the issue of the fundamental value of personal interest.  

**Conceptual map of versions of fatalism and quietism**

As a guide to navigating the various texts from Leibniz and others on fatalism, quietism, and activism, I shall examine the concepts of fatalism and quietism by distinguishing various possible senses of the terms. When Leibniz describes a view as fatalistic, it is sometimes dubious whether his use of the term is entirely accurate, as we see in the discussion of *Fatum Mahometanum*. When he mentions quietism, it is sometimes ambiguous in what sense it is invoked. And when interpreters of Leibniz such as Patrick Riley discuss Leibniz’s rejection of quietism, one may overlook the fact that there is more than one way to be a quietist, so that there is a question as to which kinds of

163 As with the principle of plenitude, one can draw an interesting implication between this debate over the place of human interest in evaluating the goodness of the world and contemporary environmental concerns. Briefly, from one environmental point of view, one can understand the position that human happiness should be subject to other evaluative criteria (such as the general goodness). An example would be the position that non-human species should flourish in the world even if it means curtailing human happiness (causing human suffering) to some extent. The more general related issue is the question of the compatibility of (evolutionary) science and religion, to the extent that religion emphasizes the special or absolute value of the human being. Of course, getting back to Leibniz, there may be a crucial difference between evaluating the world in terms of a single global criterion of goodness and evaluating the world in terms of various individual criteria of goodness which are to some degree in tension but which nevertheless must be balanced (such as an ideal of the flourishing of all species together, though not necessarily all individual creatures).
quietism Leibniz may be rejecting, why he would do so, and what the implications would be for his theodicy.

Let us then demarcate the relevant versions of fatalism and quietism, without settling the questions of which particular versions go with which thinkers or texts at this point. First of all, both fatalism and quietism should be distinguished from determinism. Determinism does not necessarily entail either fatalism or quietism, though it may serve as a foundation for both positions. For our purposes, glossing over the many nuances of debate over determinism, we may take it generally as the position that events in the world follow with necessity from the existence of prior governing conditions. We can understand fatalism and quietism as responses to determinism. In general, fatalism centers on a conclusion about the ken of human power, action, and responsibility, given determinism in the world,164 while quietism focuses on the morally best mode of human living, given a context of theism. Some versions of quietism, however, can be generated independently of considerations of determinism.

Here then are some relevant versions of fatalism and quietism.

**Fatalism(1):** A particular human choice and action will have no impact on future events.

**Fatalism(2):** Given that all events are determined necessarily, one should do nothing.165

**Fatalism(3):** Given that all events are determined necessarily, one should only bother to do what is pleasurable to oneself.166

**Fatalism(4):** Given God's determination of particular events in the world, one should act in accord with such determination.167

**Fatalism(5):** A particular human choice and action, though entirely free,

---

164For example, Leibniz reconstructs the argument for fatalism as following from determinism in various ways. See his Preface to the *Theodicy*, p. 54.
165Compare one way in which Leibniz explains the sophism of the lazy reason. (Preface, *Theodicy*, p.54.)
166Compare another way in which Leibniz explains lazy reason. (Preface, *Theodicy*, p.54.)
167On this version, consider the Islamic debate over accepting God's willing of the plague.
will never accomplish its express goal, due to interventionist
determinism by a higher being.\textsuperscript{168}

\textit{Fatalism(6):} Given that all events are determined necessarily, one should
only bother to do what is ethically right or good.

And let us further examine some versions of quietism.

\textit{Quietism(1):} Human beings have no causal efficacy in the world; only
God does.\textsuperscript{169}

\textit{Quietism(2):} Human beings should willingly accept all events that God
has determined in the world.\textsuperscript{170}

\textit{Quietism(3):} Human beings should act as little as possible, passively
participating in God's actions in the world, with a goal
of ultimate human inaction.

\textit{Quietism(4):} Right human living involves acting in carefully restrained
ways, secluded from the mainstream of human society.

\textit{Quietism(5):} Human action should not be motivated by self-interest
but rather should follow from a disinterested love of God.\textsuperscript{171}

\textbf{Leibniz's \textit{Fatum Mahometanum}}

At this point, let us turn to an examination of two representative texts, from the
preliminary sections of Leibniz's \textit{Theodicy}, which mention fatalism and quietism. In the
first text, from the Preface, Leibniz has just discussed the fatalism which he says the
ancients referred to as "Lazy Reason," and he turns now to what he understands as the

\textsuperscript{168}Edward Craig sketches this version of fatalism, which is compatible with the strongest libertarian
versions of human freedom, in his article on fatalism in the \textit{Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy}, vol.3,
p.564.

\textsuperscript{169}Compare occasionalism, and compare the first version of fatalism above.

\textsuperscript{170}This version comes from Islamic tradition, emphasizing the possibility that, even if one holds that God
fully causally determines all events in the world, there is a human mental state of positive or negative
attitude or intention in relation to the occurrence of these events. Humans are morally responsible for these
intentions, even though God causes the actions. See Hyman & Walsh, p. 206.

\textsuperscript{171}Much of Knox's discussion of quietism centers on this version of it, as does Riley's examination of
Leibniz's rejection of quietism.
Islamic roots of fatalism. He says, "The false conception of necessity, being applied in practice, has given rise to what I call *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."\textsuperscript{172} The reasoning to which Leibniz refers at the end of this quotation is a simple argument of the form, *modus ponens*, in its most basic form:

\begin{enumerate}
\item If future events are determined, then my own choices and actions are not significant.
\item For various reasons, future events are determined.
\end{enumerate}

Thus, my own choices and actions are not significant.

The conclusion of this argument is the principle of fatalism, which sometimes takes the form of a resignation to the inevitability of events in the world, and which at other times takes the quite different implication that one may as well follow one's immediate urges without bothering with ethical reflection or concern.\textsuperscript{173} Leibniz rejects the fatalistic conclusion of the argument by rejecting the consequent of premise (1). He says, "It is untrue that the event happens whatever one may do: it will happen because one does what leads thereto...."\textsuperscript{174} Even were future events to be determined, the determination would flow through one's actions as effects and causes, not above them.

What makes this passage from Leibniz particularly interesting, however, is his attribution of fatalism to unique Muslim circumstances. Leibniz is not well-known in the *Theodicy* for an inclusive, sensitive tone toward figures from non-Christian religious traditions.\textsuperscript{175} In fact, Leibniz's use of a term like "Turks" when he is actually referring to

\textsuperscript{172}Preface, *Theodicy*, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{173}Though quietists are not fatalists in this sense, fatalism and quietism do share this resignation to powers and events which are out of one's control, though for quite different reasons. Also, as we shall see, quietists were sometimes accused of moral laxity as an implication of their basic beliefs.
\textsuperscript{174}Preface, *Theodicy*, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{175}One need only consider Leibniz's description of the great medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides that his "...merit is not sufficiently recognized in the statement that he is the first of the Rabbis to have ceased talking nonsense...."(*Theodicy*, sec. 262, p. 287.)
Muslims in general demonstrates a great deal of what could charitably be called naïveté (or could accusingly be considered prejudice). It would be equally ridiculous if a Muslim contemporary of Leibniz were to refer to his theodicy as the "Reasoning of the Romans" simply because Leibniz is a Christian—and a Lutheran at that! However, in fairness to Leibniz and his times, one must acknowledge the implicit respect in his willingness to discuss ideas, whatever their tradition of origin, on the same philosophical table of theodicy.\textsuperscript{176} And it is quite clear from Leibniz's writings on China that he does have a deep respect for persons and ideas even across great sectarian differences.\textsuperscript{177}

Let us focus, however, on two of Leibniz's specific claims about Islamic fatalism, for there are remarkable stories behind them. First, Leibniz claims that Turks (read "Muslims") will allegedly refuse to flee from dangerous situations and in fact will remain in areas even if they are infected by the plague. Is there any historical veracity to this empirical claim of Leibniz? Second, Leibniz claims that the fact of this stolid Muslim resistance to plagues is explained by their reliance on fatalism. Is this explanation accurate?

The answer to the first question is found in the history of the bubonic plague. It is fascinating and to some degree ironic that Leibniz's theodicy should come down to the plague on this issue. For one reason, the spread of the bubonic plague is one of the great examples of physical evil in the actual world.\textsuperscript{178} Though Leibniz does not consider the philosophical implications of the specific kind of suffering caused by the plague, the

\textsuperscript{176}Furthermore, to Leibniz's credit, he does speak approvingly of "Mahomet" and Muslims in the preface to his Theodicy (p. 51), specifically noting Islamic compatibility with the principal points of natural theology, in particular the ideas of monothelism and immortality of souls. Also, Richard Popkin points out that for most of the 17th century, Europeans lived with the possibility of Muslim conquest. See his "The Religious Background of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy," p. 49.

\textsuperscript{177}It is at least appropriate to wonder at this juncture about the question of Leibniz's sincerity, since the Theodicy was written and published for public perusal. The basic question recurs: Is Leibniz being disingenuous to mask his more radical commitments, or is he simply a complex, sometimes conflicted thinker on diverse topics?

\textsuperscript{178}Albert Camus' moving novel, The Plague, is one of the greatest works of literature of any genre in its articulation of the problem of evil in the context of a human story about a city afflicted by bubonic plague.
plague is undoubtedly part of Leibniz's cultural milieu, given the ravages of the Black Death in Europe just three centuries before Leibniz, and given the fact that the plague continued to menace Europe even during Leibniz's own lifetime.\(^\text{179}\) It would be speculation to suppose that the vaunted--or infamous--optimistic tone of Leibniz's theodicy was partially motivated by the hope that his society would move beyond the threat of such a horrible natural evil. And for a second reason, the Black Death of the 14th century was in a bizarre way a kind of demonstration of the irrational unity of the world. That plague broke out in the heart of Asia, spreading from Mongolia and China to India, across central and western Asia, through the Middle East, and into Africa and across Europe in waves of seemingly pre-established dis-harmony.\(^\text{180}\)

What is one to make, though, of the claim that Muslims refuse to flee from the spread of such a horrible disease? Interestingly enough, there is evidence that during the Black Death Islamic law forbade citizens from fleeing their communities during times of plague.\(^\text{181}\) Plague was a problem afflicting the Middle East from the early days of the development of Islam; in fact, the Black Death is considered to be the sixth major plague epidemic in Islamic history.\(^\text{182}\) Michael Dols has therefore traced the Islamic response to plague back to three specific principles, derived from Mohammed's teachings, which were influential to the early Muslim community:

1. Plague is mercy and martyrdom from God for a Muslim, but punishment from God for an infidel.

2. A Muslim should not enter or flee a plague-infested area.

\(^{179}\)For example, Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* chronicles the events of London stricken by plague in 1665.
\(^{180}\)Again, with this issue arises the question of the intersection of the happiness of persons with other kinds of goodness. The world of the Black Death would seem quite harmonious from the point of view of the Pasteurella pestis!
(3) Since plague comes directly from God, the disease is not contagious.\textsuperscript{183}

In answering the first question about Leibniz, this second principle is obviously the most relevant. There is an established tradition in the Islamic community, up to Leibniz's time, that one should not flee one's community if it is infected by plague, thus explaining what would otherwise seem an odd empirical claim by Leibniz about the behavior of Muslims. Given this background, the second question begs for an answer. Why would Islam have developed such a principle of response to plague? Is Leibniz correct in attributing the view to fatalistic reasoning? Upon examination of the history of Islamic reaction to plague, Leibniz's explanation of the no-flight principle seems cursory and his conclusion too hastily drawn. Michael Dols reminds one of the practical challenges of this epidemic; without today's medical knowledge of the plague bacillus, medieval Muslims—and indeed all persons of that era—were left with desperate attempts at defending themselves from the disease. Dols even goes so far as to suggest that there is a pragmatic explanation for the principle of non-flight, that it arises in part from a growing recognition of the contagious nature of the infection.\textsuperscript{184} It makes good medical sense that if plague is contagious, then prohibiting interaction between various communities would lessen the chances of further spread of the disease. If Dols is correct, then the origin of the principle of non-flight could not be further from Leibniz's explanation in terms of fatalism, In fact, from this point of view, the principle would evince a sort of medical activism rather than a fatalistic resignation.

However, it is clear upon examination of all three Islamic plague principles that this pragmatic explanation cannot stand alone. The third principle contradicts this medical explanation on its face. Dols' account of the incongruity is that these three

\textsuperscript{183}Dols, pp. 23, 109. These principles are based on texts from the hadith (Islamic sayings of the prophet Mohammed).
\textsuperscript{184}Dols, p. 110.
principles themselves were never without challenge but were actually controversial within the Muslim tradition,185 and that in general there is a tension between the empirical observations and feelings within the plague epidemics and the religious tradition as it culminates in the three principles.186 Even if one accepts the pragmatic explanation, there is clearly also a theological motivation for the plague principles. Muslims were working out ways to defend themselves against a horrible disease, but they were developing yet another kind of defense, as again the practical and theoretical are intertwined. Dols notes that "More fundamental and perhaps more effective was the spiritual defense which the Muslims sought to formulate against this otherwise unaccountable scourge. The severe pandemic posed in acute form the basic theological problem of all Semitic religions: how to reconcile men's suffering with the justice and mercy of God."187 These Islamic plague principles--and especially the first one providing for the divine purpose of the plague--may be viewed then as the beginnings of a theodicy in response to the bewildering suffering caused by the plague.

Even though there is this significant theological dimension to the three plague principles, Leibniz's attribution of fatalism to the second principle is still off-target. However, Leibniz is certainly not out of line to associate fatalistic ideas with Islamic tradition in general. W. Montgomery Watt, in his book, Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam, explains several different fatalistic conceptions which were influential to the tradition. However, Watt argues that, though fatalism has even had some influence on orthodox Islamic teaching, its source lies in the pre-Islamic beliefs of people in the region of Arabia.188 Furthermore, not only is this fatalism not found in the Koran, or sacred scriptures of Islam, but the Koran actually denounces the view of fatalism.189

185Dols, pp. 23 & 109.
186Dols, pp. 23 & 110.
187Dols, p. 9.
188W. Montgomery Watt, Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam, p.20.
189Watt, pp. 20 & 23. On its rejection of fatalism, consider this passage from the Koran: "And when it is said to them: 'Give aims of that which Allah has given you,' the unbelievers say to the faithful: 'Are we to
There are, then, two specific reasons that Leibniz’s explanation of the non-flight principle falls short. First of all, the fatalism of which Leibniz accuses the Turks could follow from a divine providence, but it could just as well flow through the courses of an atheological universe. In fact, Leibniz indicates that the Muslim’s refusal to flee is evidence of an absence of moral or religious concern. Nothing could be further from the truth. The motivation for the Islamic principle against flight from plague is clearly a reverence for acting in accord with God’s principles, rather than a resignation to the absolute insignificance of one’s actions. Second, the source of the moral truth in these Islamic plague principles is not a fatalistic universe; instead, the principles result from views on the interrelation between divine and human causality. In this respect the plague principles are in harmony with the Koran, for Watt concludes that it does not merely reject the fatalistic world-view. In the Koran there is a distinctly anti-fatalistic understanding of the degree of determinism in the world, and it focuses on a sense of creaturely dependence on God, based on the Islamic emphasis on God’s omnipotence.¹⁹⁰

Islamic philosophers and theologians have understood this central principle of God’s omnipotence in terms of the range of God’s causal power vis-à-vis humans. Therefore, it is not merely important to note the actual source of the plague principles in order to understand them, but we should recognize in this issue one of the central concerns of medieval Islamic philosophy and also a contact point with both Jewish and Christian philosophical traditions. I shall elaborate this point below, when I turn to the issues of occasionalism and the author of sin problem as they relate to the importance of the debate over divine causality in Islamic philosophy. As happens in the author of sin problem from the Christian tradition, given the Islamic commitment to a strong view of

¹⁹⁰Watt, p. 29.
God's causal activity in the world, it becomes imperative to account not only for the suffering caused by the plague but also to justify God's role in causing that suffering.

The emphasis of principles (1) and (3) on God's role in causing plague suggests that principle (2), the injunction against flight, should be interpreted as a proscription for acting in accord with God's will. However, before examining further the Islamic debate on causality and action, I would like to briefly comment on the twin theodicy components of the first principle. This principle aims to explain the existence of the physical evil (in Leibniz's terms) of the plague by appeal to a standard of retributive justice. With this strategy, the Islamic answer is in good company with doctrines from other major traditions, such as the similar notion of divine judgment in Judaism and Christianity, or the ideas of karma and samsara in Hinduism and Buddhism. In order to answer the question of why some person is suffering in some particularly disturbing manner, theodicians have not uncommonly invoked the explanation that the suffering is a just consequence or punishment for wrongdoing by that person. In these cases the existence of the evil of suffering is not denied, but its coexistence with a just God is explained by situating it within a larger moral framework whereby it becomes just recompense.\footnote{In contemporary ethical terminology, under this theodicy scheme, the non-moral badness of the suffering is not denied, but it is placed in a context where a non-moral bad is morally right, given the existence of a prior condition of moral wrong. Compare the deontological theoretical framework of a retributive justice theodicy with a teleological greater-good defense, wherein the question of whether a particular feature of the world is ultimately evil (or good) is determined by how it may contribute to some sum of goodness.} And in this first Islamic principle, the ravages of the plague are certainly explained in just this way—for the suffering of non-Muslims. However, the fascinating aspect of this principle is that the suffering of Muslims is explained in a quite different way. For them, the plague is not an instance of just retribution; rather, the plague bestows martyrdom on the true believer as an act of mercy from God. In this theodicy strategy, the evil of the plague is in fact denied. The suffering is not evil at all but on the contrary is good, presumably because it leads to the great goods of presence with God upon death and of demonstration
of one's faith through martyrdom. Thus, in this case of the *prima facie* contradiction between the existence of evil and the existence of a just God, the solution comes through a denial of the ultimate reality of the apparent evil.\textsuperscript{192} Undoubtedly, this denial is an example of the tension Dols mentions between the Islamic tradition and the actual observations and feelings of those experiencing the plague.

The Islamic response to plague relates most directly to the issues of quietism, fatalism, and activism in its consideration of whether it would be wrong to leave a plague-stricken area. In fleeing a region under plague—and thereby in violating the second principle—would one therefore be morally or spiritually "fleeing" from God's decree? Is a faithful Muslim really bound to accept an infection by plague as God's direct will? Should a Muslim resign herself to plague-suffering, not, as Leibniz suggests, because of a fatalistic view of the universe, but rather because of a deep intent to live in accord with divine principles? As noted above, there was by no means a consensus on these principles regarding the plague.\textsuperscript{193} Dols recounts a story of a meeting between the Caliph Umar\textsuperscript{194} and his military commander, Abu Ubaydah, during the plague of Amwas in Syria (c. 638-639). The Caliph decides to accept the advice of other leaders to leave the region of the epidemic, but Abu protests that in doing so they would be fleeing from God's decree, alluding to the prohibition of movement during plague. Umar then justifies the decision to leave by reciting a parable: "Suppose that you come to a valley where one side is green with pasture and the other is bare and barren; whichever side you let loose your camels, it would be the will of God. But you would choose the side that was green."\textsuperscript{195} The two sides of the valley in this parable are metaphors for the two options

\begin{footnotes}
    \item[192] If one were to emphasize the mercy of a believer's suffering from the plague in terms of its being a condition of the subsequent good of presence with God after death, one could interpret this part of the first principle as a version of a greater-good defense rather than as a simple denial of the reality of the evil.
    \item[193] Dols notes that there is considerable ambiguity and even contradiction in the *hadith* on the acceptability of flight from the plague (p. 22, footnote 30).
    \item[194] Umar was the second Islamic Caliph, or political successor to Mohammed.
    \item[195] Dols, p. 22.
\end{footnotes}
under consideration, either remaining in the plague-zone or moving outside it. What then does Umar mean by saying that whichever pasture is chosen, it would be God's will? We may presume that he does not mean to say that God wills that the camels be placed in the fertile pasture and that they be released in the barren pasture, for in that case God's will would be contradictory. We can read the parable to indicate that there is a commitment to an a priori principle of God's providence: whatever may happen in the world, God is in control of events and wills them to happen. Umar must be supposing further that this principle of providence is general so far as human beings know of it; in other words, it is not clear in every specific situation which among various possible human actions, taken in isolation, would be willed by God. Therefore, the best procedure for resolving such a quandary of action is to determine which possible action is the best or most reasonable among the alternatives. We might say that Umar's method gets him God's efficacious will plus the most reasonable action while Abu's method, at least in this case, gets him God's efficacious will plus the least reasonable action.  

The medieval Muslim philosopher Al-Ghazali discusses the issue of God's predestination of events in the world and whether a believer might consistently oppose the plague as a predestined event of mercy and martyrdom. This discussion of predestination is focused sharper than Umar's mention of two possible events being God's will, for with the latter there is the question of whether he means that God would be directly causing the events or that the events, caused by humans, would be in accord with God's intended purposes for the world. Since Al-Ghazali casts the question in terms of predestination, it follows that God would be ultimately causally responsible for the occurrence of the plague. In this case, he wonders, how might a Muslim in good faith

---

196 It may be the case that Abu is conceiving of the efficacy and range of God's will in a significantly different way than is Umar. Were Abu to suppose (1) that God's will is specifically discernible by human beings and (2) that God's will, while normatively absolute, does not completely determine whether a particular human action accords with it in fact (so that a creature can contradict God's will, through the power of human freedom), then Umar's parable would miss its mark in dispelling Abu's objection. I shall address these issues below in the section on causality in the Islamic philosophical tradition.
even pray for the cessation of the plague? Al-gazali invokes a metaphor of an arrow as a
model of how a creature might pray for something in opposition to an event predestined
by God. He says that the shaft of the arrow is the plague, while the head of the arrow is
the prayer for removal of the disease. The entire arrow, head and shaft, has been shot by
God, so to speak. The prayer against plague is part of what has been predestined by God,
as is the plague itself.\textsuperscript{197} There is no contradiction in supposing that God may predestine
an event along with human opposition to it; such "incongruous predestination" makes
sense if one understands the basic event (the plague) as a necessary condition for the
expression of a further opposing event (praying or even working for the cessation of the
plague). One may even understand this example under the rubric of a greater-good
defense, wherein the good work of the faithful cannot genuinely occur without the prior
predestination of the plague.\textsuperscript{198}

\textit{Divine vs. human causality in Islamic philosophy}

This discussion of whether one's avoiding or opposing the plague could accord
with God's will in Islam leads to more basic questions of philosophical theology. These
questions relate to principle (3) above, in its assertion that the cause of the plague is God
rather than some secondary, natural cause; however, these questions are deeply
characteristic of medieval Islamic philosophy, and not simply in relation to the plague
example. What is the range of God's omnipotence? Given God's causal activity in the
world, do human beings have genuine causal power? Is there room for human freedom in
such a world? Can one preserve an authentic category of human moral responsibility
along with an exclusive view of God's causal efficacy? These questions arise repeatedly
in medieval Islamic philosophy, and they are similar in kind to questions linked to the

\textsuperscript{197}Dols, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{198}Compare John Hick's soul-making theodicy, though Hick certainly does not argue for predestination;
rather, he sees human moral action in response to evil in the world as fully free.
author of sin problem and also with occasionalism in the Christian philosophical tradition.

It is not my purpose at this point to even approach a comprehensive survey of the Islamic debate on causality. Rather, I shall briefly highlight two examples of the debate, for several reasons. First of all, these examples elaborate upon the point that I make above, that Islamic philosophy is primarily concerned with omnipotence and causality rather than fatalism. Second, these issues are relevant to any philosophical concern with the problem of evil and theodicy, as the author of sin problem has already arisen in the first and second main sections of this work. Third, these questions of causality are of tremendous importance to modern philosophers, so it is intriguing to understand that similar questions had a philosophical vitality in perhaps surprising places.

Considering this third issue first of all, it is somewhat ironic that our investigation of Leibniz’s attribution of fatalism to Muslims should lead instead to rich sources of philosophical debate on causality. The Islamic debate is generated by the friction between their theological tradition, based on the Koran, and philosophical arguments, inspired by ancient Greek philosophy. In this respect, medieval Islamic philosophy has the same formal genesis as does much medieval Jewish or Christian philosophy; Maimonides’ Guide of the Perplexed is aimed at Jewish believers who confusedly think that the philosophical sciences contradict their faith, and Aquinas’ Summa Theologica is well-known for its creative synthesis of rational philosophy and revealed theology, often assumed to be mutually exclusive. Even a modern philosopher like our Leibniz has the medieval drive to develop a philosophical system whereby one understands that the realms of nature and of grace are in harmony.

Majid Fakhry traces out some of the historical connections on the causality debate in his book on Islamic occasionalism. The Islamic philosophical defense of occasionalism reached its zenith with Algazali (1058-1111). The Muslim Averroes (1126-1198) and the Jewish Maimonides (1135-1204) criticize this occasionalism and
defend the notion of secondary causality, and through contact with the works of the latter in Latin translation the debate is transmitted to the Christian Aquinas (1225-1274). Thus, these three philosophico-theological traditions are bound together by a common philosophical question. Further, these connections are cyclical, since the early Islamic occasionalists were influenced by contacts with Syriac Christian thinkers. Leibniz's work follows the spirit, if not the actual historical lineage, of these debates in its many points of contact with thinkers of diverse traditions.

Let us now turn to these examples of the Islamic concern with questions of causality. Fakhry notes that it is the Ash'arite tradition within Islam that interprets God's omnipotence to entail a denial of causal efficacy for secondary agents. He cites the Creed of al-Ash'ari as an example of this occasionalism. Relevant excerpts from this creed include the statements that "We believe...that nothing on earth, whether a fortune or a misfortune, comes to be save through God's will;...that there is no creator save God; and that the deeds of the creatures are created by Him and predestined by Him." In supporting his creed, al-Ash'ari includes this text from the Koran, wherein Abraham protests to his idolatrous people: "Would you worship that which you have made with your own hands,' he said, 'when it was Allah who created you and all that you have made?" This Koranic basis becomes crucial, for Fakhry contends that the Ash'arites offer no rational justification of their occasionalism other than a claim that the admission

---

200 See Watt, pp. 63 & 145, for example.
201 Two main medieval Islamic philosophical traditions are the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites. The former developed near the end of the eighth century and were interested in using ancient Greek philosophy in working through particular Islamic questions. The latter group, begun by al-Ash'ari (873-935), was also interested in philosophical clarification of Islamic doctrines, but viewed themselves as staying closer to orthodoxy, in part as a reaction to some Mu'tazilite doctrines. Both schools of thought emphasized the concept of God's omnipotence. (See Hyman & Walsh, pp. 205-206.)
202 Fakhry, p. 56, quoting from *Ibanah*, p. 9.
203 *Koran*, 37:94. One could argue in interpreting this text taken in isolation that there is a middle ground between idolatry and occasionalism. In other words, the text could support the model that God's causal contribution is necessary for the efficacy of any human action but that in the *de facto* realm of human action God's causal contribution alone is not sufficient. Compare the notions of God's *conservation* in Christian tradition and *sustenance* in Islamic tradition.
of causal power in creatures would contradict the account of God in the *Koran*. It is not until Algzali that one gets a systematic philosophical argument for occasionalism.\(^{204}\)

Before looking at Algzali's argument for occasionalism, let us linger over al-Ash'ari long enough to recognize one of the significant implications of his version of occasionalism. As indicated by his quotation above, al-Ash'ari straightforwardly takes his occasionalism to imply that God, and no other being, is causally responsible for the evil as well as the good that is in the world. Note that this evil includes "the evil that humans do," to paraphrase Augustine. Though al-Ash'ari does not use these terms, we could say that he recognizes that occasionalism implies a *prima facie* author of sin problem. Facing this problem of evil, al-Ash'ari makes an interesting argument that, in W. Montgomery Watt's words, "If a man performs a movement, he is described as 'moving'; but when God creates a movement in one of His creatures, *He* is not to be described as 'moving.'"\(^{205}\) Watt himself takes the argument to apply to the problem of evil in general, without extending it in terms of the author of sin problem, but the implication is there: If a human being commits a sin, she is described as "sinning"; but when God causes a sin in one of God's creatures, God is not to be described as "sinning." Al-Ash'ari supports this defense of God with an interesting illustration taken from the *Koran*.

The illustration is the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Egypt.\(^{206}\) Joseph's master's wife makes one final attempt to seduce him, backed by a group of women from her city. Joseph, however, maintains his resolve and makes this prayer: "'Lord,' said Joseph, 'sooner would I go to prison than give in to their advances. Shield me from their cunning, or I shall yield to them and lapse into folly.'"\(^{207}\) Al-Ash'ari's argument is that

\(^{204}\)Fakhry, pp. 56-57.

\(^{205}\)Watt, p. 144.

\(^{206}\)The version in the *Koran*, while following the same basic form as the story in Genesis, differs in some significant details. For instance, Joseph's master examines the evidence of the torn shirt and concludes that his wife's accusation of Joseph's attempted seduction is false. Nevertheless, Joseph is eventually imprisoned anyway.

\(^{207}\)Koran, 12:33.
Joseph wills his own imprisonment in this case, and furthermore this jailing is a sin because it is unjust. However, it does not follow that Joseph is sinning in this case, even though the sinful imprisonment would not occur without Joseph's volition. Joseph wills the sin but is not a sinner in this case. Al-Ash'ari thus concludes that "...although God wills folly, He is not necessarily foolish."  

We may take al-Ash'ari, as does Watt, to mean that, for the purposes of our consideration of the author of sin problem, although God wills sin, God is not necessarily sinful.

Even though this illustration is helpful in its demonstration of the complexity of attributing moral culpability, there are several unresolved problems with al-Ash'ari's argument. One could understand Joseph's dilemma as a tragic condition of being faced with two conflicting evil courses of action. In the one case he sees himself as committing a sin, and in the other case he sees himself as permitting a sin, so he chooses the lesser evil. Such a tragic situation is reasonable, given the contextual limitations of finite humanity, but it is unlikely that a theist like al-Ash'ari, who places such emphasis on God's omnipotence, should be satisfied with a tragic view of God. Furthermore, there is the related problem that in the Joseph example one reason that he is not culpable is that his willing of the imprisonment is only permissive for avoidance of another direct sin. Those culpable for the imprisonment are those who directly will it, those who could have avoided the imprisonment without thereby committing another sin. The ones who imprison Joseph thus play a greater, active causal role in bringing about the jailing. There is at least a prima facie question of whether al-Ash'ari would be genuinely willing to accept a view of God such that, in some cases, other agents make a more direct, primary causal contribution to an event than does God. If one were to respond that such cases in question are fully acceptable because they are restricted to sinful actions, then one would

\[208\text{Watt, p. 145.}\]

\[209\text{It is intriguing that Watt speculates (with good evidence) that al-Ash'ari may have been influenced in his treatment of this problem of evil by the Apology of Timothy, a patriarch of the East Syrian Church (c. 781). There is obviously room for further study of the background and history of the author of sin problem.}\]
need to present further explanation to mitigate the *ad hoc* nature of the solution. It
certainly would be reasonable to develop a consistent model of causality such that God's
will is active in some cases and merely permissive in others (as Leibniz does, for
instance), but this idea leads to a final question about al-Ash'ari's treatment of the author
of sin problem. Watt concludes that the Joseph example demonstrates "...how an event
can be willed by different persons in different ways, and yet truly willed by both; and it
would seem possible along these lines to explain how the will of God can be supreme in
the world, and yet not destroy the genuine responsibility of the human wills."\(^{210}\) The
lingering problem is how such a view can be made consistent with al-Ash'ari's
occasionalism. His occasionalism entails an author of sin version of the problem of evil,
but it seems that in resolving the author of sin problem he must relinquish his
occasionalism. If God is understood by analogy with Joseph in this story, one definite
conclusion is that there are multiple causal agents in this world.

Leaving these questions behind, let us look again at the Islamic philosopher
Algazali for a glimpse of his occasionalism. Algazali develops a much more
philosophically sophisticated defense of occasionalism than does al-Ash'ari.\(^{211}\) While the
former's occasionalism is undoubtedly motivated by a theological emphasis on the
omnipotence of God just as is the latter's, Algazali philosophically justifies his view with
a skeptical argument that is intriguing to anyone familiar with David Hume. First, let us
look at an example of Algazali's occasionalism, and then I shall comment on the tenor of
his argument. He says,

> ...The opponent asserts that the acting cause of burning is fire
exclusively and that fire acts by nature not by choice, so that
fire, when brought in contact with a subject receptive of it, cannot
refrain from acting according to its nature.
This is what we deny. On the contrary, we say that it is God

\(^{210}\)Watt, p. 145.
\(^{211}\)Fakhry, pp. 56-57.
Who...is the acting cause of burning by creating blackness in the cotton, dividing it into its parts, making it burn, or [turning it into] ashes.

...Indeed, there is no other cause but [God].

Algazali’s discussion here is actually more complex than my purpose would warrant. He is not merely arguing for occasionalism, but he is arguing for it within a context of repudiating philosophers (including the Islamic philosopher Avicenna) who hold a complicated model of causality in the world. Nevertheless, I would highlight the more limited conclusion of Algazali’s occasionalism in this argument. The real cause of an event such as the burning of cotton is not the natural action of fire upon a flammable substance; rather, the real cause of such an event is God. By extrapolation, the real cause of any event in the world is God, and Algazali states that there is no other cause.

What are the implications of Algazali’s occasionalism for our original discussion of Leibniz’s charge of fatalism, Fatum Mahometanum? Obviously, as I have already shown, and as I shall reiterate in discussing Algazali’s skeptical argument for occasionalism, the philosophical unsophisticatedness implied by Leibniz is unfounded. More precisely, however, Algazali gives the ultimate philosophical illustration of the claim that the somewhat peculiar Islamic attitudes toward the plague demonstrate not a fatalistic resignation but rather a deep concern with the causal sovereignty of God. Algazali’s occasionalism is perhaps simply the most extreme example of a long-standing concern with causality, both in the prima facie implausibility of the position and in the sophistication of the arguments for it.

---

212 Algazali, The Incoherence of the Philosophers, trans. Arthur Hyman, in Hyman & Walsh, p. 284. (Note that in my quotations from Algazali, the bracketed material is supplied by Hyman.)

213 The model includes the view that the actions of inanimate bodies can be explained by their inherent causal power alone along with the view that the actions of animals involve extraneous causes which are incorporeal intelligences, such as the Agent Intellect. See Hyman & Walsh, p. 284, footnote 2.

214 It is important to remember that the concern of Islamic philosophy with God’s omnipotence and causality did not translate into a monolithic endorsement of occasionalism. Just one example is Averroes’ criticism of occasionalism; see Fakhry, ch. 3, pp. 83-138.
Algazali's strategy in reaching his occasionalist position is surprising. Rather than directly arguing for occasionalism based on particular theological assumptions, he uses an indirect, skeptical method which is not at all unlike the arguments of Nicolas of Autrecourt and Hume. Algazali's indirect approach is consistent with his broader skeptical criticisms of philosophy as incompatible with a mystical theology in approaching truths of God and the world.\textsuperscript{215} At best, philosophy is able to demonstrate its own inadequacy in matters of ultimate truth,\textsuperscript{216} and if anything is to fill the void for Algazali it must be true religion. Algazali makes this critical analysis of causality in the world: "The connection between what is customarily believed to be a cause and what is believed to be an effect is not necessary, according to our opinion; but each of the two [namely, cause and effect] is independent of the other.... the existence of one does not necessitate the existence of the other, nor does the non-existence of one necessitate the non-existence of the other."\textsuperscript{217} Not only is Algazali denying any logically necessary connection between two events that are considered cause and effect, but he also denies that there is justification in maintaining any causal connection whatever between such events. With regard to his example of the burning of a piece of cotton, he skeptically asks, "What is the proof [of the opponent] that fire is the acting cause? He has no other proof except the observation that burning occurs when there is contact with fire. However, observation only proves that one occurs together with the other, but it does not prove that one occurs through [the agency of] the other."\textsuperscript{218} While one does observe that the burning of cotton does consistently follow its contact with fire, one does not observe any causal agency inherent between the two independent events. Based in part on this

\textsuperscript{215} For these more general arguments on the relation between philosophy and mysticism see Algazali's \textit{Deliverance from Error}.

\textsuperscript{216} Even Socrates argues in Plato's \textit{Apology} (21a-22c) that the pronouncement of the oracle at Delphi that there is no one wiser than Socrates is to be understood in the sense that Socrates alone truly understands that he is ignorant.

\textsuperscript{217} Algazali, \textit{The Incoherence of the Philosophers}, p. 283.

\textsuperscript{218} Algazali, \textit{The Incoherence of the Philosophers}, p. 284.
skeptical analysis of causality, Algazali draws the occasionalist conclusion noted above, that God is the only true cause.

What is the basic structure of this argument from skepticism to occasionalism? I am overlooking much of the complexity of Algazali's argument, but it follows the simplified form of a disjunctive syllogism. Both Algazali and his philosophical opponents (including Muslim Aristotelians such as Alfarabi and Avicenna) hold that there must be some account of causal power of events in the world. Algazali rejects the opponents' explanation of causal action in terms of power inherent in creatures themselves, on the basis of his skeptical criticism of causality. Thus, he concludes that he has vindicated his occasionalist alternative, that God alone causes events in the world.\textsuperscript{219} Fakhry criticizes this justification of occasionalism in general, arguing that it leads to a greater skepticism or agnosticism. He says, "...if 'secondary causality' is allowed to go, it is not clear how primary causality can be retained on any save the supra-rational grounds of Faith."\textsuperscript{220} If critical analysis of the claims of causal power in creatures leads to skepticism for Algazali, should not a consistent analysis of the claims of the causal power of God lead to a similar conclusion? The difference comes in Algazali's turn away from philosophy; ultimately, he bases his occasionalism not on positive philosophical grounds but on his Islamic mysticism. This turn indicates an interesting connection between occasionalism and quietism.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{219}For a sketch of this type of argument, see Fakhry, pp. 13-14, where he attributes it to the Mutakallims, or Muslim scholastics.
\textsuperscript{220}Fakhry, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{221}There is also an interesting connection between Algazali's occasionalism and voluntarism. In part, he is spurred toward occasionalism by the theological principle of the utter uniqueness of God. Fakhry inquires where this uniqueness is centered in God's character and finds that for Algazali God's omnipotence is the attribute \textit{par excellence}. While Algazali does allow that God's power is constrained within the domain of the logically possible (Hyman & Walsh, p. 267), Fakhry criticizes his occasionalism for its consequence that "God can, in fact, exact the intolerable..., torture the innocent without remuneration..., even refrain from exacting righteousness or assign \textit{sic} reward and punishment to righteousness and sin respectively." (Fakhry, p. 76) Ultimately, Fakhry finds this unguided omnipotence to impoverish the concept of God, who acts despotically and aimlessly, and he also notes the paradox that a being of such unapproachable might would create a world so flimsy in absence of power (p. 78).
The vision of God's unique power—which implies occasionalism from the philosophical perspective—is only fully realized through mystical insight for Algazali. The metaphysical claims are ultimately based in ethical and religious principles. In the higher stages of mystical insight, Algazali says, "...you perceive that there is no agent but God; and that everything that is (whether a creature or a possession, a giving or a denying, death or life, poverty or wealth, etc....) are to be referred to God as their unique source and author. Having grasped this you cease to direct your gaze to anyone else. Thus your hope, confidence and trust would be placed in Him, since He is the unique and exclusive Agent." This mystical vision adds two substantive elements to the occasionalist view. First, the mystic now claims to directly perceive the exclusive power of God, whereas philosophical argument at best gets to a nebulous concept of causal power in indirect fashion. Second, this mystical vision of a metaphysical truth engages a moral claim upon one's life; one is now to live seeking no other object but God. The Islamic concern for God's omnipotence, as I have argued, leads not to Fatum Mahometanum, but rather to a rich debate over occasionalism. And in the instance of Algazali, that occasionalism in its practical effects leads not to fatalistic resignation but rather to quietism.  

**Leibniz's rejections of quietism**

Leibniz himself is not always careful to distinguish quietism from fatalism. In fact, in his revealing section on quietism in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, he aligns it with the same specious argument of *lazy reason* that he attributes to Islamic fatalism. As with the issue of Fatum Mahometanum, we shall question whether there is a conflation of fatalism and quietism. But there is also a deeper point; Leibniz discusses quietism in two different senses, rejecting each for different but related reasons. In the first sense he

---

222 Quoted by Fakhry, p. 73, from *Ithya*, IV, p. 213.
223 Thus I would argue that it is somewhat misleading when Fakhry speaks of the "fatalism of Islam" (p. 14); it would be more precise to refer to the *quietism* of Islam.
rejects a monistic quietism in favor of his metaphysics of a plurality of created substances. In the second sense he rejects a fatalistic quietism in favor of an activist ethics. His rejection of each version of quietism is significant for his theodicy. Activism is of the utmost significance because it provides a foundation for creatures to participate in the creation of good and the opposition of evil in the world; Leibniz's fledgling activism provides the beginnings of a distinct response to criticisms of his theodicy as insensitive to suffering. Furthermore, Leibniz's metaphysical pluralism provides a basis for his moral activism, since on his account individual rational creatures have the power to act which is a necessary condition for a normative activism. However, his rejection of quietism in the monistic sense is also relevant to theodicy in that it allows the emergence of the *prima facie* tension between the global level at which his best-possible-world argument functions and the level of individual persons which in fact includes problems of unjust suffering.

*Quietism (1)*

I shall develop these implications for theodicy in due time, but first it will be instructive to examine texts where Leibniz employs—and rejects—the two distinct senses of quietism. The first text comes from Leibniz's "Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason" that is part of his *Theodicy*. In this part of his discourse Leibniz is discussing "monopsychism," the view that individual souls are ultimately part of or absorbed into a single, universal soul. In this context, he says,

> The annihilation of all that belongs to us in our own right, carried to great lengths by the Quietists, might equally well be veiled irreligion in certain minds, as is related, for example, concerning the Quietism of Foë, originator of a great Chinese...

---

224Catherine Wilson's criticism discussed above is one example. This moral activism of Leibniz is a distinct response to the criticism from the above discussion of Leibniz's theoretical consideration of unjust suffering, as in his treatment of the damnation of infants problem.
sect. After having preached his religion for forty years, when he felt death was approaching, he declared to his disciples that he had hidden the truth from them under the veil of metaphors, and that all reduced itself to Nothingness, which he said was the first source of all things.225

Let us examine this text in sequence, first fleshing out this concept of annihilation which Leibniz links with quietism, then exploring the intriguing tangent which leads into Buddhism. What does Leibniz mean by the quietists' "annihilation of all that belongs to us in our own right?" Given his discussion of universal versus particular soul, Leibniz attributes to quietism the position that there is no substantiality to the individual soul. What is annihilated is any ultimate sense of distinctness or uniqueness of particular beings in the world, taking Leibniz to be referring to creatures in general. This version of quietism for Leibniz focuses on the metaphysical unity of the creature with God; apparently distinct, all beings are in actuality merged with the one, universal Being. This metaphysical version of quietism then is a quietism of monism. Because of the fact that rational creatures are usually unaware of the oneness of soul or substance, this version of quietism implies a closely related ethical version, which I shall discuss further below.

For now, Leibniz takes quietism in this text to be the doctrine that one is identical with Being in general in one's ultimate being. And Leibniz argues that his system of pre-established harmony, with its plurality of substances dependent only on God, is the best alternative to this universal Soul that engulfs all other souls, in large part because his model is able to account for individual immortality.226

---

225"Preliminary Dissertation," sect. 10, Theodicy, pp. 79-80. Compare Leibniz's caution in the Preface to his New Essays on Human Understanding (59) that "I am afraid that some who speak of immortality through grace do so only for the sake of appearances, and are fundamentally not far from those Averroists and certain wicked Quietists who imagine that the soul is absorbed into and reunited with the sea of divinity; my system is perhaps the only one which properly shows the impossibility of this notion." (Ed. & trans. Peter Remnant & Jonathan Bennett.)

**Quietism of Foë**

It is fascinating that Leibniz extends this discussion of monistic quietism to what he terms the *quietism of Foë*. Leibniz refers here to Buddhism and the Buddha;\(^{227}\) thus he is simultaneously drawing a perceptive cross-cultural connection while interpreting Buddhism as quietistic with too broad and imprecise a brush. Quietism is extreme for Leibniz, but he takes Buddhist quietism as an extension of that extreme. Not only are apparently distinct individual beings in actuality dissolved into a Universal, but according to the Buddha this universal Source is not Soul or Mind or God but *Nothingness*. Leibniz’s description of the quietist *annihilation* of the substantiality of individuals is further sharpened by this devolution of being to nothingness. However, is Leibniz accurate in taking Buddhism to be a paradoxical paragon of monistic quietism?

Leibniz is on target with regard to the content of Buddhist philosophical anthropology, but he misinterprets the metaphysical slant of the position. Actually, the metaphysical context Leibniz attributes to the Buddhist view is more truly characteristic of Hinduism. The model of the self in Vedanta Hinduism is that—like multiple rivers flowing to the selfsame sea—one’s substantial being (*atman*) is in reality identical with the one universal Being (*Brahman*) which pervades all apparently distinct empirical things.\(^{228}\)

On the contrary, Buddhism rejects the reality of any purported metaphysical substratum

\(^{227}\)In his *Preface to the NOVISSIMA SINICA*, Leibniz refers to the "accursed idol Foë," which Cook and Rosemont in their annotations identify as the Buddha (transliteration of the Chinese is *Fo*). See their translation of Leibniz’s *Writings on China*, p. 54 and note 27. It is interesting that Leibniz refers to the Buddha’s 40 years of teaching his disciples, for Buddhist tradition holds that he taught for about 45 years. (See Richard H. Robinson & Willard L. Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*, 3rd ed., p. 36.) The mention of the doctrine of nothingness also identifies Leibniz’s target as the Buddha, though I have found no evidence of the Buddha’s hiding that notion from his followers until his death.

\(^{228}\)Consider this metaphor that a teacher uses to lead a student toward this insight: "’[The father says] ‘Having put this salt in the water, come to me in the morning.’ He [the student] did so. Then the father said to him: ‘That salt which you put in the water last evening—please bring it hither.’ Although he looked for it, he did not find it, for it was completely dissolved. ‘Please take a sip of water from this end,’ said the father. ‘How is it?’ ‘Salt.’ ‘Take a sip from the middle,’ said he. ‘How is it?’ ‘Salt.’ ‘Take a sip from that end,’ said he. ‘How is it?’ ‘Salt.’...Then Aruni said to him: ‘Verily, my dear, you do not perceive Being in this world; but it is, indeed, here only: That which is the subtle essence—this whole world has that essence for its Self. That is the Real. That is the Self. That art thou, Shvetaketu.’” (From the *Chandogya Upanisad*, in Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition*, 2nd ed., Vol. I, pp. 37-38.)
of things, whether that substance is one or plural. It is not, as Leibniz implies, that Buddhism paradoxically takes Nothingness to be the universal Being which engulfs all particularity. Nor is not that Buddhism understands the character of this universal Being to be nothingness. Instead, Buddhism takes a critical stance toward metaphysics in arguing that in fact there is nothing substantial at all which underlies the vicissitudes of empirical experience; thus Buddhist tradition employs the term anatman to describe the position: no atman, no self, no substantial thing.\(^{229}\) Still, Leibniz is correct in taking this Buddhist view to be opposed to his own metaphysics of plural substances; it is just that the Buddhist disagreement comes the other way around.

** Quietism (2) **

Aside from his pluralistic metaphysics, there is another reason that Leibniz rejects quietism. For the sake of clarity, we may consider this reason by developing a second, primarily ethical version of quietism. In effect, Leibniz rejects this version of quietism for reasons independent of the first. But there are ties between the two versions. From the quietest point of view, because of the cleft between the misperception of a substantial

---

\(^{229}\) Consider the dialogue, the well-known chariot analogy, between the Greco-Bactrian King Milinda (or Menander) and the Buddhist monk Nagasena: "Then the Venerable Nagasena addressed the King. 'Your Majesty, how did you come here—on foot, or in a vehicle?' 'In a chariot.' 'Then tell me what is the chariot? Is the pole the chariot?' 'No, your Reverence.' 'Or the axle, wheels, frame, reins, yoke, spokes, or goad?' 'None of these things is the chariot.' 'Then all these separate parts taken together are the chariot?' 'No, your Reverence.' 'Then is the chariot something other than the separate parts?' 'No, your Reverence.' 'Then for all my asking, your Majesty, I can find no chariot. The chariot is a mere sound. What then is the chariot? Surely what your Majesty has said is false! There is no chariot!...' When he had spoken the five hundred Greeks cried 'Well done!' and said to the King, 'Now, your Majesty, get out of that dilemma if you can!' 'What I said was not false,' replied the King. 'It's on account of all these various components, the pole, axle, wheels, and so on, that the vehicle is called a chariot. It's just a generally understood term, a practical designation.' 'Well said, your Majesty! You know what the word "chariot" means! And it's just the same with me. It's on account of the various components of my being that I'm known by the generally understood term, the practical designation Nagasena.' (From the *Milindapanha*, in Embree, p. 106.) Compare Descartes' examination of a piece of wax, which leads him to a radically different conclusion (in the second *Meditation*, 30-32). Descartes makes a similar phenomenological investigation of an empirical thing but draws the conclusion that the substance of the wax must be something "perceived" by the rational mind and not by the senses, because of his commitment to his assumption of a substance model of being. Were Nagasena to dialogue with Descartes in some alternate universe, Descartes would affirm that the chariot most truly is "something other than the separate parts."
distinction between creatures and God and the actual identity of all soul as one, this quietism of monism implies a closely related ethical version, which is a quietism of disinterest. The annihilation of the distinctness of the self is not only the metaphysical order of being but is also a normative goal to be actualized, in a sense bringing particular perception in line with reality by ultimately losing the perception of particularity. Of course, one could in the abstract adhere to either of these versions of quietism without the other. I shall return to the question of the relation between these distinct versions of quietism below. For now, it is important that in this second version, what the individual is to "keep quiet" are categories of action with reference to the self, though it is consistent to understand this discipline as requiring focused effort on the part of the creature; one might describe this focused version as an active quietism.

Leibniz's rejection of Fénelon's radically disinterested love

This moral version of quietism, focused on disinterest, was historically espoused by several French thinkers of the seventeenth century. In particular, there was a strident debate over quietism as disinterest in 1697 between two bishops of the French church, Fénelon and Bossuet. Fénelon associated with the vocal proponent of quietism, Madame Guyon, and he published his Maxims of the Saints in order to defend their quietist approach to Christian mysticism. Bossuet was ultimately the ecclesiastical victor, as Fénelon's work was condemned at Rome in 1699, though R.A. Knox argues that the

---

230 Compare the similar movement for Alqazali from the metaphysical truth of occasionalism to a mystical perception of ultimate dependence on God. However, his mystical vision does preserve a sense of distinction between the creature and God, although the former comes to see a total dependence on the latter. The "annihilation quietism" Leibniz discusses in this passage goes further, ultimately allowing for no distinction between creatures and God at all. Compare David Stewart's distinction between union mysticism and communion mysticism in his text (Exploring the Philosophy of Religion, 4th ed., Prentice-Hall, 1998). For a criticism of such cross-cultural typologies of mysticism see Bernard McGinn, "Meister Eckhart: An Introduction," in An Introduction to The Medieval Mystics of Europe, ed. Paul E. Szarmach, p. 247.


232 Riley, p. 146.
papal brief on Fénelon was as lenient as it could have been, allowing him to claim continued support for the intended sense of the *Maxims*, while rejecting the erroneous implications of the work for ordinary readers, due to his poor wording.233

This dispute between Bossuet and Fénelon primarily concerned quietism as disinterest, as can be seen from the emblematic question of the controversy. Both R.A. Knox and Patrick Riley agree that the disagreement centered on whether the love of God in its highest degree should be disinterested to the point that one takes no concern for one's eternal gain or loss. In particular, the sharpest form of the question was whether "...a soul might be encouraged to acquiesce in the prospect of its own eternal loss."234 This quietistic notion of love is thus one in which self-interest is absent. Not only does a concern for one's personal happiness play no part in one's love of God, but, as the hypothetical example demonstrates, one's love is so distinct from any concern with self-interest that one should lovingly cooperate with God even in God's condemning one to the *eternal suffering* of hell. Quietists like Guyon and Fénelon have aptly chosen their illustration of the radical degree to which their love is to be disinterested, for, as I have noted above, there is no greater example of physical evil than hell.

This question of embracing the God who condemns one is particularly fascinating because of its connection with other concerns of Leibniz's theodicy. First, the dispute links with the general issue of the problem of innocent suffering. One should ask the disinterested quietist whether this damnation is presumed to be just or unjust. Is Fénelon willing to argue that one should love God even though God were to *unjustly* condemn one to the eternal torment of hell? If Fénelon is aiming at a purely disinterested love, as Riley argues,235 then it would seem to behoove him to welcome this modification of the example. If one is to acquiesce in merely just damnation, then one would be able to

---

233Knox, p. 349.
234Knox, p. 344. See also Riley, p. 145.
235See Riley, pp. 145 & 152, where Riley points out Fénelon's understanding of love as requiring annihilation of the self.
clutch that thin straw of the right—and of one’s participation in the universal system of justice—even amidst the horrors of hell. 236 Frail though it may seem, that identification with the fairness of the punishment could provide some condolence. However, were one to be condemned without cause, there would be no such thread; maintaining a love of God in such circumstances would truly require a pure disinterest of self.

Of course, were the quietist to extend the illustration of disinterest to this extreme, there would immediately arise a severe problem of the goodness of God in the face of such unjust suffering. One way that quietism could mediate this problem would be to adopt an extreme voluntarism of ethics. In fact, the quietist could reverse the force of the hypothetical case of continuing to love God even while suffering in hell. Rather than measuring such an action of God by external standards of justice, the quietist could argue that the justice of the action is based in the fact that it is God who wills it. This voluntarist turn fits with the general tenor of Fénelonian quietism, where the ultimate good for a creature is to merge one’s will with the supremely good will of God. Knox summarizes quietism as a kind of "ultra-supernaturalism," because it ultimately holds that "God alone must do everything; we cannot even co-operate with him, only allow him to operate in us, and forget that he even allows us to allow him." 237 It may be more precise, at least according to the terminology of this study, to note that quietism involves a confluence of voluntarism and occasionalism. It is occasionalist to the degree that it maintains an ideal of God as the only fully real causal agent, and it is voluntarist to the degree that it holds that identification with this active will of God is the ultimate source of goodness. From these two sources, quietism thus flows as a sort of normative occasionalism.

236 Consider Satan’s statement in Milton’s Paradise Lost that The mind is its own place, and in itself Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n. (Book I, 254-255).

237 Knox, p. 350.
The latent voluntarism associated with this quietism of disinterest indicates a tension with the problem of suffering. There is a further way in which this quietism is actually opposed to the problem of suffering. Fénelon is convinced that one treads the true path of love by diminishing concern for oneself to the point of disappearance; for instance, he says that "It is only those who do violence to themselves who will gain the kingdom of heaven." However, what about those who have already had violence done to them? What about innocent persons who suffer horribly in the actual world? Perhaps Fénelon's quietistic way is intended only for select souls with the strength for it, but there is a pervasive tension that emerges. In order to advance the problem of suffering as a theological or even as an ethical concern, one must presuppose that individual persons have a significant degree of moral value. This point indicates why it is important for the legitimacy of the problem of suffering that Leibniz recognizes a concern for rational creatures in the creation of the world. Were the individual person to have no autonomous value, the problem of suffering would evaporate in the searing light of a greater good, and it is just such particularity that this quietism extinguishes in its aim for a disinterested love of God. In other words, it requires a certain degree of self-interest in order to launch a problem of suffering, even a problem of suffering of innocents.

Riley argues that it is primarily on this point of self-interest that Leibniz rejects Fénelon's quietism. For Leibniz, love of self does lead to many vices and terrible evils, but the disintegration of the self would be too extreme a cure. In fact, from Leibniz's point of view, it would be incoherent, as all human action involves self-interest and concern for one's own happiness, to some degree. Rather than entirely lose the self, Leibniz would enlarge the self, to the point that one's own happiness is linked with the happiness of others. Such an expansion does involve a sort of loss of self-interest--

238 Riley, p. 150, quoted from Fénelon's "Happiness of the Soul."
239 I mean self-interest in the sense of a concern with the unique traits of a particular creature, though not in the sense of a concern with such traits of one's own.
240 Riley, p. 152.
certainly a loss of an exclusionary self-interest. Furthermore, Leibniz's reason for rejecting this quietism of disinterest echoes his reason for rejecting the quietism of monism discussed above. He rejects the monistic version in order to preserve the particularity of individual substances, and he rejects the disinterested version in order to defend particularity of interest as an integral component of love. One thus sees how closely related are these two versions of quietism: one emphasizes the metaphysical side, the other the ethical side, of the same coin. Furthermore, given the assumption discussed above about the lag of awareness behind metaphysical reality, acceptance of monistic quietism would require a mystical way of disinterest like that of Fénelon, while the latter's moral discipline would presuppose a similar monistic metaphysics.

Leibniz's rejection of these two versions of quietism therefore reflects back on the discussion of suffering and a concern for the happiness of rational creatures in section one. In the first case, Leibniz preserves a place for particular substances; in the second instance, he maintains the importance of the happiness of the rational creature in loving other creatures and God. Leibniz's defenses of individuality against quietism are good examples of the importance of persons in multiple areas of his philosophical system. However, it is reasonable to wonder whether Leibniz is entirely consistent with regard to this philosophical importance of particular beings. I have argued that his theodicy is more than a greater-good defense, but what of that element of his system that is teleological? Perhaps the most obvious example is Leibniz's best-possible-world argument. If God's creation of the best of all possible worlds vindicates God's goodness, and if rational creatures are to find their happiness through comprehension of this global goodness, is not Leibniz advocating a quietism of sorts? Is there not a threat from this dimension of his theodicy that the individual, with all its particularities of suffering or happiness, will be engulfed by the global goodness of the world on its most general level?

There is even a tension in Leibniz's accounts of the relation of particular persons to the world as a global whole, but on either side of the tension Leibniz attempts to
maintain the individual. Leibniz is clear that a wholly teleological theodicy that rests its justification entirely on global goodness will not answer the problem of suffering; an evil for an individual would not be justified simply because it is linked with global goodness, unless this goodness reflects back on the individual. And Leibniz goes on to say that "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." 241 It is possible to read this equation of Leibniz in a quietist sense, as saying that the love of God entails giving up an interest in one's own good in exchange for a real participation in the general good. However, given that the context of the statement is a concern with the problem of suffering, it is much more reasonable to take Leibniz's point in a quite different sense; those who love God find their individual goods within the general good. Rather than becoming disinterested, one's particular interest is satisfied by the general good. 242 It may be that this happiness is in some thin sense available to all rational creatures, but even Leibniz is clear that he is not claiming that each individual is as good or as happy as is possible. He says, "One reasons thus in geometry...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...." 243 In other words, the fact that the world on the global level is the best possible does not imply that each individual within that world is as good as possible—or even that each individual is not suffering or evil. Leibniz again maintains the place of the individual, and, in doing so, though he does not fully draw out the implications himself, he leaves open the door for the problem of suffering.

241 Theodicy, sec. 217, p. 263.
242 Rutherford argues for a highly intellectual version of this linkage for Leibniz, such that when God creates the world of highest global perfection, God also creates the world with the greatest human happiness, since pleasure is ultimately perception of perfection (taking happiness to be an enduring state of pleasure). See his Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature, p. 49.
Quietism (3)

The metaphysical and moral strata of the two versions of quietism discussed above are intersected by a further axis which goes to the heart of the practical implications of Leibniz's theodicy. This axis spans the dichotomy between activism and passivism. Perhaps surprisingly, there is a sense in which one may consider quietism of disinterest as an active way of life. In fact, in Knox's exposition of this version of quietism, he argues that it does not essentially mean living a quiet or inactive life. Rather, what distinguishes quietism is the way in which its adherents claim to come to know how to act and the way in which they act.\textsuperscript{244} Knox is not speaking with tongue entirely in-cheek when he notes that "The chief complaint made against the Quietists by their adversaries was that they would not keep quiet."\textsuperscript{245} These quietists had a way of approaching the love of God which to them seemed superior, so they were therefore neither passive in the discipline required to enact their spiritual exercise nor timid in proclaiming its value. Yet Knox also says, as I have quoted above, that the essence of quietism is the view that one cannot even cooperate with God; God alone is to be active in doing everything.\textsuperscript{246} How can these two aspects of quietism be consistent? The position that God alone has the power to act in the world is a kind of occasionalism, but it is important to note that this quietism of disinterest invokes a normative and not a descriptive occasionalism. To some genuine degree, human beings have the power to act of their own volitions and can even act contrary to the volitions of God. However, human beings can also act in ways that harmonize with the will of God. According to quietists such as Fénelon, this way of acting leads paradoxically to a cessation of action; it is an interest in loving God that leads to a radical disposal of self-interest. This active

\textsuperscript{244}Knox, pp. 261-263.
\textsuperscript{245}Knox, p. 262.
\textsuperscript{246}Knox, p. 350.
discipline leads ultimately to a loss of oneself, a forgetting of oneself in the loving action of God.\textsuperscript{247}

Leibniz rejects this quietism because he is unable to accept the paradox of a love that would be wholly disinterested in its own happiness. But he also at times speaks of a quietism that takes inaction not as a normative ideal in the loss of the self in love of God but in an even more extreme sense. One lives a life of inactivity in response to the realities of God and the world. Leibniz counsels against this kind of life in the \textit{Discourse on Metaphysics}: "As for the future, we must not be quietists and stand ridiculously with arms folded, awaiting that which God will do, according to the sophism that the ancients called \textit{logon aergon}, the lazy reason."\textsuperscript{248} We may take the quietism which Leibniz dismisses in this passage in a third distinct sense, as a quietism of inaction. Such a quietism would be consistent with a metaphysics of pluralistic substances, and this quietism endorses no esoteric discipline of denegation of the self in the love of God. As Leibniz describes it, this quietism makes no active moral engagement in the world at all. Because of a particular kind of belief in the activity of God, this quietist concludes that one is not to be morally responsible for nor to take an active role in the production of the kind of world that will exist in the future. Only God is responsible for the degree of good

\textsuperscript{247}In this ultimate forgetting of oneself, the quietism of disinterest, which begins as an active process, then becomes passive, and ultimately leads to the monistic absorption of the individual self in God. Knox argues that this quietist end of identification of oneself with God takes it to an extreme beyond the legitimate aims of mysticism (p. 351). It is interesting to note that Meister Eckhart takes disinterest to be of primary importance, saying that "Unmovable disinterest brings man into his closest resemblance to God." Yet Eckhart means by "disinterest" being unaffected by contingent or transitory things (from his sermon, \textit{About Disinterest}, in \textit{Meister Eckhart, a Modern Translation}, ed. & trans. Raymond B. Blakney, p. 85). Furthermore, Bernard McGinn is clear about the relation between Eckhart's mysticism and activism, arguing that "Eckhart's thought is fundamentally opposed to any solipsistic view of contemplation that would remove the human person from the world of moral and social involvement." Interestingly, McGinn points out that Eckhart turns the story from Luke 10:38-42 around and elevates Martha over Mary as an ideal example, taking Martha to be "...the soul who is inseparably joined with God but at the same time fully active in the world...." ("Meister Eckhart: An Introduction," in \textit{An Introduction to The Medieval Mystics of Europe}, ed. Paul E. Szarmach, p. 253.)

or evil of the future states of the world, so an individual creature should not even attempt to influence the divine outcome. This version of quietism is essentially a kind of theological fatalism, and it is telling that Leibniz attributes it to "lazy reason" just as he did the fatum Mahometanum.

As Leibniz is taking quietism in this sense of inaction, the implication of his rejection of it is what is most relevant to his theodicy. Given Leibniz's argument that this world is the best possible, one might expect his theodicy to entail a kind of passive satisfaction with the divinely-ordained goodness of the universe. In rejecting this quietism, however, Leibniz is arguing for precisely the opposite, for an active moral engagement on the part of rational creatures in the future goodness of the world. The role of human beings in connection with the value of the best possible world goes even further than the "...liberation of the soul through knowledge of the perfection and harmony of the universe...." of which Rutherford persuasively writes. For Leibniz, ethics does not ultimately reduce to a passive contemplation of perfection; the human being must be actively morally engaged in doing right action in the world.

After chastising quietism for its passivity, Leibniz goes on to say,

But we must act in accordance with what we presume to be the will of God, insofar as we can judge it, trying with all our might to contribute to the general good and especially to the embellishment and perfection of that which affects us or that which is near us, that which is, so to speak, in our grasp.

---

249Rutherford, p. 290. In fairness to Rutherford, he does acknowledge that for Leibniz the life of piety is not exclusively contemplative. However, even the active life of virtue on Rutherford's interpretation is slanted toward nurturing others toward the intellectualist end of contemplation of the order in the world, and thus loving the wisdom of God responsible for that order (p. 61).

250One could see a tension in Leibniz's system between the ideal of contemplation of perfection and the ideal of active engagement of practical wisdom in the world, which parallels the tension between the emphasis on global perfection and the recognition of the autonomy of personal value in the world. On the relation between these two ideals of the best life, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (X. 7-8. 1177a11-1179a32) and *Politics* (VII. 3. 1325b13-32). Also, see Plato, *Republic* (VII. 539e-540c) and Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, "The Attainment of Happiness" (IV. 50-64) (pp. 226-232 in Hyman & Walsh).

251*Discourse on Metaphysics*, sec. 4, p. 38 (italics in the text).
Leibniz is quite clear that quietism and fatalism are untenable and that one bears a moral responsibility for doing the right thing and alleviating evil in the world.\footnote{However, Leibniz is somewhat vague concerning the specific reason that "lazy reason" is fallacious. Perhaps one implicit argument is that one must act in that there is no neutral course in the quietist sense. One may act diligently, striving to do the right, or one may act lazily, with little concern for the particular form of a specific action. In either case, one is acting, so it is better to strive for the action that expresses good moral intention. Leibniz hints at another implicit argument on intention toward the end of this section from \textit{DM}. Perhaps the argument there is that although God may have structured an occasionalist universe, such that one's attempted action is in fact inefficacious, even on this extreme, fatalistic quietism is unjustified. For God could still allow the substantive category of moral intention, such that it would make an ethical difference whether one intended to act in a particular way, even though one were to be powerless to effect that intention. It is interesting that Leibniz speaks of God "never demanding more than the right intention" in this section, for the Ash\'arite philosophers in the Islamic tradition developed a doctrine of "acquisition" in order to preserve a place for ethics in the face of their occasionalism. The idea of the doctrine is that even though God is fully responsible for effecting action, one can decide to act willingly or to act with reservation. Human ethics then inheres at the level of these mental states, and not at the level of action itself. (See Hyman \& Walsh, p. 206.)} This obligation holds in particular for those events in the world to which one makes a direct contribution, but it also binds us to some degree of concern and responsibility for the goodness of the wider world to which our particular actions contribute only indirectly. Taking goodness in its most general sense, as the global value of this best possible world, Leibniz holds that rational creatures are responsible for contributing to the global goodness of this world, which is the governing reason for God's very creation of it. In a sense that is not insignificant, human beings are ethically called to justify God, not merely at the theoretical level of theodicy, but at the level of practical action in cooperative production of the best possible world. This role of rational creatures gains plausibility when one considers the dimension of time in the existence of the best possible world. Leibniz himself muses about the amelioration of the best possible world:

\textbf{Besides} it might be said that the whole sequence 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.\textsuperscript{253}

The part-whole relations of possible worlds at a given time do not follow a geometrical pattern, so that it is not the case that global goodness implies goodness in all parts of the world, nor that the most global goodness implies that each part is best. By the same token, neither do the instant-continuum relations of possible worlds over time follow such a principle. It is not the case that the best world extended over time implies that each state of that world is the best at any given moment. Part of the goodness of a world could be the continuous improvement of it;\textsuperscript{254} if so, then there would be a further justification for the existence of metaphysical evil as imperfection in given temporal states of the world.\textsuperscript{255} Furthermore, once one conceives of the creation of the world in the sense that it is extended over time, one can see how creatures could significantly contribute to the goodness of that world. The value of the best possible world is not actualized in the initial moment of its creation, but it is continuously actualized, primarily through the causal activity of God, but also secondarily through the causal activity of rational creatures.

Three in one: reconsidering the versions of quietism

In principle, one could hold either of the three versions of quietism without the other two, so it is not merely a theoretical exercise to separate them. However, there is

\textsuperscript{253}Theodicy, sec. 202, pp. 253-254.

\textsuperscript{254}For Rutherford's spin on amelioration of the best possible world in terms of gradual human enlightenment, see his p. 52. For Catherine Wilson's discussion of progress in relation to Leibniz's theodicy, see her pp. 290-293.

\textsuperscript{255}In addition to justifying the existence of evil in parts (considered spatially) of the best possible world because of their relation to the whole at a given moment, there would be a second dimension of justification of earlier evil parts of the best world as conditions sine qua non for the subsequent better states of that world. However, there is a \textit{prima facie} tension between Leibniz's conjecture that the best world might continuously improve in value into infinity and his insistence elsewhere, in order to preserve the rationality of God's selection of one possible world for creation, the there is a single, determinate best possible world, while the worse possible worlds descend into infinity, without reaching a worst possible world (e.g. \textit{Theodicy}, sec. 8, p. 128 and \textit{Discourse on Metaphysics}, sec. 3, pp. 36-37).
also a manner in which the different versions fit together, so it is possible to reconstruct a single quietism with three aspects. As I suggest above, the first two versions complement one another as metaphysical and ethical principles of a model of union between rational creatures and God. In this respect, the third version seems most distinctive; as Leibniz represents it, it centers on moral inaction, which presupposes no particular metaphysical system of substance. On one hand, one may emphasize connections between this version of quietism and fatalism and thereby find it tending toward a pluralistic metaphysics, if one emphasizes the antagonism between human beings and the gods that is common to at least one form of fatalism. On the other hand, one may highlight the similarity between this quietism and occasionalism and thus link it with a monistic metaphysics, if it is necessary for substance to have causal power. Yet, there is one way that this quietism of inaction does connect with the quietism of disinterest. Knox describes the stages of progression of quietist disinterest with regard to the practice of virtues. One first relinquishes any proprietary interest in one’s own virtues; then one releases the virtues themselves in allowing God to act through oneself. One then achieves a final transformation into God, with the cessation of even a sense that one is conforming with the distinguishable will of God.\textsuperscript{256} Therefore, what Leibniz considers an absurd passivity as a result of a fallacious argument of fatalism would actually be the visible signs of the advanced stages of a systematic religious discipline. In brief, the inactive third version of quietism would actually be the culmination of the exercise of the second version of radically disinterested love.

It is therefore possible to place these three emphases into a single, coherent quietism. In order to do so, one must begin with the second version. Suppose there is a \textit{de facto} plurality of substances, individual beings that are separated in some problematic sense from God or Ultimate Being. One who realizes these dynamics would then be

\textsuperscript{256}Knox, p. 278.
motivated to seek identity with God, to remedy the problematic, which would ultimately require a radical dissolution of the distinctness of the self. Thus far, one is dealing with the second version of quietism. The first version factors in as the ideal metaphysical and moral state of union toward which the disinterested quietist seeker is striving. The third version comes into play as the ultimately illusory distinct "beings" with their particular "actions" give way to the universal activity of God. Thus, when the quietist seeker has achieved truly disinterested love of God, there would appear to be inaction from a mundane perspective, though in reality all would be permeated by the fecund activity of God alone.

To an external observer, it would be difficult to distinguish this self-inaction through conformity with the will of God from the inaction of fatalistic resignation or even from simple idleness. Leibniz may therefore be criticizing a caricature of quietism in his presentation of its followers as ridiculously inactive, just as his account of Muslim attitudes toward the plague is significantly imprecise. However, even though Leibniz’s dismissal of quietism is quick and cutting, there is an enduring kernel of truth in it. Even if one were to admit the ultimate quietist goal of a fully disinterested love and an identification with God—as opposed to a mere cooperation with God—it is not at all clear why this deference to God’s activity could not mundanely manifest itself through the vehicle of human "action" just as well as it could mundanely manifest itself through human "inaction." Furthermore, when one considers the consistent importance in Leibniz’s philosophy of individual substances, causal power of creatures, and moral responsibility of rational creatures, it is entirely reasonable to argue that, whatever the merits of quietism might be, the loss of individual moral spontaneity is too high a price to pay. In fact, this metaphysical and moral emphasis on the particularity and plurality of power in the created world is the thread which binds Leibniz’s rejection of these three aspects of quietism, along with his rejection of fatalism and even occasionalism. His activism is the natural ethical analogue of his pluralistic metaphysics. Just as that
metaphysics serves his theodicy well in defending God from being ascribed as the author of sin, so too it opens an exciting but challenging ethical door for human beings to respond to particular evils in this world by contributing to the general good of the future. Leibniz succinctly expresses the importance of rational creatures in his theodicy: "It is impossible in this matter to find a better standard than the very law of justice, which dictates that everyone should take part in the perfection of the universe and in his own happiness in proportion to his own virtue and to the extent that his will has thus contributed to the common good."257 Human beings take part in the perfection of the best possible world in two senses: God justly rewards them (and cannot cause unjust suffering), and they contribute to the goodness in the world. Living in this world is justice, as both the basis of that reward, through the active love of other creatures and God, and as the reward itself.

---

Conclusion: On links between theological and ethical dimensions of evil

Two concerns have motivated this inquiry. The first is a basic worry about the existence of horrible kinds of suffering in the world. The second, which follows from the first, is the question of whether Leibniz's theodicy gives any special weight to the concerns of individual persons with regard to evil. The answer to this second question is clearly affirmative. Not only does the author of the infamous best possible world argument recognize that a theodicy must go much deeper than a mere appeal to global good, he actually recognizes the threat to God's goodness posed by a version of innocent suffering. Further, the importance of rational creatures permeates his theodicy and his vision of the best possible world. Leibniz does not use a theological version of sovereign immunity to shield God from the lances of the problem of evil; on the contrary, he insists on a conception of ethics that is available to all rational creatures. Without such a common moral context, without a line of ethical relation, there would be no tension between the suffering of an innocent person and the perfect goodness of God. One could not raise the problem in its compelling form. In addition, Leibniz's recognizes that his theodicy must address the good for individuals in general. The best possible world must be good for rational creatures on a personal level And in a significant sense, rational creatures are making the best possible world. It is through the causal activity of creatures that this world might progress in time, continually improving from one state to another.

However, what about this initial concern? Does Leibniz's theodicy give a convincing answer to the problem of innocent suffering? If one poses the problem in its most troubling evidential form, then, alas, his theodicy seems to fail. Such evil seems to be genuinely dysteleological. The antinomy between it and an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God would prevail. The most rational course seems to be to amend one's conception that God is omnipotent, in line with process theodicy. Or perhaps the
theist might retreat into the realm of faith and revealed theology, drawing a skeptical conclusion about the limitations of reason when it comes to knowledge of God.

Does the rational theist lose, then? Has the skeptic prevailed? Much contemporary debate over the problem of evil has the tone of a collegiate football game played in a neutral stadium. There are two sides, and it is clear which side one is on, either as a player or a spectator. There will be a winner and a loser, and the victory is the point of the whole endeavor. Things get muddled outside the artificial environment of the stadium, however. The theist is sensitive to the reality of evil—or should be. The atheist is committed to the good—or should be. Both are in pursuit of the truth, which may entail relinquishing prior assumptions. The problem of evil is more than a theological game to be won or lost.

The problem of evil has different modes of impact on human beings. I have focused on versions of the theoretical problem, the intellectual puzzle, the apparent tensions and contradictions amidst a set of beliefs about the nature of the world and God. The problem functions at other levels, though. What motivates someone to take up this particular theoretical problem? What gives the problem of evil a sense of urgency for many on both the theistic and atheistic sides of the spectrum of belief? To consider a challenge to one’s deeply-held beliefs involves more than a mental exercise. Paul Tillich is right when he argues that faith is a state of being ultimately concerned. Beliefs run much deeper than mere abstract assent to the truth of propositions. Bertrand Russell is also right when he argues that philosophy tends to free human lives from the tyranny of custom, from the isolated fortress of dogmatic beliefs and interests. Of course, there is also a dreadful side to philosophical questions which have no obvious, determinate answers, and some persons resist philosophical deliberation precisely because of the threat it poses to the comfort of antecedent certainty. There is, then, an existential

---

258 Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, pp. 1ff.
259 Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, pp. 243-244.
problem raised by evil. To even acknowledge the existence of certain kinds of evil may threaten the meaningfulness and order of one's life. However, I would suggest that if theodicy is unable in a definitive way to theoretically justify certain kinds of evil such as the horrible suffering of innocents, there are reasonable adumbrations of how human beings should ethically respond to the fact of evil even in a theodicy like Leibniz's. It is with regard to the moral dimensions of evil that the theistic and atheistic points of view come closest to truly common ground.

Evil as an ethical problem

What might theodicy have to say to one who finds evil to be not merely an abstract dilemma but an obstacle to living a good and meaningful life? In the ancient story of Job from the Hebrew scriptures, there are perhaps more questions raised of evil than there are answers. And Job is certainly unabashed about giving voice to his moral complaint against God on the basis of his unjust suffering. Job is a good man, of "perfect integrity" in Stephen Mitchell's translation of the text. Even were Job a modestly flawed character, he would have grounds for his objections of injustice because of the terrible disproportion of his suffering. Much of the main body of the story is devoted to the contradiction between the example of Job and the standard principle of retributive justice, whereby one suffers in proportion to one's sins. However, it is interesting that in the prologue at the beginning of the story--where we see the Satan not as a figure who contradicts God's purposes but rather as the Accuser who has a rightful place within the heavenly court--Job's great suffering is proposed not to engender a theological problem of belief but rather to try to expose what Satan thinks is the frailty of Job's goodness. It is one thing to live an apparently blameless life surrounded by wealth, comfort, and happy relationships, but would Job's character survive amidst a siege of suffering after astonishing suffering? In this telling, anyway, Job maintains his goodness with remarkable stability.
There are also contemporary attempts to articulate an ethical rather than a strictly theological problem of evil. John Kekes, following the terminology of Peter Kivy, explores the sense and implications of a secular problem of evil. Kekes considers the existence of evil independently of any theological commitments, and what he means by the secular problem is the prevalence of undeserved harm in the world and the fact that the occurrence of such evil retards the aspiration of human beings to live good lives.260 Kekes' response to this problem is that human beings must learn to face evil in a twofold sense. On one hand, the problem demands that one recognize the truth of its widespread existence—which for Kekes also means the preponderance of unintended evil which results from vices of character.261 On the other hand, one must face evil in order to reduce its incidence—which for Kekes means cultivating a greater degree of philosophical reflection upon one's life.262 It is noteworthy that Kekes suggests a response to evil that integrates a leading contemplative virtue, reflection, with the general practice of virtue—and limitation of the evil that one causes.

Robert Nozick, in his book, The Examined Life, also expresses a kind of ethical problem of evil which is independent of theological belief. Nozick sees a way that the existence of a certain kind of evil in the world poses a problem for the existence of the human species as a whole. He sketches what is essentially an evidential problem of evil with reference not to God but rather to any normative claim that the human species might make for continued existence. On the basis of the Holocaust—and other similar heinous actions from the hands of human beings—the human species has lost any right to continue in existence. Nozick does not argue that a historical evil of the magnitude of the Holocaust implies an indifference to the evil of further individual suffering. Nor does he claim that it follows that the human species ought to become extinct. What the Holocaust

260Kekes, Facing Evil, pp. 4 & 12.
261Kekes, pp. 9, 49-50.
262Kekes, pp. 221-222.
 entails is that were humanity to cease to exist, there would be no special tragedy in the loss of this species, over and above the tragedy of individual deaths.\footnote{Nozick, \textit{The Examined Life}, pp. 236-239.}

\textit{Ethical response to the problem of evil}

What is the point of multiplying these examples of the problem of evil? The philosopher follows the thread of truth, even though it should appear to lead one deeper into the labyrinth. Evil is not merely a problem for the theist. But is there any way to answer the kind of problem that Nozick articulates? Is there an "anthropodicy," a way to justify the human species with regard to the terrible evil we have caused? The ethical component of Leibniz's theodicy may provide a clue for responding.

In the Preface to his \textit{Theodicy}, Leibniz argues that his systematic attempt to vindicate God aims at more than merely a solution to metaphysical disputes. He argues that there are certain mistaken beliefs about God, such as that God's despotic power is primary, rather than perfect goodness or wisdom, based on the existence of evil. Moreover, these erroneous opinions are "apt to do harm," and he also speaks of a "reign of darkness."\footnote{Preface, \textit{Theodicy}, p. 53.} What kind of harm? What is this darkness? Leibniz does not refer to mere cognitive error or ignorance, nor is he indicating some sort of global imperfection, such that this world might be thought to be less good than the best possible. No, the threat is that one might live one's life according to erroneous principles. One might miss the happiness which is available to rational creatures in this world. One might neglect one's duty to encourage happiness of others through service for the sake of the common good. The resolution of these errors is to be found not through a denial of the existence of evil. Instead, Leibniz argues that the confusion stems from mistaken metaphysical and theological concepts. The ultimate end of Leibniz's systematic deliberations in theodicy
is to effect a right understanding of piety and ethics, which centers on the principle of love.

Leibniz says,

It follows manifestly that 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.265

Leibniz's account of the good life is undeniably theological and unmistakably Christian. What he is advocating is a kind of contemplative activism. Human beings are ultimately called upon to love God. For Leibniz, it would be impossible to love God without knowing God, and this knowledge includes metaphysical truth and understanding of the harmonious universe which God has created in addition to theology. But it is also impossible to know God without acting in accord with the truths of ethical duty. And the content of this duty primarily refers to the good of other human beings. One is to refrain from wronging anyone else, and one is to act in a kindly and beneficent way toward others.266 It is important to note that these goods are not entirely intellectual. Just as God is not solely concerned with maximizing global metaphysical perfection for Leibniz, so too the happy life of moral activism involves more than contemplating the eternal truths or discovering the rational order of nature. Even the greatest global good cannot justify God's sinning or causing an instance of unjust suffering. Likewise, the virtuous person must act in accordance with what she presumes to be the will of God, which in this world would be the deliberate and systematic attempt to prevent and alleviate suffering to the degree that it is within one's control.

265Preface, Theodicy, pp. 51-52.
266Preface, Theodicy, p. 52.
How might Leibniz's theodicy be helpful to a theist in lieu of a definitive answer to the evidential problem of horrible suffering of innocents? Because the human being is bound by the same ethical standards as is God, one is compelled to attempt to follow the principle invoked against God, that is one should prevent or eliminate instances of horrendous suffering. How might Leibniz's theodicy be helpful in responding to Nozick's ethical problem of the Holocaust? Because rational creatures occupy a special moral role in the best possible world and are uniquely able to ameliorate suffering and bring about a progressive improvement of the world over time, there would be a special tragedy were the human species to cease to exist and to leave this potential eternally unfulfilled. I am not prepared to argue that this positive potential outweighs the moral stain which has accrued upon humanity because of its crimes. But as long as the human species continues to exist, it seems to me that both theist and atheist alike are called upon to sincerely search out the truth of the existence of evil, to acknowledge its implication, and actively work to employ this understanding to reduce its impact in the world.
Selected Bibliography


_______. Leibniz's First Theodicy. Forthcoming.


