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Leibniz's Theodicies

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Leibniz's Theodicies

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Aubyrn, whose love is for me the best proof of providence.

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ABSTRACT

Evil poses a particular problem to early modern thinkers. Late scholasticism, while itself variegated, provided a number of resources for dispelling concerns about the justice of God raised by the existence of evil. With much of the metaphysics of the scholastics rejected, the new philosophers needed either to find inventive ways to make the old solutions fit into their new systems, to come up with new resources for dispelling the difficulties, or to accept the difficulties as insurmountable, likely via fideism or atheism. Leibniz, I claim, provides a provocative mixture of the first two approaches.

Many readers think Leibniz's solution to the problem of evil can be summed up in as little as a page, perhaps even a compound sentence, that sentence being, "God created the best possible world, and so He cannot be blamed for the existence of evil." My primary purpose is to show that this conception is false. Not only does Leibniz offer a complex response to the problem of evil which involves a unique combination and reinterpretation of components from the history of philosophical thinking about evil, but his solution changes a number of times throughout his career. And how could it not? It is nearly uncontested that Leibniz's metaphysics underwent important changes between the early 1670s and the mid 1680s. The thesis that Leibniz's metaphysics changed significantly at least once between the mid 1680s and the end of his life is becoming more and more accepted among scholars. Given the importance of theology to Leibniz's metaphysical thinking and the importance of metaphysics to Leibniz's theological

thinking, it could hardly be the case that Leibniz's thought on the problem of evil could remain unchanged throughout these changes.

What follows is structured as three developmental stories each revolving around the role of one conceptual tool used by Leibniz as a part of a solution to the problems posed by evil—these conceptual tools being the doctrine that God created the best possible world, the distinction between willing and permitting (in particular as it relates to God's relationship to evil), and the doctrine that sin is a privation. Each chapter highlights the way Leibniz's conception and use of the particular tool changed throughout his life and the differing ways these concepts interact with each other.

I begin by examining the doctrine that this is the best possible world. Early in his career (in particular in the Letter to Magnus Wedderkopf of 1671) Leibniz thought that this doctrine was sufficient for explaining the goodness of God in spite of the evils in the world. In that letter he explicitly denied that divine permission was possible, and within a few years explicitly denied that the doctrine that sin is a privation was of any use in securing the goodness of God. The doctrine that God created the best possible world itself went through a few changes as Leibniz's thought developed. Of most significance is the change from seeing God's creation of this world as necessary to holding that it is a contingent fact that God created the best possible world. Shortly after this change occurs and, I argue, partly because this change occurs, Leibniz begins to see the problem of evil split in such a way that it is no longer sufficient for procuring divine goodness to point out that God has a good reason for bringing evils about. It must now be argued that God brings evils about for a good reason *and remains morally upright in doing so*. Regarding the other two doctrines—divine permission and the privative nature of sin—Leibniz's thought undergoes radical change. Once Leibniz feels the need to go beyond giving a reason

why God choose to create a world that contains evil, he reverses his opinion about whether God can be said to permit anything. Regarding privations, Leibniz's thought undergoes a number of changes. Around 1678, He reverses his opinion about whether there is any value to holding that sins are privations. Further, the phrase 'sins are privations' takes on different meanings as Leibniz develops. In 1686, he takes the phrase to mean that sins are the result of the limitation of the creature. By the time of the *Theodicy* (1710), however, he thinks of sins both as the result of limitations of creatures and as having a privative aspect (i.e., there is a defect in the action itself, and thus a double-role of the concept of privation). These changes require changes in Leibniz's metaphysics and in particular a change in the way Leibniz thinks of the causal interactions between God and human actions, and substances and human actions. This lends support to the still controversial but increasingly accepted view that Leibniz's metaphysics undergoes a significant change between the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and the *Monadology*.

INTRODUCTION

Leibniz's *Theodicy* has been ridiculed, satirized, and dismissed since shortly after its publication. Yet, there are a number of very good reasons that persons of varying interests ought to give Leibniz's theodical thought close attention. Leibniz's work on evil should be of interest to those interested in the problem of evil and to those interested in seventeenth century philosophy.

Before identifying those who will find this work interesting or useful, I would like to say just a few words about my own motivations. I find Leibniz's work on providence and evil to be worth studying in itself, in the same way that I find the work of his fellow courtier Handel to be worth listening to in itself. Leibniz is widely regarded to be among the brightest philosophers of any age, and the defense of the justice of God is a task he devoted considerable attention to. The Pont du Gard, Handel's *Messiah*, and the European Union all deserve their scholars. For whatever reason, Leibniz's efforts for the justice of God attract me more than these.

While I find Leibniz's work to be worth studying in itself, it is surely of particular interest to those interested in problems regarding divine providence and evil. Whether there are perennial philosophical problems is a contested issue.¹ If there are perennial philosophical problems, they are more likely to be found in philosophy of religion where the constraints of supposedly unchanging dogma work against changing fashions. If there are no perennial

¹ See Waugh and Ariew's "The Contingency of Philosophical Problems" for what I take to be a compelling argument against the existence of perennial philosophical problems.

problems, there are at least resemblances between problems. Before one attempts a solution of one's own, one could do worse than to study what great minds have written on closely related issues, not for straight-forward adoption, but to familiarize oneself more fully with the intricacies of the issue, the breadth of resources available, and potential pitfalls of employing those resources.

Leibniz's work on evil is particularly interesting for a number of reasons. For one, evil presents more of a problem for Leibniz than for some other religious thinkers given his rather rigid determinism. As far as I can tell, human freedom plays less of a role in Leibniz's work on evil than in that of any other religious thinker. Leibniz's early work in particular presents us with an extreme among theodicies. The relationship between God and the world is one of necessitation. God is found to be just, not because some aspects of the world are beyond his control, but because the world is *exactly* as he wants it. Rather than appealing to divine right or to mystery at this point (as do, for example Hobbes and Bayle, respectively), Leibniz concludes that there is no evil, taken in an absolute sense. Theodicies today tend to go in exactly the opposite direction, removing God's moral responsibility for evils by making these evils undetermined and sometimes even unforeknown. If one sees value, as I do, in examining a variety of different approaches to an issue, then Leibniz's early theodicy provides a unique extreme.

While the young Leibniz's theodicy is of interest because of the novelty and variety it offers to a survey of theodical projects; some might hesitate to give it much thought given how radical and unorthodox it is. Luckily, Leibniz himself began to see it this way and, without sacrificing originality, made revisions to present a more nuanced approach which is more easily incorporated into a Christian system. Thus, the study of the *development* of Leibniz's thought on

evil, more than a study of any one text, gives one appreciation for both Leibniz's innovation and his moderation. Apologetics texts and even texts on the history of apologetics have neglected or too quickly dismissed this wonderfully original thinker. One two volume text on the history of apologetics, for example, devotes chapters to Pascal, Butler, and Edwards, while Leibniz receives only a paragraph which features the following description of the *Theodicy*: "Leibniz argued that we are living in the 'best of all possible worlds.' Since God is the Creator, although there must be such a thing as evil, yet the world is as good as it ought to be."² I trust that it is obvious what an unfortunate oversight this is.

It should be noted that while I think there is some apologetic payoff to the study of Leibniz's works on evil, it is not immediate for a couple of reasons. One who wishes to contribute to contemporary apologetics would do well to be informed of the variety of problems of evil Leibniz faced, the theodical tools he used for arguing for the justice of God, and the context in which these problems and arguments arose. I have chosen to largely ignore the question of whether Leibniz's theodicy is directly helpful for solving today's problems of evil and the question of how to incorporate Leibnizian resources into a contemporary theodicy. I worry that an attempt to combine a study of a historical thinker's approach to the issues of evil and providence with an attempt to resolve similar issues in 21st century thought would be unhelpful to both aims. The historian would almost inevitably be drawn to treat her subject's problems as the same as her own and to adjust the solutions offered to make them more acceptable. Regardless of the method and aim of study, the scholar will bring some distortion to the text. This, I think, can be minimized by approaching the study with the sole aim of expositing the texts at hand. Where there truly are applications that can be made from historical

² Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics: Past and Present*, 586.

systems of thought, those applications ought to be made from accurate expositions of texts. So, in order for there to be any apologetic good from the study of Leibniz's work on evil, there ought to be a division of labor in which one study attempts first to exposit Leibniz's thought with no other goals than to faithfully present Leibniz's thought and another study makes whatever applications there might be to contemporary issues.

Fittingly, then, *this study*, though perhaps of use to one interested in apologetics, is intended for an audience with more historical interests. The *Theodicy* has a prominent place among Leibniz's works as the largest of his works published in his lifetime. Leibniz wrote the *Theodicy*, a book whose subject matter is of interest to the nobility and with appendixes on English authors, as an attempt to show off his philosophical skills for his now-English employer with the hopes of having his assignments altered. He writes to Burnett:

There is another digression on the dispute between M. Hobbes and the Bishop Bramhall, and another digression on the subject of the book of M. King on the origin of evil. There are also here and there some clarifications on my system of pre-established Harmony, and on a number of matters of general Philosophy and of natural Theology, where I suppose that all can be demonstratively settled and I have given the means of doing it. If I were to be released from my historical work, I would work at establishing these Elements of general Philosophy and of natural Theology, which includes things of even more importance in this Philosophy for theory and practice. But this present work can serve as a forerunner, as well as the pieces that I gave in the journals of Germany, France, and Holland. I hope that these Essays of Theodicy or of the justice of God will not displease in England. [...] I would have liked to have been capable of writing it in English, for the English are competent enough judges on these matters.³

³ To Burnett (October 30, 1710). *Die Philosophischen schriften*, III: 321-2. "Il y a encor une digression sur la dispute entre M. Hobbes et l'Eveque Bramhall, et une autre digression au sujet du livre de M. King sur l'origine du mal. Il y a aussi par cy par là des éclaircissemens sur mon système de l'Harmonie préétablie, et sur quantité de matieres de la Philosophie generale et de la Theologie naturelle, où je pretends que tout se peut regler demonstrativement, et j'en ay donné les moyens. Si j'estois debarrassé de mes travaux historiques, je voudrois me mettre à établir ces Elemens de la Philosophie generale et de la Theologie naturelle, qui comprend ce qu'il y a de plus important dans cette Philosophie pour la Theorie et pour la Pratique. Mais ce present ouvrage peut servir d'avantcoureur, comme aussi les pieces detachées que j'ay données dans les journeaux d'Allemagne, de France et de Hollande. J'espere que ces Essais de Theodicée ou de la justice de Dieu ne deplairont pas en Angleterre. [...] Je voudrois avoir esté capable de l'écrire en Anglois, car les Anglois sont des juges assés competens sur ces matieres."

Leibniz, then, gives us in his *Theodicy* an advertisement for his philosophical powers. A work that he hoped would make a name for him even more than did his *New System of Nature*.⁴ When Leibniz wrote *The Monadology*, a work that now too often treated as his most significant text, he cross-referenced the work to passages in the *Theodicy*, only omitting these in his final copy.

It is clear that Leibniz gave the *Theodicy* a certain priority among his works. It is not obvious that we should follow him in this, though perhaps we do now have a *prima facie* reason to do so. Further reasons come from the fact that theodical issues occupied Leibniz throughout his life and from the fact that throughout his life, his theodicy is intertwined with the metaphysical positions that are central to our conception of his thought (for example, positions concerning the nature of necessity and contingency, of substance, and of freedom). One goal for this study is to show the interconnection between Leibniz's work on evil and these classically Leibnizian positions. Rather than finding the *Theodicy* to be a popular work with little relation to the more interesting, private philosophy of Leibniz,⁵ a simple reading of the *Theodicy* itself will show that it is thoroughly connected to Leibniz's philosophy. A reading of the development of Leibniz's theodicy displays this even more clearly.

Robert Sleight's "Remarks on Leibniz's Treatment of the Problem of Evil" presents itself as a call for more attention to be paid to the intricacies of Leibniz's theodicy. Since its publication, there has been increased interest and increased work on the *Theodicy* and related texts. One of the chief merits of Sleight's piece is the way he acknowledges the complexity of the issues addressed by Leibniz's theodical works, and, to some extent, the development of

⁴ For another, compatible account of the goals of the *Theodicy*, see Antognazza, *Leibniz: An Intellectual Biography*, 479-86.

⁵ This was famously the position of Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, 531.

Leibniz's thought on these issues.⁶ While I have some disagreements about the details of Sleigh's interpretation, I have found his overall approach to this issue inspiring. The issues that fall under the label of 'theodicy' and the 'problem of evil' are indeed more complex than has often been noted. For instance, Nicholas Jolley has proposed that

[T]he key to understanding Leibniz's theodicy is to see that it comes in at least two distinct stages. The first stage in the defense of God's character against the charge of injustice consists in maintaining the thesis that God has created the best of all possible worlds; that is, God has done the best job open to him. [...] The second main stage consists in defending this 'optimistic' thesis against obvious objections. Critics like Voltaire will protest that the actual world surely cannot be the best possible world in view of all the various kinds of evils which it contains; surely other, better worlds are conceivable than the one which we inhabit.⁷

This, I believe, makes the mistake of thinking that of Leibniz's theodicy as wholly an issue of the best-possible-world thesis. I want to follow Sleigh in complicating the issue.

I want to complicate the issue, both temporally and doctrinally. I have divided this work into three developmental stories, each focusing on changes Leibniz made regarding one doctrine or theodical tool: the best-possible-world thesis, divine permission, and privation. I will argue that all three of these doctrines change as Leibniz's matures. I will then conclude by synthesizing these changes into an overarching account of the development of Leibniz's theodicy and drawing some application to recent debates about the development of Leibniz's metaphysics.

⁶ Sleigh writes, "My main developmental thesis is this: once Leibniz came to accept each of these propositions [the best-possible-world thesis, that sin is not absolutely evil, that an evil will deserves punishment, and that the source of evil is the divine understanding], he never rejected any of them, but his views about exactly what theodicean problems they resolved varied significantly over time." "Remarks on Leibniz's Treatment," 166-7. I will argue for more development in these theses themselves than Sleigh allows, particularly regarding the nature of evil. If Sleigh means that Leibniz never took the evil in the world to diminish the goodness of the world, he's absolutely right. The evils are either the means or effects of greater goods. However, one of the main theses of this dissertation will be that Leibniz comes to see evil as *more real* as he develops his theodicy. In Leibniz's early works, he is quite comfortable having God be the cause of 'evils,' largely because they are not *really* evils (not absolutely). By 1686 Leibniz has taken steps to ensure that God does not figure in his system as the cause of evil. This would be a genuine threat to God's perfection.

⁷ Jolley, *Leibniz*, 159. While Leibniz's optimism is an essential part of all his theodicies, when his thought on evil is taken to be entirely centered on the best-possible-world thesis, it is little wonder why it is so often so quickly dismissed.

It is the significant development, and to a lesser extent the division of the problems Leibniz faces, that leads me to give this dissertation the title *Leibniz's Theodicies*.

One will notice that I have already claimed that freedom has hardly any role in Leibniz's theodicies and that I fail to devote a chapter to his conception of freedom. Perhaps I should explain this a little given how much Leibniz has to say about freedom. One can hardly look through an anthology of Leibniz's works without seeing freedom in the title to some work or another. Freedom is only introduced in a roundabout way in Leibniz's theodical writings. Paul Rateau points out that Leibniz follows a juridical approach to the problem of evil, asking primarily "Who is responsible for [evil]?"⁸ A failure to read Leibniz as concerned with freedom only by way of responsibility can lead to strange interpretations. One description even makes Leibniz's theodicy sound just like Plantinga's free-will defense, "The possibility of sinning is a necessary concomitant of freedom of action and therefore had to be included for the sake of this greater good."⁹ I will argue that there is no feature (physical or metaphysical) of the world that is explained by freedom. Instead, freedom enters Leibniz's account when it is determined that humans are responsible for sins, and since responsible, free.

The first chapter discusses the thesis that this is the best possible world. In this chapter I argue that Leibniz's early account of the relationship between God and the world, extending (perhaps surprisingly) through his writing of the *Confessio philosophi* in 1672-3, is one of necessitation. Leibniz's earliest theodicies involve a denial of evil except in a relative sense. Though the necessitarian theodicy of Leibniz's letter to Wedderkopf is fascinating and perhaps even successful, theological issues raised by Leibniz's contemporaries eventually convinced him

⁸ Rateau, "The Problem of Evil and the Justice of God."

⁹ Mates, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, 45-6.

that some kind of contingency is required for an acceptable conception of God. Perhaps as a result of this newly found contingency in the works of God, Leibniz famously offered a little more detail in the form of the variety/simplicity criterion. The way in which Leibniz conceived of this criterion and also the extent that it could be given a theodical use changed significantly over the course of his life.

In the second chapter, Leibniz's early mentions of divine permission are compared with the arguments made by Pierre Bayle against permission. It is found that the young Leibniz's account of permission is truly bizarre and problematic. In fact, I argue, it can only be seen as lip service and not as a genuine account of divine permission. Because of this we are right to focus nearly exclusively on the necessary creation of the best possible world in the young Leibniz's theodicy, but further study will show us that this is not the case regarding the mature Leibniz. Changes Leibniz made to his metaphysics in the 1680s allowed him a more meaningful notion of permission, and changes in his conception of evil required that he incorporate divine permission into his theodicy.

In the final chapter, Leibniz's positions regarding the thesis that sins are privations are chronicled and explained. I find three phases in Leibniz's development regarding privation. First, he follows Hobbes in rejecting its theodical usefulness. Around the time of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, he uses privation to explain the source of evil. He holds that the evil actions themselves are positive and not caused by God. Finally, culminating in the *Theodicy*, he finds that evils both are privations and come from privations. Actions are divided between the positive component, with which God concurs, and the privative component which springs from the creature's inherent limitation – itself a privation.

The drawback of such a divided study of Leibniz's theodical thought is that it hides the fact that the pieces must develop together. Leibniz could not have revised his conception of evil without also revising his conception of divine permission; and revising his conception of divine permission also changes the way that Leibniz's God is related to the world. I hope to remedy this oversight in the conclusion by providing summary of Leibniz's theodicies at different stages in his development. I believe this will also highlight the way in which Leibniz's work on evil is connected to his larger metaphysics since the stages of the development of his theodicy line up with those of his metaphysics.

In spite of this drawback, I believe this way of dividing my discussion of Leibniz's theodicies highlights the feature of Leibniz's thoughts concerning evil that is unfortunately most easily missed: that it is complex. Organizing the work in order to display this complexity, along with the developmental story and the connections to Leibniz's metaphysics, I hope will encourage others to look more closely at Leibniz's *Theodicy*. While ultimately many will still find Leibniz's optimism unsatisfying, perhaps they will still see the marks of a careful mind in Leibniz's treatment of evil.

CHAPTER ONE:
THE BEST POSSIBLE WORLD¹⁰

The thesis that this is the best possible world seems to be both too obviously true to tell us very much in that it follows quite naturally from the idea of a perfect God, and too obviously false to be worth thinking about given our experience of the world. As Bayle might say, it is supported by *a priori* reasons and refuted by *a posteriori* reasons. Leibniz's claim that this is the best of all possible worlds is the most famous and most ridiculed part of his theodicy. It also has the appearance of the most enduring part of his theodicy. Here I will examine the ways in which Leibniz's best-possible-world thesis underwent changes as what Leibniz meant by possible and what Leibniz meant by best changed throughout his life.¹¹

¹⁰ Portions of this chapter have been published as "Necessitarianism in Leibniz's *Confessio Philosophi*." *Society and Politics* 6:2 (2012): 101-9.

¹¹ Interestingly, Leibniz's conception of the world also changed throughout his life, that is, Leibniz thought about what the world consists of developed over the course of his life. But for the purposes of this study, I take Leibniz's definition of the world as "the whole assemblage of *contingent* things" (*Theodicy*, §7) to be relatively stable (aside the inclusion of 'contingency'). Paul Rateau sees this as an important point, given that he thinks of Leibniz's early "series of things" as including God as the first term, while Leibniz's later conception of possible worlds puts God outside the world (Rateau, *La question du mal*, 150-5). See also, Rateau, "The Problem of Evil and the Justice of God," where he writes, "To really establish the contingency of the world, Leibniz will have to revise some of his theses. God is no longer to be considered the first term of the entire series of things but must be said to be outside and independent of it. Thus it will be possible to assert that God might have created another world without ceasing to be God. These theological and metaphysical changes imply to revise the notion of possible (which cannot be reduced to a pure and unrealizable fiction), and the role of the divine will so as to define it as a real positive power of choosing." I concede that this is an important point, and put quite nicely. I believe I have come to much the same result in my discussion of contingency below.

The Theodicy of the Letter to Wedderkopf

Leibniz's 1671 letter to Magnus Wedderkopf has many virtues. It is candid, concise, and, in some sense, I think it is successful. That it is candid can be seen in that Leibniz wishes the details of the theodicy offered there to be kept between himself and Wedderkopf. He writes, "But these remarks are for you; I do not wish them made public. For not even the most proper remarks are understood by everyone."¹² As for the rest, it is a page and a half and offers a thorough explanation of the justice of God in creating this world. Of course, that the letter is so brief, that it pretends to do so much, and that it is not to be offered to the public makes one suspect whether it can contain anything approaching an orthodox position. It is generally acknowledged that one can easily solve the problem of evil by giving up either God's omnipotence, God's goodness, or the existence of evil.¹³ Solutions of this kind have in common both concision and heresy; and, in fact, we will find that Leibniz does give up the existence of evil.

In the letter to Wedderkopf, The best-possible-world thesis shows up as follows:

However, since God is the most perfect mind, it is impossible that he is not affected by the most perfect harmony and thus must bring about the best by the very ideality of things. [...] From this it follows that whatever has happened, is happening, or will happen is the best and, accordingly, necessary.¹⁴

The thesis is based on a certain conception of the divine intellect. God is supremely rational. He considers all possible combinations of possible essences and is compelled to bring about that

¹² SCP, 4-5; A II.1, 118: Sed haec ad Te: nolim enim eliminari Nam nec rectissima a quovis intelliguntur.

¹³ See, for instance, Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 201.

¹⁴ SCP, 3-5; A II.1, 117. "Cum autem Deus sit mens perfectissima, impossibile est ipsum non affici harmonia perfectissima, atque ita ab ipsa rerum idealitate ad optimum necessitari [...] Hinc sequitur, quicquid factum est, fit aut fiet, optimum ac proinde necessarium esse, [...]"

which is most harmonious. The reason for believing this is the best possible world is obvious. If God is such a supremely rational being, he would choose to create the best world.

More interesting than the argument for the best-possible-world thesis are the ways the evils in the world are shown to be compatible with it in the letter to Wedderkopf and the *Confessio philosophi* of 1672-3. There are two basic approaches that Leibniz follows with variations throughout his life: one that considers aesthetics, and one that considers what one might call theological economics.

Leibniz uses a number of aesthetic analogies to support the best-possible-world thesis. We already saw that Leibniz appeals to harmony in the letter to Wedderkopf as the basis for God's evaluation of the best world. When Leibniz attempts an explanation of damnation in the *Confessio philosophi*, he writes, “[S]ince not everyone could be saved (because of the universal harmony of things, which sets off a picture by shading, consonance by dissonance), some, less loved, were *rejected* [...]”¹⁵ And later in the same document, he writes, “Moreover, just as in the most exquisite harmony the most turbulent discord is unexpectedly reduced to order, a painting is made more distinct by the shading, a harmony is made from dissonances in concert with dissonances (as an even number results from two odd numbers), so sins (remarkably) inflict on themselves their own punishments.”¹⁶ In a different context, Maria Rosa Antognazza writes insightfully about Leibniz's use of analogy in his defense of the trinity and the incarnation:

Once again its aim is not a positive demonstration of the possibility but something more subtle: namely, the discovery of ‘a trace,’ ‘an image,’ ‘a shadow’ in the natural sphere, of what is affirmed about the supernatural sphere. Although it is not possible to produce adequate examples of the existence in nature of what is maintained in revelation, one can

¹⁵ SCP, 31; A VI.3, 117. “[C]um non possent (per harmoniam rerum universalem, picturam umbris, consonantiam dissonantiis distinguentem) salvari omnes; aliquos minus amatos [...]fuisse *rejectos*.”

¹⁶ SCP, 53; A VI.3, 126. “Harmoniae autem exquisitissimae sit discordantiam turbatissimam in ordinem velut insperato redigi, picturam umbris distingui, harmoniam per dissonantias dissonantiis in consonantiam compensari (quemadmodum ex duobus numeris imparibus par fit) peccata sibi ipsis (quod notandum est) poenas irrogare [...]”

nevertheless show that relations similar to the one indicated by the mystery in question actually exist in the natural sphere. [...] This actual existence is an indication of the possibility that there may be something similar also in the sphere of the divine.¹⁷

Likewise, Leibniz uses an aesthetic analogy to defend the goodness of God's creation in spite of the evil appearances in the parts of that creation. He does not have proof that every instance of evil results in a better world, but he can provide analogies to persuade us that it is reasonable to think so.

While some of Leibniz's appeals to harmony do have an analogical dimension, harmony is more than just an analogy. Leibniz writes,

For every ratio, proportion, analogy, proportionality arises from God's nature or, what is the same, from the idea of things, and not from the will of God. [...] If this is the way it is with ratio and proportionality, then it is the same with *harmony* and *discord*, for they consist in the *ratio of identity to diversity*, for harmony is unity in multiplicity, and it is greatest in the case where it is a unity of the greatest number of things disordered in appearance and reduced, unexpectedly, by some wonderful ratio to the greatest elegance.¹⁸

There is a real aesthetic good—tied, in fact, to the Trinitarian nature of God¹⁹—in variety brought to identity. That it is tied to the Trinity indicates that we will not be able to perfectly understand this harmony, but we have analogies to the use of shade in painting or the use of dissonance in music. We are invited then to imagine that the aspects of the world that appear evil may enhance the whole.

While the analogies bring to mind other examples of constructions which benefit from components that would be unpleasant in isolation, Leibniz has more to offer. He believes this to

¹⁷ Antognazza, *Leibniz on the Trinity and the Incarnation*, xviii.

¹⁸ SCP, 42-5; A VI.3, 122. Sleigh translates 'concinnitatem' as 'symmetry.' I opt for 'elegance' above. "Omnis enim ratio, proportio, analogia, proportionalitas, non a voluntate sed natura Dei, vel quod idem est, ab Idea rerum proficiscitur. [...] Si ratio vel proportionalitas, ergo et *Harmonia* et *discordantia*. Consistunt enim in *ratione identitatis ad diversitatem*, est enim harmonia unitas in multis, maxima in plurimis; et in speciem turbatis et mirabili quadam ratione ex insperato ad summam concinnitatem reductis."

¹⁹ See Antognazza, *Leibniz on the Trinity and the Incarnation*, xx-xxiii.

be the best possible world but also holds that a world without sin and other evils would exist if it were better than this one. Any evils in the world then must make the world better in some way.

All sins must be *felices culpa*. In the letter to Wedderkopf, Leibniz is explicit about this and offers an explanation with respect to sin:

Therefore, nothing is to be considered absolutely evil, otherwise either God will not be supremely wise with respect to its comprehension or God will not be supremely powerful with respect to its elimination. There is no doubt that this was the opinion of Augustine. Sins are evil, not absolutely, not with respect to the world as a whole, not with respect to God—otherwise he would not permit them—but with respect to the sinner. God hates sins, not in the sense that he cannot bear the sight of them, as we cannot bear the sight of what we detest—otherwise he would eliminate them—but because he punishes them. Taken together with punishment or atonement, sins are good, i.e., harmonious. For there is no harmony except as a result of contraries.²⁰

In general, then, Leibniz holds that the sins in the world do not necessarily make the world worse as long as they are also punished. One evil might make the world worse (a sin), but surprisingly, two (a sin and a pain), at least sometimes, make it better.

These aesthetic considerations blend into economic considerations. The evils in this world are compensated by goods they produce. In the *Confessio*, Leibniz writes,

In brief: God permits sins because he knows that what he permits is not contrary to the general good, for this dissonance is compensated for in another way. However, a man, sinning mortally, knows that what he does is contrary to the general good, as far as he is able to judge, and that what he does *cannot be reconciled with the general good except through his own punishment*.²¹

²⁰ SCP, 5; A II.1, 118. “Nihil ergo absolute malum esse putandum, alioqui Deus aut non erit summe sapiens ad deprehendendum, aut non summe potens ad eliminandum. Hanc fuisse sententiam Augustini nullus dubito. Peccata mala sunt, non absolute, non mundo, non Deo, alioqui nec permetteret, sed peccanti. Deus odit peccata, non ut nec conspectum eorum ferre possit, uti nos quae aversamur, alioquin eliminaret, sed quia punit. Peccata bona sunt, id est harmonica, sumta cum poena aut expiatione. Nulla enim nisi ex contrariis harmonia est.” Much the same thought is expressed in the *Confessio* at SCP, 51-3; A VI.3, 126.

²¹ SCP, 65; A VI.3, 131. “Breviter: Deus permittit peccata quia scit ea quae permittit, contra bonum publicum non esse, sed aliter hanc dissonantiam compensari. Homo vero mortaliter peccans scit id quod agit esse contra bonum publicum, quantum ipse judicare potest, *nec ei conciliari posse nisi poena sua* [...]”

It seems that the simple variety and contrariety that sins introduce are good so long as there is a proper order maintained in the world. The simple occurrence of a sin is out of order. It is against the rules of morality, but order is restored by punishment.

Having some grasp of what the best-possible-world thesis entails in these early writings, it remains to be seen how it fits in Leibniz's early theodicy. The letter to Wedderkopf offers a simple theodicy that relies heavily on the best-possible-world thesis. In the letter, Leibniz holds that God is necessitated to create the best possible world, that everything that happens is necessary, and that, strictly speaking, there is no evil. If all this were true, there would be no theodical problems left to solve.

The best-possible-world thesis, thus, takes a disturbingly unorthodox meaning in the letter to Wedderkopf. God's decision and the events of the world are necessitated. Leibniz writes, "For it is the highest form of reason to be forced to the best by right reason; whoever desires another form of freedom is a fool. From this it follows that whatever has happened, is happening, or will happen is the best and, accordingly, necessary."²² Leibniz was soon made aware that claiming that everything (including sins) is necessary is problematic.

More disturbing still, Leibniz claims that there actually are no evils. Zbigniew Janowski writes, "Leibniz and Voltaire lived in the same world. The point of their disagreement is not that Leibniz denies the reality of evil by claiming that evil is only apparent while Voltaire insists on its actuality; the crux of the controversy is whether there evil has any *meaning*."²³ As insightful as Janowski's comment is, it does not apply to the young Leibniz. Here, instead, Leibniz holds that nothing in the world is evil in the strict sense. He writes,

²² SCP 3-5; A II.1, 117. "Summa enim libertas est ad optimum a recta ratione cogi, qui aliam libertatem desiderat stultus est. Hinc sequitur, quicquid factum est, fit aut fiet, optimum ac proinde necessarium esse [...]"

²³ Janowski, *Cartesian Theodicy*, 24.

Therefore, nothing is to be considered absolutely evil, otherwise either God will not be supremely wise with respect to its comprehension or God will not be supremely powerful with respect to its elimination. [...] Sins are evil, not absolutely, not with respect to the world as a whole, not with respect to God—otherwise he would not permit them—but with respect to the sinner.²⁴

Leibniz's theodicy in the letter to Wedderkopf (and the best-possible-world thesis) can be seen as a way of explaining evil away rather than explaining why God would permit evil. In section III, I will consider more fully the implications of Leibniz's denial of evil (in the strict sense), but first I want to consider the treatment of evil and necessity in the *Confessio philosophi*.

Necessity in the Letter to Wedderkopf and the *Confessio Philosophi*

There are several reasons why the *Confessio philosophi* (1672-3) merits extended treatment. First, compared to Leibniz's other writings on evil (excluding the *Theodicy*), it is rather lengthy, coming in at 34 pages in the Akademie edition. Compare this to the 1.5-paged letter to Wedderkopf and the seven-paged *Dialogue on Human Freedom and the Origin of Evil*. Secondly, it is remarkable in content, as will be seen in what follows. Here I will focus on the necessitarian implications of the early appearances of the best-possible-world thesis.

The *Confessio philosophi* appears to diverge from the letter to Wedderkopf by providing an anti-necessitarian solution to the problem of the author of sin.²⁵ I will argue instead that Leibniz's uses of 'contingency' in this early manuscript dialogue were intentionally deceptive. Leibniz intended to offer only the appearance of contingency so that this work might appeal to less radical theologians when in reality it offers a more radically necessitarian solution to this

²⁴ SCP, 5; A II.1, 118. "Nihil ergo absolute malum esse putandum, alioqui Deus aut non erit summe sapiens ad deprehendendum, aut non summe potens ad eliminandum. [...] Peccata mala sunt, non absolute, non mundo, non Deo, alioqui nec permetteret, sed peccanti."

²⁵ Robert Sleigh, for example, suggests this reading. "Leibniz may have taken the per se modalities to be the unqualified modalities, and, hence, believed that the per se modalities provided an escape from necessitarianism." Sleigh, "Leibniz's First Theodicy," 496. See also, SCP, xxiv-xxvii.

problem than is found in his mature works. Thus, the differences between Leibniz's thought on evil in the 1671 letter to Wedderkopf and in 1672-3 (while writing the *Confessio*) are not as significant as they at first appear.

I will give a brief reading of what appear to be two solutions to the problem of the author of sin in the *Confessio*. The first solution appears to commit Leibniz's spokesman (the Philosopher) to necessitarianism. The Theologian (Leibniz's interlocutor) objects to this necessitarianism, prompting the Philosopher to offer a modified version that appears to exorcise this doctrine from his theodicy. As it turns out, Leibniz holds that these two solutions are in fact the same. So, I will then reconcile these solutions, arguing for the priority to the more radical, first solution. It will be argued that Leibniz does not find the necessitarianism, which references to per se contingencies are supposed to solve, to be problematic in 1673.

The *Confessio philosophi* opens with a discussion of the justice of God in light of the doctrines of election and reprobation. The Philosopher explains that the damned are rejected, not because God *wills* it, "but by God's permitting it when the nature of things demanded it."²⁶ The Theologian responds to this by posing the problem of the author of sin,

And how is it that he [God] is not a *promoter of sin* if, having knowledge of it (though he could have eliminated it from the world), he admitted it or tolerated it? Indeed, how is it that he is not the *author of sin*, if he created everything in such a manner that sin followed?²⁷

The problem being considered, then, is that since the sins in the world are the result of God's causal activity, how is it that God is not their author?

²⁶ SCP, 31; A VI.3, 117. "[...] attamen cum ita rerum natura ferat, permittente Deo [...]"

²⁷ SCP, 33; A VI.3, 117. "Et quomodo non *fautor peccati* est, si sciens (cum eliminare mundo potuerit) admisit aut toleravit. imo quomodo non *autor*, si omnia ita creavit, ut inde peccatum sequeretur."

Leibniz's first solution from the *Confessio* focuses on removing blameworthiness from God by suggesting (1) that from God's existence, all created things follow ("if God is taken away, so is the entire series of things, and if God is posited, so is the entire series of things") and (2) that sins result from God's understanding, not from his will ("I think, therefore, that sins are not due to the divine *will* but rather to the divine *understanding* or, what is the same, to the eternal ideas or the nature of things[...]").²⁸

While in the letter to Wedderkopf, Leibniz describes the connection between God and the world depicted by (1) as a necessary connection, the word 'necessary' is absent from this portion of the *Confessio*. Despite this omission, the Theologian's accusation of necessitarianism²⁹ prompts the Philosopher to recast his solution in less radical terms. The Philosopher, thus, proposes his second solution by defining away problem of the author of sin and *apparently* the first account's necessitarianism with it. First, regarding the problem of the author of sin, Leibniz writes,

To will in favor of something is to be delighted by its existence; *to will against* something is to be sad at its existence or to be delighted at its non-existence. *To permit* is neither to will in favor nor to will against, and nevertheless to know. *To be the author* is by one's will to be the ground of something else.³⁰

Following these definitions, Leibniz concludes, "Namely, that it is not God but rather man, or the devil, who alone will in favor of sin, i.e., take delight in evil."³¹ God is not delighted by the

²⁸ SCP, 41; A VI.3, 121. "[S]ublato Deo tolli, posito poni totam seriem rerum, [...] Sentio igitur peccata deberi non *voluntati*, sed *intellectui* divino, vel quod idem est, ideis illis aeternis, seu naturae rerum [...]"

²⁹ SCP, 49; A VI.3, 125.

³⁰ SCP, 55; A VI.3, 127. "*Velle* est existentia alicuius delectari. *Nolle* est existentia alicuius dolere, aut non existentia delectari. *Permittere* est, nec velle nec nolle, et tamen scire. *Autorem* esse, est voluntate sua esse rationem alienae."

³¹ SCP, 63; A VI.3, 131. "Non Deum scilicet sed hominem, diabolumve esse, qui soli volunt, id est malo delectantur."

existence of evil and so cannot be said to will evil, but neither is he sad at its existence. God permits sin, knowing that it accords with the general good. Humans and demons lack this knowledge and so are not exonerated.³² Thus, the second account, instead of suggesting that all things follow from God's existence and sins from His understanding, relies rather on definitions of willing and authoring to demonstrate that God cannot be the author of sin.

It still remains to be seen how the Philosopher evades the charge of necessitarianism. This is also accomplished with definitions. He defines *necessity* and *contingency* in terms of logical contradiction and clear conception, writing, "So, I will designate that as *necessary*, the opposite of which implies a contradiction or cannot be clearly conceived [...] Those things are *contingent* that are not necessary [...]"³³ Leibniz is here utilizing the notion of *per se* possibility³⁴ which will remain a part of his philosophy for the remainder of his career. Robert Adams describes this view as follows:

On this view, the actual world, and the things that exist in it, are not necessary but contingent, because other worlds are possible in which those things would not exist. The possibility of those other worlds does not depend on the possibility of God's choosing them. It is enough, for the contingency of the actual world, if the other possible worlds are 'possible in their own nature' or 'do not imply a contradiction in themselves,' considered apart from God's choice.³⁵

Leibniz emends the *Confessio* years later. In the emendations, he explicitly distinguishes between *per se* and absolute necessity. Absolute necessity considers not only the individual essence of a particular thing but also its relationship to other necessary things.

³² SCP, 65; A VI.3, 131.

³³ SCP, 53-5; A VI.3, 126-7. "*Necessarium* ergo illud vocabo, cuius oppositum implicat contradictionem, seu intelligi clare non potest [...] *Contingentia* sunt, quae necessaria non sunt."

³⁴ This quotation taken by itself leaves it undetermined whether *per se* modalities or some other notion is being used. In the later emendations Leibniz explicitly refers to *per se* modalities. Given the passage from SCP, 57, quoted below, it is clear that Leibniz was in fact intending these to be *per se* modalities in the initial drafting.

³⁵ Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 12-3.

There is an oddity in Leibniz’s use of the *per se* modalities here. Robert Sleigh writes, “Although the ‘per se’ terminology is not therein employed, this is, in a sense, the purest use of the per se modalities you will find in Leibniz; in the original *Confessio* Leibniz took them to be the unqualified modalities.”³⁶ Following Sleigh’s apt analysis, when Leibniz uses ‘necessity’ in this second solution, he is referring to *per se* necessity even though it seems the objection really ought to be concerned with absolute necessity. It is a credit to Leibniz’s dialogue that the Theologian point out this oddity: “But isn’t whatever will be such that it is ⟨absolutely⟩ necessary that it will be, just as whatever was, was necessarily, and whatever is, similarly is necessarily?”³⁷ Leibniz’s response to this objection is a simple denial, “Absolutely not; that is false [...]”³⁸ Note that the term ‘absolute’ in the Theologian’s objection above was added to the text at a later date. Before the emendation, the way Leibniz wrote the Philosopher seemed to indicate that he understood the Theologian’s objection to be using the definition of necessity provided (not absolute necessity, but *per se* necessity). The Philosopher’s response misses the issue by clarifying³⁹ his definition (a definition of *per se* necessity) rather than arguing that necessitarianism (which relates to absolute necessity) is false.

So, we have *some* evidence that Leibniz was not truly concerned with necessitarianism and so suggested something that is contingency in name only so he could deny contingency in name only. It could however be the case that Leibniz was genuinely concerned with

³⁶ Sleigh, “Leibniz’s First Theodicy,” 496.

³⁷ SCP, 57; A VI.3, 128. Wide angles indicate later additions. “[N]onne quicquid erit, absolute necessarium erit, quemadmodum quicquid fuit, necessario fuit, et quicquid est, utique necessario est?”

³⁸ SCP, 57; A VI.3, 128. “Imo falsum est [...]”

³⁹ This clarification comes in the form of a denial of closure for necessity; SCP, 55; A VI.3, 127. This allows contingent existences and events to follow from God’s necessary existence. Clearly, this is a feature of *per se* modalities.

necessitarianism and really thought the addition of *per se* modalities would solve the problems that absolute necessitarianism raised. This is not the case. Since Leibniz considers these not two solutions but two accounts of one solution,⁴⁰ we must ultimately reconcile them. But first I want to show that Leibniz *really* takes the first account to be a necessitarian solution to the problem of the author of sin.

In *On Freedom*, Leibniz gives testimony of his early necessitarian period as follows:

When I considered that nothing happens by chance or by accident (unless we are considering certain substances taken by themselves), that fortune distinguished from fate is an empty name, and that no thing exists unless its own particular conditions are present (conditions from whose joint presence it follows, in turn, that the thing exists), I was very close to the view of those who think that everything is absolutely necessary, who judge that it is enough for freedom that we be uncoerced, even though we might be subject to necessity, and close to the view of those who do not distinguish what is infallible or certainly known to be true, from that which is necessary.⁴¹

Following Adams,⁴² I take it that Leibniz is understating the necessitarianism of his youth.

Leibniz's early letter to Wedderkopf was clearly a part of this early necessitarian period. But there are a number of ways in which this letter is closely related to the *Confessio philosophi*.

First, there are fewer than two years between the writing of these two documents. Consider also how the strong similarities in the language used in the letter and in the *Confessio*. In the letter, Leibniz writes, "From this it follows that whatever has happened, is happening, or will happen is the best and, accordingly, necessary."⁴³ What leads Leibniz to this necessitarianism in the letter

⁴⁰ SCP, 51; A VI.3, 125.

⁴¹ AG, 94; A VI.4b, 1653. "Ego cum considerarem nihil casu fieri, aut per accidens nisi respectu ad substantias quasdam particulares habito, et fortunam a fato sparatam inane nomen esse, et nihil existere nisi positis singulis requisitis, ex his autem omnibus simul vicissim consequi ut res existat; parum aberam ab eorum sententia, qui omnia absolute necessaria arbitrantur, et libertati sufficere judicant, ut a coactione tuta sit, etsi necessitati submittatur; neque infallibile seu verum certo cognitum, a necessario discernunt."

⁴² Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 11.

⁴³ SCP, 5; A II.1, 117. "Hinc sequitur, quicquid factum est, fit aut fiet, optimum ac proinde necessarium esse [...]" Note that 'necessity' here cannot mean *per se* necessity as it follows from universal harmony.

is an early form of the principle of sufficient reason and considerations of divine perfection, and a harmony, the creation of which is objectively the best course of action for a perfect being. He writes,

For everything must be reduced to some reason, which process cannot stop until it reaches a primary reason. [...] What, therefore is the ultimate basis for the divine will? The divine intellect. For God wills those things that he perceives to be the best and, likewise, the most harmonious; and he selects them, so to speak, from the infinite number of all the possible. [...] However, since God is the most perfect mind, it is impossible that he is not affected by the most perfect harmony and thus must bring about the best by the very ideality of things.⁴⁴

In the *Confessio*, Leibniz makes a statement similar to the letter's statement of necessitarianism, writing, "I cannot deny that God is the ultimate grounds of things," and clarifying that statement by adding, "if God is taken away, so is the entire series of things, and if God is posited, so is the entire series of things[...]. Take away or change the series of things, and the ultimate ground of things, that is, God, will be done away with or changed."⁴⁵ What brings Leibniz to the conclusion that God is the ultimate ground of all things (even human choices) is similarly sufficient reason,⁴⁶ divine perfection, and harmony.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ SCP, 3; A II.1, 117. "Omnia enim necesse est resolvi in rationem aliquam, nec subsisti potest, donec perveniatur ad primam [...] Quae ergo ultima ratio voluntatis divinae? intellectus divinus. Deus enim vult quae optima item harmonicotata intelligit eaque velut seligit ex numero omnium possibilium infinito. [...] Cum autem Deus sit mens perfectissima, impossibile est ipsum non affici harmonia perfectissima, atque ita ab ipsa rerum idealitate ad optimum necessitari."

⁴⁵ SCP, 41, 45; A VI.3, 121, 123. "Non possum negare Deum ultimam rationem rerum [...] [N]on inquam, non possum negare, quia certum est, sublato Deo tolli, posito poni totam seriem rerum, [...] Ita enim comparatum est cum rebus, ut sublatis peccatis tota rerum series longe alia futura fuerit. Sublata, vel mutata rerum serie, etiam ultima ratio rerum, id est Deus e medio tolletur mutabiturque."

⁴⁶ SCP, 33; A VI.3, 118. "Whatever exists, at any rate, will have all the requisites for existing; however, all the requisites for existing taken together at the same time are a sufficient reason for existing. Therefore, whatever exists has a *sufficient reason for existing*." "Quicquid existit, utique habebit omnia ad existendum requisita, omnia autem ad existendum requisita simul sumpta, sunt *ratio existendi sufficiens*; Ergo quicquid existit, habet rationem existendi sufficientem."

⁴⁷ SCP 31; A VI.3, 117. "[s]ome loved less were *rejected*, not by God's willing it (for God does not will the death of the sinner) but by God's permitting it when the nature of things demanded it." "aliquos, minus amatos, non quidem volente, attamen cum ita rerum natura ferat, permittente Deo (neque enim Deus vult mortem peccatoris) fuisse *rejectos*." SCP, 45; A VI.3 122. "Sins occur to bring forth a universal harmony of things, thus distinguishing the

It is puzzling, then, that the term ‘necessary’ and related terms are not used by the Philosopher to present the first account. Leibniz’s necessitarianism was not a public doctrine, as is seen in the conclusion of Leibniz’s letter to Wedderkopf where he writes, “I do not wish [these remarks] to be made public. For not even the most proper remarks are understood by everyone.”⁴⁸ Given the subject matter of the *Confessio*, we can assume that Leibniz meant it to be read by theologians who would be wary of this radical doctrine.⁴⁹

Additionally, it is curious that when the Philosopher lays out his method for producing the second solution from the first (that is, substituting the definitions of necessity and like terms for the appearance of the words⁵⁰) he seems to have forgotten that these words were not used in the first solution. If my reading is correct, Leibniz’s plan in the *Confessio* was to offer a stipulative definition of ‘necessity’ to (illegitimately) sidestep the issue of necessitarianism. The addition of ‘necessity’ early in the document would have ill-served this goal. That the first solution is treated as if it had used these words (as seen both in the objection and in the method for a response), gives evidence that Leibniz saw the first account as a necessitarian solution to the problem of the author of sin.

There are two ways in which one can reconcile these two solutions. One might give priority to the second account; indeed, it feels natural to do so given that it is supposed to

light by means of shadows. However, the universal harmony is a result not of the will of God but the intellect of God, or of the idea, that is, the nature of things.” “Peccata scilicet contingere ita ferente harmonia rerum universali, lucem umbris distinguente, Harmoniam autem universalem non a voluntate Dei, sed intellectu seu idea, id est natura rerum esse.”

⁴⁸ SCP, 5; A II.1, 118. “[N]olim enim eliminari. Nam nec rectissima a quovis intelliguntur.”

⁴⁹ Indeed, Otto Saame has shown that some of the marginalia to the manuscript belongs to Nicolaus Steno; Sleight, after making note of Saame’s research, notes that Leibniz mentions having shown an early dialogue on freedom to Antoine Arnauld while in Paris (SCP, xxii-xxiii). The time and content suggest that some version of the *Confessio* is likely that dialogue.

⁵⁰ SCP, 51; A VI.3, 125.

overcome an objection posed to the first. In spite of this, I believe we ought to give priority to the first solution. I will argue for this from the *Confessio philosophi*'s connection to other texts in this period of Leibniz's career, and from considerations internal to the text of the *Confessio*.

The *Confessio philosophi* is one of a number of texts characterized by an attempt to resolve the tension between mechanistic philosophy and Christian orthodoxy. Daniel Garber, describing these early texts, writes, "Beginning as early as the *Demonstrationes catholicae* from the late 1660s, Leibniz tried to show how the mechanical philosophy then popular in progressive intellectual circles requires us to turn to God at crucial moments."⁵¹ Garber points to the *Confessio naturae contra atheistas* of 1669 as an important effort in this conciliatory program. In that work Leibniz argues that the new mechanistic philosophy requires "a mind ruling the whole world, that is, God."⁵² After the *Confessio naturae*, then, Leibniz has to his satisfaction demonstrated that the mechanical philosophy requires acceptance of certain religious doctrines; however, the result of such thinking is a radically deterministic view of the relationship between God and the world. It is in light of this relationship between God and the world that the problem of the author of sin appears. Between the two confessions, Leibniz writes the letter to Magnus Wedderkopf. The letter (like the *Confessio philosophi*) attempts to resolve this difficulty between the deterministic relationship between God and the world on the one hand, and the justice of God on the other. In the letter, Leibniz does not resolve this difficulty by softening the connection between God and the world, but rather relies on its strength to render God innocent.

What, therefore [since 'everything must be reduced to some reason'], is the basis of the divine will? The divine intellect[...] What, therefore, is the ultimate basis of the divine intellect? The harmony of things[...] However, since God is the most perfect mind, it is

⁵¹ Garber, "Leibniz, Theology and the Mechanical Philosophy," 170.

⁵² Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 112; A VI.1, 492. "Tale igitur Ens incorporale erit Mens totius Mundi Rectrix, id est DEUS."

impossible that he is not affected by the most perfect harmony, and thus must bring about the best by the very ideality of things[...] From this it follows that whatever has happened, is happening, or will happen is the best and, accordingly, necessary.⁵³

Here Leibniz argues that God's perfection necessarily results in his selection of the most perfect series of things possible.

One can see a progression in these texts. In the *Confessio naturae*, Leibniz shows that the mechanistic philosophy requires us to turn to God. This mechanistic view of the world raises theodical problems. In the letter to Wedderkopf, Leibniz begins to address the problem of the author of sin relying on the necessity of the world as a part of that defense; He, however, worries about the reception of such a radical solution. In the *Confessio philosophi*, Leibniz offers a slightly different⁵⁴ defense against the problem of the author of sin attempting something that might be more easily swallowed by the more conservative.

In the *Confessio philosophi*, I find a careful reading of the text between the two solutions to be instructive. The Philosopher responds to the objection that sins are necessary by saying, "By the same argument, you would conclude that all things are necessary[...] [and] that contingency is removed from the nature of things, contrary to the manner of speaking accepted by all mankind."⁵⁵ Leibniz clearly finds the objection problematic, but why? The difficulty he cites with denying contingency is that it is contrary to the *common manner of speaking*. Hence, the Philosopher says of the objection, "Its entire difficulty arises from a twisted sense of words."

⁵³ SCP, 2-5; A II.1, 117. "Quae ergo ultima ratio voluntatis divinae? intellectus divinus. [...] Quae ergo intellectus divini? harmonia rerum. [...] Cum autem Deus sit mens perfectissima, impossibile est ipsum non affici harmonia perfectissima, atque ita ab ipsa rerum idealitate ad optimum necessitari. [...] Hinc sequitur, quicquid factum est, fit aut fiet, optimum ac proinde necessarium esse [...]"

⁵⁴ Leibniz's full solution to the problem of the author of sin in this letter also relies on an evaluation of sins as being ultimately good because they contribute to the perfection of the world.

⁵⁵ SCP, 49; A VI.3, 125. "Eodem argumento collegeris, omnia esse necessaria, [...] ac proinde contingentiam tolli e natura rerum, contra usum loquendi, a toto genere humano receptum."

Leibniz then proceeds to provide his own definitions for terms like ‘necessary’, and when these are utilized, the difficulty is supposed to vanish:

[O]mit only those words just mentioned from this entire discussion [necessity, possibility, ...] and as often as you need substitute their meanings or definitions, and I wager whatever you like that, as it were by a certain exorcism, as if a torch had been carried there, all the obscurities would disappear immediately, all apparitions and specters of difficulties would vanish like fine vapors.⁵⁶

Leibniz has penned a solution to the problem, and now will reconcile that solution to common language⁵⁷ using a series of definitions. But recall that there Leibniz’s definitions of modal terms substituted *per se* modalities for absolute modalities. This move does not allow Leibniz to avoid necessitarianism, but I believe it does allow Leibniz to accomplish his primary goal: providing a sense in which phrases like ‘sins are necessary’ come out false. The necessitarian story remains the same, but without the word. The point is to lead more traditional theologians into a necessitarian solution to the problem of the author of sin without their knowledge.⁵⁸

Further, if Leibniz really believes that the *per se* modalities provide an important sense of contingency at this early age, it is odd that they are not put to any important use in the *Confessio philosophi* aside from responding to the accusation of necessitarianism. One might expect Leibniz to utilize them when discussing human freedom. In his mature philosophy, Leibniz

⁵⁶ SCP, 51; A VI.3, 125. “Omitte tantum vocabula ista in tota hac tractatione [...] et quoties opus est, substitue eorum significata seu definitiones, et quovis pignore tecum certabo, continuo, velut exorcismo quodam, ac quasi face illata, omnes tenebras disparituras, omnia spectra, et terriculamenta difficultatum tenues in auras abitura.”

⁵⁷ G. H. R. Parkinson also suggests that Leibniz is interacting with common language later in the *Confessio*, when the issue at hand is human freedom, “I suggest that we can make better sense of what Leibniz says about reason and freedom if we take him to be operating with a concept of freedom which is not associated with any particular philosopher or school, but is held by ordinary people.” Parkinson, “Sufficient Reason and Human Freedom in the *Confessio philosophi*,” 212.

⁵⁸ Or more generously, one can read Leibniz as doing what Descartes did concerning the motion of the world. Religious authorities required that the earth was at rest, and so Descartes provided a philosophy in which the earth was at rest in spite of it being a part of a heliocentric system (*Principles of Philosophy* III, §§29-30). In Leibniz’s case, we do not have the aspect of reconciling the discoveries of natural philosophy with religious authority and so his novelty here is perhaps even more troubling as it indicates the inadequacy of religious doctrines *on religious issues*.

defines freedom in terms of spontaneity, intelligence, and contingency.⁵⁹ In the *Confessio*, though Leibniz had worked out a notion of *per se* contingency, it does not enter into the discussion of freedom. G. H. R. Parkinson makes the case that human freedom in the *Confessio* is “constituted by spontaneity with choice” and that “the connections between judgment and will, and between will and act, are *necessary* connections.”⁶⁰ It would surely be surprising if Leibniz had a meaningful notion of contingency and did not use it in his account of human freedom.

Leibniz holds that these are not two solutions but one,⁶¹ and so, it is important that they be reconcilable. Having shown that the second account need not oppose the necessitarianism of the first, the major task remaining is to resolve the tension between the role of the divine understanding in the first account and the act of permission in the second, both of which are presented as grounding the evil in the world. Recall that Leibniz defined *to permit* as, “neither to will in favor nor to will against, and nevertheless to know.”⁶² This indicates that those things that occur and exist in the world which fall under this category of *being permitted* (which importantly includes evils) exist without any influence of the will. There must be some basis for their existence that is separate from God’s will. This fills in our picture of divine causation in this second account. Some things exist *with* God’s will; these are willed. Other things exist without God’s will; these exist by the understanding and are permitted. This link between the understanding and permission as well as the grounding of (at least some aspects of) the world in the divine understanding give evidence of the unity in Leibniz’s two accounts.

⁵⁹ Leibniz, *Theodicy*, §302.

⁶⁰ Parkinson, “Sufficient Reason and Human Freedom in the *Confessio philosophi*,” 211-2.

⁶¹ SCP, 51; A VI.3, 125.

⁶² SCP, 55; A VI.3, 127. “*Permittere est, nec velle nec nolle, et tamen scire.*”

Joining these two accounts, we can construct a unified solution to the problem of the author of sin. Leibniz evades the problem of the author of sin by arguing that God does not will evil and hence is not the author of sin. The understanding produces that which is most harmonious. This harmony involves a mixture of good and evil. God's will delights in the good produced. The evil in the world is neither *willed against* nor *willed for*, but nevertheless exists because of harmony (or nature of things), this is called permission. Thus, Leibniz's final outcome is that "[i]t is not God but rather man, or the devil, who alone will in favor of sin, i.e., take delight in evil."⁶³

We have seen that the *Confessio philosophi*, presents two accounts of a solution to the problem of the author of sin. While Leibniz gives the appearance of denying necessitarianism in the second account, he provides us with hints that this appearance is disingenuous. Leibniz is satisfied (at least for a moment) with the necessitarianism of the best-possible-world thesis, but attempts to make it appear less suspicious to naïve eyes. To that end, he provides a sense in which 'sins are necessary' is false. While Leibniz will later accept the *per se* modalities as part of a rejection of necessitarianism, while writing the *Confessio philosophi*, he had not yet abandoned necessitarianism.

Christianity without Evil

What is most shocking about the early, necessitarian understanding of the best-possible-world thesis is that it requires that nothing in the world is really evil, that is, evil from a God's-eye view. Now, while this sounds similar to some orthodox theses about the nature of evil (that evil is a privation will be discussed in chapter 3), this is something else. Leibniz holds that since

⁶³ SCP, 63; A VI.3, 131. "Non Deum scilicet sed hominem, diabolumve esse, qui soli volunt, id est malo delectantur."

the so-called evils in the world lead to its increased perfection, they are not actually evils, taken in this absolute sense. He writes to Wedderkopf, “Therefore, nothing is to be considered absolutely evil, otherwise either God will not be supremely wise with respect to its comprehension or God will not be supremely powerful with respect to its elimination.”⁶⁴

Without real evils, the problems raised by evil disappear, but, of course, so does orthodoxy. This leaves Leibniz with another puzzle, more difficult than providing a sense in which ‘sins are necessary’ is false; he must reconcile the nonexistence of evil with the teachings of Christianity. There are quite a number of doctrines that seem to be inconsistent with a denial of evil; of special importance are the doctrines of atonement and hell.

Leibniz begins this task already in the very brief letter to Wedderkopf. While there are no evils, in an absolute sense, he holds that there are evils “with respect to the sinner.” He writes, “Taken together with punishment or atonement, sins are good, i.e., harmonious.”⁶⁵ You can see what he has in mind for the doctrines of atonement and hell. While, overall, this is the best possible world, that does not mean that it is the best possible world for every individual in it, nor does each individual action or property have to have the most perfection possible. In a real sense, though, these beings, actions, and properties, cannot be considered evil. They are for the best. Actions and properties can work for the detriment of the creature which has them. Sin, then, can result in the punishment of that creature, but only if the sin and the punishment together bring about a more perfect state of affairs. Sin, likewise, can be pardoned for the same reason. While Leibniz has provided very little in this letter, it already seems to put him in a serious predicament. He has God punishing actions even though those actions are not strictly evil.

⁶⁴ SCP, 5; A II.1, 118. “Nihil ergo absolute malum esse putandum, alioqui Deus aut non erit summe sapiens ad deprehendum, aut non summe potens ad eliminandum.”

⁶⁵ SCP, 5; A II.1, 118. “Peccata bona sunt, id est harmonica, sumta cum poena aut expiatione.”

Something more needs to be said, and luckily, it is.

In the *Confessio philosophi*, Leibniz's primary concern is with the doctrines of election and reprobation. We left our discussion of the letter to Wedderkopf considering how it can be that God can punish one whose actions were brought about by God for the betterment of the universe. And this is just the issue that Leibniz addresses in the *Confessio*. He begins by providing some rather odd definitions which indicate that God is just only if he loves everybody, or rather only if he is delighted by the happiness of everybody.⁶⁶ How, then, could it be that some are elected and not others? Leibniz's answer is that the most perfect order of things includes that some—not hated, but “loved less”—were not elected.⁶⁷ But this does not give one the impression of a wrathful God punishing sin. Instead, one finds sinners bringing misery on themselves.⁶⁸ Leibniz writes,

I believe it [the reason for the damnation of Judas] was the state of the dying man, namely his burning hatred of God—the state in which he died and in which consists the nature of despair. Moreover, this suffices for damnation. For since the soul is not open to new external sensations from the moment of death until its body is restored to it, it concentrates its attention only on its last thoughts, so that it does not change but rather extends the state it was in at death. But from hatred of God, that is, of the most happy being, the greatest sadness follows, for *to hate* is to be sad about the happiness of the one hated (just as *to love* is to take joy in the happiness of the one loved), and therefore the greatest sadness arises in the case of hatred of the greatest happiness. The greatest sadness is misery, or damnation. *Hence, he who dies hating God damns himself.*⁶⁹

⁶⁶ SCP, 29; A VI.3, 116.

⁶⁷ SCP, 31; A VI.3, 117.

⁶⁸ One finds another example of this in Leibniz's telling of the dialogue between Beelzebub and a Hermit, SCP, 93-9; A VI.3, 143-5. See also Leibniz's explicit remarks about the pitiable state of the damned in SCP, 75; A VI.3, 136.

⁶⁹ SCP, 35-7; A VI.3, 118-9. “Status, puto, morientis, odium scilicet Dei quo flagrans obiit in quo consistit natura desperationis. Hoc autem damnationi sufficit. Anima enim cum a mortis momento novis sensibus externis, dum corpus reddatur, non pateat, cogitationibus tantum postremis insistit, unde non mutat, sed auget statum mortis ; odium autem Dei id est felicissimi, sequitur dolor maximus, est enim *odium*, dolere felicitate (ut *amare* felicitate amati gaudere), ergo maxime maxima. Dolor maximus est miseria, seu damnatio; unde *qui odit Deum moriens, damnat seipsum.*”

For Leibniz, damnation just is a state of continual hatred for God.⁷⁰ God is not so much a punisher of sin as he is an object of hatred. Creatures are freed from this hatred by grace. Damnation turns out to be the persistence of this hatred in death. God is determined by harmony to create some creatures who receive grace and some who die with hatred for God.

The Rejection of the Necessitarian Theodicy

Leibniz eventually comes to accept that the necessitarian theodicy of the letter to Wedderkopf and the *Confessio philosophi* carry unacceptable consequences. The *Confessio*, as we saw, tries to mitigate or hide these unacceptable consequences, but by 1677 Leibniz comes to realize that this is not enough. It is not clear what the reason is for this change. I offer two suggestions.

First, it could be that Leibniz's increasing familiarity with Spinoza's metaphysics finally brought him to realize the incompatibility of necessitarianism with the Christian religion. In 1675, Spinoza learned that Leibniz had been meeting with Tschirnhaus in Paris and it was requested that some of Spinoza's works (presumably, the *Ethics*) be shared with Leibniz—a request that was denied.⁷¹ In 1676, Leibniz met with Spinoza, and finally, in 1677, the *Ethics* was published (posthumously).⁷²

Second, Leibniz had a few interactions with famed geologist-turned-priest Nicolaus

⁷⁰ See also Leibniz's reiteration of this passage and the remarks that follow at SCP, 83-5; A VI.3, 138-9.

⁷¹ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, Letters 70 and 72. Lærke has argued persuasively that what Leibniz did learn about Spinoza's metaphysics from Tschirnhaus was colored by the *Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-Being*, which is more amenable to a Christian reading. Lærke, *A Conjecture about a Textual Mystery*.

⁷² In *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, Lærke argues that Leibniz's knowledge of Spinoza's metaphysics prior to its publication was somewhat confused. He sums his thesis up nicely, "while the Report [of 1676] testifies to some knowledge of Spinoza, it still remains fairly imprecise about key Spinozistic doctrines, leaving rather wide margins for creative reinterpretation of what that doctrine consists in [...] Leibniz did not know Spinoza's doctrine sufficiently well to necessarily reject it off hand in 1676, but still well enough to speculate creatively about it." Lærke, "A Conjecture about a Textual Mystery," 34.

Steno. It has been noted above that the marginalia of the *Confessio philosophi* contains objections by Steno and responses by Leibniz as well as some additions that Leibniz made after his meeting with Steno. Both Leibniz's changes and the objections of Steno focus heavily on concepts of necessity and possibility. The issue also comes up in the *Conversation with Steno Concerning Freedom* of 1677. While Leibniz did not think highly of Steno as a theologian,⁷³ it is quite possible that in the process of satisfying some of Steno's objections, Leibniz found reasons to abandon the strict necessitarianism of his early writings.

And so, in the 1677 emendations to the *Confessio*, we find Leibniz distinguishing carefully between necessity *ex hypothesi* and necessity *per se*. He writes,

For in this place we call *necessary* only what is necessary *per se*, namely, that which has the reason for its existence and truth in itself. The truths of geometry are of this sort. But among existing things, only God is of this sort; all the rest, which follow from the series of things presupposed—i.e., from the harmony of things or the existence of God—are *contingent per se* and only hypothetically necessary, even if nothing is fortuitous, since everything proceeds by destiny, i.e., from some established reason of providence.⁷⁴

In 1677, the existence of the world is necessary *ex hypothesi*, which is to say that it is contingent though determined.⁷⁵ Here, then, we have a significant change in Leibniz's theodical thought.

In his early works, he claims that the existence of this world is the necessary consequence of God's perfection and is absolutely necessary. In the *Confessio philosophi*, he provides idiosyncratic definitions to offer a (rather hollow) sense in which 'sins are necessary' comes out false, but by 1677 he becomes convinced for himself that it is problematic to hold that the world

⁷³ See Leibniz, *Theodicy*, §100.

⁷⁴ SCP, 57; A VI.3, 128. "*necessarium enim hoc loco a nobis illud appellatur tantum, quod per se necessarium est, quod rationem scilicet existentiae et veritatis suae habet intra se, quales sunt Geometricae veritates; ex rebus existentibus, Deus solus, caetera, quae ex hac rerum serie supposita, id est harmonia rerum, sive Existentia Dei, sequuntur, per se contingentia, et hypothetice tantum necessaria sunt, tametsi nihil sit fortuitum, cum omnia fato, id est certa quadam providentiae ratione decurrant.*"

⁷⁵ Much could be said about the details and development of Leibniz's modal metaphysics. I am satisfied to note that the broad change in the modal status of the world which follows from God's choice of the best.

is necessary and begins formulating his theories of contingency.

Simplicity and Variety

In Leibniz's letter to Wedderkopf and in the *Confessio philosophi*, very little is said about what makes this world the best.⁷⁶ In the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, on the other hand, Leibniz feels the need to say more about the merits of this world. I have two goals for this section. First, I want to make a couple of conjectures about why it is Leibniz says more about what makes this world the best in the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and the *Theodicy*. Second, I will argue that there are some subtle but important differences between the criteria of goodness used in the *Discourse* and in Leibniz's later works.

I have two conjectures about why it is Leibniz now provides criteria for God's choice of this world. In the early writings, Leibniz was content to say little more than that God was determined by his perfect perception of the best. I find it difficult to ignore the fact that it is only after Leibniz acknowledges the *per se* contingency of the world that he gives a more thorough account of the reasons that determine (without necessitating) God's choice of this world. The distinction between determined and necessitated is an important and long-lasting doctrine in his thought. He did, however, play with the idea that God and humans are perhaps undetermined.⁷⁷ My suggestion here is that once Leibniz had started considering that God could chose the other worlds even though it was determined that he would not, it is natural to consider the reasons that determine him to that choice. Even more, since Leibniz seems to have considered briefly the

⁷⁶ There are some remarks about harmony being unity and variety, but these comments differ from the later Malebranchean remarks in that the former are not presented as a *justification* for God's choice of this world.

⁷⁷ See *De libertate a necessitate in eligendo*, A VI.4b, 1450-5; Translated in *The Shorter Leibniz Texts*, 105-110. Leibniz has often been described as a thinker who never had an unwritten thought. Leibniz's libertarian period appears to have been short-lived, and perhaps simultaneous with his determinist attempts to explain free will.

position that God could chose the other worlds and that it was *not* determined that he would not, it is then a great mystery why he did not. Perhaps it was these considerations that lead Leibniz to consider what the scale was according to which this world was judged the best.

Second, several sections of the *Discourse*, including section 5, include significant responses to Malebranche's thought. Malebranche's *Treatise on Nature and Grace* first appeared in 1680. In it he writes,

An excellent worker must proportion his action to his work; he must not do by very complex means, that which he can execute by more simple means; he must not act without goal, and must never act with useless efforts. It must be concluded from this that God discovered in the infinite treasures of his wisdom an infinity of possible worlds, as following necessarily from the laws of movements that he could establish, which determined him to create those which he would be able to produce and to conserve by the most simple laws, or which would be the most perfect by connection to the simplicity of ways necessary for their production or for their conservation.⁷⁸

This passage, as we will see, is quite similar to the criterion Leibniz offers in the *Discourse* and in the *Theodicy*. Though critical of Malebranche in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Leibniz consistently showed great admiration for the Oratorian. It seems that Leibniz found, whether he thought he needed them or not, helpful considerations about the reasons that motivate the divine will. Certainly there is some important influence from Malebranche on this point.⁷⁹ It seems to me that there are also reasons internal to Leibniz's system that motivated him to consider more fully the reasons for God's choice.

⁷⁸ Malebranche, *Oeuvres complètes* V.28, *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, I.xiii. "Un excellent Ouvrier doit proportionner son action à son Ouvrage; il ne fait point par des voyes fort composées, ce qu'il peut executer par de plus simples; il n'agit point sans fin, et ne fait jamais d'efforts inutiles. Il faut conclure de là, que Dieu découvrant dans les thrésors infinis de sa sagesse une infinité de Mondes possibles, comme des suites nécessaires des loix des mouvemens qu'il pouvoit établir, s'est déterminé à créer celui qui auroit pû se produire et se conserver par les loix les plus simples, ou qui devoit être le plus parfait, par rapport à la simplicité des voyes nécessaires à sa production, ou à sa conservation."

⁷⁹ Steven Nadler's *The Best of All Possible Worlds* provides a helpful and accessible account of the philosophical relationship between Leibniz and Malebranche on issues of theodicy.

In the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, as in the letter to Wedderkopf, Leibniz assumes God's perfection and argues that the world created by a perfect God must be the best possible world.⁸⁰ After drawing conclusions about the way we ought to conduct ourselves given our confidence in the goodness of God and the world, Leibniz gives more detail about the perfection of God's ways. He distinguishes between reasons we cannot hope to know and reasons we can hope to know. The former would explain why God chose "to allow sins [and] to dispense his saving grace in a certain way." It is not immediately clear whether Leibniz means that we cannot know the reason why God chose to allow specific sins or sins in general. "However," he continues, "we can make some general remarks concerning the course of providence in the governance of things."⁸¹ Leibniz explains God's motivations, writing, "God has chosen the most perfect world, that is, the one which is at the same time the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena [...]"⁸² One finds very similar formulations in several works in Leibniz's later writings (including, *On the Ultimate Origination of Things*; *The Theodicy*; *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason*; and *The Monadology*), which has led several to equate the doctrine expressed in the *Discourse* with those of the later writings.⁸³ Interestingly, the doctrine has a rather prominent place in Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics* in the context of arguing for the

⁸⁰ There are significant differences between the two documents regarding the role of the doctrine. For instance, in the letter to Wedderkopf and the *Confessio philosophi*, the doctrine plays a defensive role responding to the problem of the author of sin. In the *Discourse*, the doctrine is presented at the outset as the foundation of all that follows and then used again in a defensive role in *Discourse* §30.

⁸¹ *Discourse* §5; AG 38-9; A VI.4b, 1536. "[M]ais de connoistre en particulier les raisons qui l'ont pû mouvoir à choisir cet ordre de l'univers, à souffrir les pechés, à dispenser ses graces salutaires d'une certaine maniere, cela passe les forces d'un esprit fini, sur tout quand il n'est pas encor parvenu à la jouissance de la veue de Dieu. Cependant on peut faire quelques remarques generales touchant la conduite de la providence dans le gouvernement des choses."

⁸² *Discourse* §6; AG 39; A VI.4b, 1537. "Mais Dieu a choisi celuy qui est le plus parfait, c'est à dire celuy qui est en même temps le plus simple en hypotheses et le plus riche en phenomenes [...]"

⁸³ Many scholars feel very comfortable citing passages from the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and the *Theodicy* together on this topic. See, for example, Rescher, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, 19-20; Blumenfeld, "Perfection and Happiness," *passim*; and Strickland, *Leibniz Reinterpreted*, 38-9.

goodness of God's action and in the later works which focus on the composition of the world, but it gets a rather light treatment in the *Theodicy* itself. It seems that its importance becomes less theodical and more metaphysical as Leibniz's thought progressed. I shall argue not only that Leibniz uses this doctrine differently as time goes on, but that there is a difference in the content of this doctrine, missed by most commentators, that allows for this different use.

The importance of the simplicity/variety criterion in Leibniz's later works is that it provides the foundation for his doctrine of pre-established harmony. Variety is taken to be the fullness of the world (as many possible essences as compossible), and simplicity is taken to be the best use of the orders of space and time (the "plot of ground"). In *On the Ultimate Origination of Things*, written in 1697, Leibniz explains this as follows:

From this it is obvious that of the infinite combinations of possibilities and possible series, the one that exists is the one through which the most essence or possibility is brought into existence. In practical affairs one always follows the decision rule in accordance with which one ought to seek the maximum or the minimum: namely, one prefers the maximum effect at the minimum cost, so to speak. And in this context, time, place, or in a word, the receptivity or capacity of the world can be taken for the cost or the plot of ground on which the most pleasing building possible is to be built, and the variety of shapes corresponds to the pleasingness of the building and the number and elegance of the rooms. [...] And so, assuming that at some time being is to prevail over nonbeing, or that there is a reason why something rather than nothing is to exist, or that something is to pass from possibility to actuality, although nothing beyond this is determined, it follows that there would be as much as there possibly can be, given the capacity of time and space (that is, the capacity of the order of possible existence).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ AG, 150-1; *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, VII, 303-4. "Hinc vero manifestissime intelligitur ex infinitis possibilium combinationibus seriebusque possibilibus existere eam, per quam plurimum essentiae seu possibilitatis perducitur ad existendum. Semper scilicet est in rebus principium determinationis quod a Maximo Minimo petendum est, ut nempe maximus praestetur effectus, minimo ut sic dicam sumtu. Et hoc loco tempus, locus, aut ut verbo dicam, receptivitas vel capacitas mundi haberi potest pro sumtu sive terreno, in quo quam commodissime est aedificandum, formarum autem varietates respondent commoditati aedificii multitudinique et elegantiae camerarum. [...] ita posito semel ens praevalere non-enti, seu rationem esse cur aliquid potius extiterit quam nihil, sive a possibilitate transeundum esse ad actum, hinc, etsi nihil ultra determinetur, consequens est, existere quantum plurimum potest pro temporis locique (seu ordinis possibilis existendi) capacitate, prorsus quemadmodum ita componuntur tessellae ut in proposita area quam plurimae capiantur." There are some vestiges of the theodical doctrine of variety/simplicity to be found in a few of these texts, perhaps most clearly in *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* (the earliest of these later texts), where Leibniz writes, "This exonerates what we call the charity and love of God [...] We must also hold that afflictions, especially those the good have, only lead to their greater good. This is true not only in theology, but in nature as well, since a seed flung to the ground must suffer

Likewise, in the *Principles of Nature and Grace*, Leibniz writes,

§10. It follows from the supreme perfection of God that he chose the best possible plan in producing the universe, a plan in which there is the greatest variety together with the greatest order. The most carefully used *plot of ground, place, and time*; the greatest effect produced by the simplest means; the most *power*, knowledge, happiness, and goodness in created things that the universe could allow. For, since all the possibles have a claim to existence in God's understanding in proportion to their perfections, the result of all these claims must be the most perfect actual world possible.⁸⁵

Here Leibniz briefly mentions that God's aim in creating the world thus is that there be the greatest amount of knowledge, happiness, and goodness possible, but this should not distract from the fact that what Leibniz is really trying to get at is that God has created the world with the greatest amount of *power* possible (i.e., the greatest metaphysical perfections) which requires the careful use of the "plot of ground, place, and time." Leibniz continues by explaining that all the forces of the world are ordered "with as much order and agreement as possible."⁸⁶ Here, again, it is Leibniz's doctrines of mirroring and pre-established harmony that are at stake rather than anything connected to divine justice. This is even clearer in the *Monadology*, where Leibniz writes

§58. And this [that each monad expresses the entire world and is accommodated to all the others] is the way of obtaining as much variety as possible, but with the greatest order possible, that is, it is the way of obtaining as much perfection as possible.

before it bears fruit. And, all in all, one can say that afflictions that are bad in the short run are good in their effect, since they constitute a short path to greater perfection." "quo id ipsum absolvitur, quod caritatem amoremque Dei vocamus [...] Quod autem afflictiones bonorum praesertim virorum attinet, pro certo tenendum est, cedere eas in majus eorum bonum, idque non tantum Theologice, sed etiam physice verum est, uti granum in terram projectum patitur antequam fructus ferat. Et omnino dici potest, afflictiones pro tempore malas, effectu bonas esse, cum sint viae compendiariae ad majorem perfectionem." (AG, 154; *Die Philosophischen schriften*, VII, 307). Increasingly, Leibniz's conception of variety as fullness of essence justifies the metaphysical rather than any theological use.

⁸⁵ AG, 210, *emphasis added*; *Die Philosophischen schriften*, VI, 603. "Il suit de la Perfection Supreme de Dieu, qu'en produisant l'Univers il a choisi le meilleur Plan possible, où il y ait la plus grande variété, avec le plus grand ordre: l terrain, le lieu, le temps, les mieux menagés: le plus d'effet produit par les voyes les plus simples; le plus de puissance, le plus de onnoissance, le plus de bonheur et de bonté dans les creatures, que l'Univers en pouvoit admettre. Car tous les Possibles pretendant à l'existence dans l'entendement de Dieu, à proportion de leur perfections, le resultat de toutes ces pretensions doit être le Monde Actuel le plus parfait qui soit possible."

⁸⁶ §13; AG, 211; *Die Philosophischen schriften*, 604. "avec autant d'ordre et de correspondance qu'il est possible."

§59. Moreover, this is the only hypothesis (which I dare say is demonstrated) that properly enhances God's greatness. Mr. Bayle recognized this when, in his *Dictionary* (article "Rorarius"), he set out objections to it; indeed, he was tempted to believe that I ascribed too much to God, more than is possible. But he was unable to present any reason why this universal harmony, which results in every substance expressing exactly all the others through the relations it has to them, is impossible.⁸⁷

The variety/simplicity criterion of goodness is the way Leibniz grounds his system of pre-established harmony in the principle of perfection. In order to make the most perfect world (i.e., the world with the most metaphysical perfection, i.e., the world with the most essence), God must make the best use of the relations of space and time, that is, of the order inherent in the monads.

As in these later texts, Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics*, makes some metaphysical claims based on the variety/simplicity criterion, but the argument as a whole has a more distinctively theological tone and it certainly falls short of providing an argument for pre-established harmony.

We can therefore say that one who acts perfectly is similar to an excellent geometer [...]; or to a good architect [...]; or to a good householder [...]; or to a skilled machinist [...]; or to a learned author [...]. Now the most perfect of all beings, those that least interfere with one another, are minds, whose perfections consist in their virtues. That is why we mustn't doubt that the happiness of minds is the principal aim of God and that he puts this into practice to the extent that general harmony permits it.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ AG, 220; *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, 616. "§58, Et c'est le moyen d'obtenir autant de variété qu'il est possible, mais avec le plus grand ordre qui se puisse, c'est à dire c'est le moyen d'obtenir autant de perfection qu'il se peut. §59. Aussi n'est ce que cette Hypothese (que j'ose dire démontrée) qui relève, comme il faut, la grandeur de Dieu; c'est ce que Monsieur Bayle reconnut, lorsque dans son Dictionnaire (article Rorarius) il y fit des objections où même il fut tenté de croire, que je donnois trop à Dieu, et plus qu'il n'est possible. Mais il ne pût alleguer aucune raison pourquoy cette harmonie universelle, qui fait que toute substance exprime exactement toutes les autres par les rapports qu'elle y a, fût impossible.

⁸⁸ *Discourse* §5; AG, 38; A VI.4b, 1536-7. "On peut donc dire, que celuy qui agit parfaitement est semblable à un excellent geometre [...] à un bon Architecte [...] à un bon pere de famille [...] à un habile machiniste [...] à un sçavant auteur [...] Or les plus parfaits de tous les estres, et qui occupent le moins de volume, c'est à dire qui s'empeschent le moins, ce sont les esprits, dont les perfections sont les vertus. C'est pourquoy il ne faut point douter que la felicité des esprits ne soit le principal but de Dieu, et qu'il ne la mette en execution autant que l'harmonie generale le permet." Contrast *Théodicée* §124, "Virtue is the most noble quality of created things, but it is not the only good quality of creatures; there are an infinity of others which attract the inclination of God: from all these inclinations results the most good possible." "La vertu est la plus noble qualité des choses créées, mais ce n'est pas la seule

This version of the variety/simplicity criterion is better expressed as the balance of the simplicity of ways with the richness of effects (following the title of *Discourse* §5). *Discourse* §5 begins with a series of unhelpful analogies which express several different (i.e., inconsistent) ways of balancing richness of effects with simplicity of ways, Leibniz indicates which effects God primarily aims at: happiness of minds. He then completes the section with an account of the simplicity of ways. Structurally then, the best way to read *Discourse* §5 is to take Leibniz's treatment of the aim of God (happiness of minds) to be his treatment of the richness of effects, otherwise, Leibniz discusses only one half of his variety/simplicity criterion. Of course, to maximize happiness of minds, one would want to create a very large number of virtuous minds, but this is very far from simply creating the world with the most essence.

In the *Discourse*, two things limit God as he seeks to bring about the world with the most happiness of minds: harmony (that is, which essences are compossible with which) and simplicity of ways. Regarding simplicity of ways, Leibniz writes, “[R]eason requires that we avoid multiplying hypotheses or principles, in somewhat the same way that the simplest system is always preferred in astronomy.”⁸⁹ For Leibniz, as for Malebranche, this means that God acts through general laws rather than particular volitions. Leibniz writes, “[W]e must say that God permits this [evil] but does not will it, even though he concurs with it because of the laws of nature he has established and because he knows how to draw a greater good from it.”⁹⁰ Here, both sides of the variety/simplicity criterion are appealed to in order to explain the motives

bonne qualité des créatures; il y en a une infinité d'autres qui attirent l'inclination de Dieu: de toutes ces inclinations résulte le plus de bien qu'il se peut [...]"

⁸⁹ *Discourse* §5; AG, 39; A VI.4b, “Car la raison veut, qu'on evite la multiplicité dans les hypotheses ou principes, comme le system le plus simple est tousjours preferé en Astronomie.”

⁹⁰ *Discourse* §7; AG 40; A VI.4b, 1539: “il faut dire que Dieu le permet et non pas qu'il le veut, quoyqu'il y concoure à cause des loix de nature qu'il a establies et parce qu'il en sçait tirer un plus grand bien.”

behind God's permission of evil. God acts to bring about greater goods through the evils that follow from the simple laws he has established.

The priority of the moral good of rational substances is not to be found in the later conception of variety as the maximization of essences, and so there are only slight vestiges of the original theodical intention behind the doctrine in its later uses. This is borne out by the marginal place of the variety/simplicity criterion in the *Theodicy* itself as opposed to the *Discourse*. Early in the *Theodicy*, Leibniz proposes that God created the best possible world (§8), but it is only in §208 that Leibniz treats the variety/simplicity criterion. It is prompted by a discussion of Malebranche (beginning in §204) and is quickly connected to pre-established harmony. The conception of the richness of effects as the maximization of essences rather than the maximization of the happiness of minds lends itself better to an argument for pre-established harmony than it does for the theodical project it served in Malebranche's writings and in Leibniz's *Discourse*.

Conclusion

I have argued that Leibniz's conception of the best possible world began as a form of necessitarianism in which one world necessarily follows from the existence of God. This necessitarian theodicy involved a denial of evil, taken in an absolute sense. Though the necessitarian theodicy of Leibniz's letter to Wedderkopf is fascinating and perhaps even successful, theological issues raised by Leibniz's contemporaries eventually convinced him that some kind of contingency is required for an acceptable conception of God. Perhaps as a result of this new found contingency in the works of God, Leibniz famously offered a little more detail in

the form of the variety/simplicity criterion. I have traced what I take to be a subtle difference in what Leibniz thinks makes this the best possible world.

If this is the best possible world but God didn't have to create it thus, doesn't that mean that God has done evil, though for the sake of the good? The next chapter will argue that Leibniz's early theodicies had no place for divine permission, but it will be seen that Leibniz acceptance by 1686 of creatures with real forces allows him a more robust conception of evil and a place for divine permission. The problems raised about the necessity of sin in the *Confessio philosophi* are problems for any kind of determinism; Leibniz begins to answer them as such in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*.

CHAPTER TWO:
DIVINE PERMISSION AND THE PROBLEMS OF EVIL⁹¹

Often, Leibniz's work on the problem of evil is thought to begin and end with the claim that this is the best of all possible worlds, as if this were all that Leibniz needed to defend the justice of God.⁹² In many places, however, Leibniz is concerned to remove from God the actual agency for the evils in the world. By examining Leibniz's uses of the concept of divine permission, one might find a Leibniz for whom the best-possible-world thesis answers only some of the difficulties regarding God's relationship to the evils in the world. Leibniz introduces permission early in his career, in the manuscript dialogue, *Confessio philosophi*, written in the early 1670s. Two and a half decades later, Pierre Bayle offered a critique of traditional uses of permission in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Though he certainly had not read Leibniz's manuscript, the arguments against the use of permission in the *Dictionary* offer a useful foil for understanding the role permission plays in Leibniz's early thought. Bayle's objections will be discussed first. Once these are explained, they will be used to argue that Leibniz's doctrine of permission, as presented in the *Confessio philosophi*, adds nothing to the best-possible-world thesis. As the reasons for this are explained, it will become obvious that this is not the case for

⁹¹ Portions of this chapter have been published as "Leibniz and Bayle on Divine Permission." In *Leibniz et Bayle: confrontation et dialogue*, edited by Christian Leduc, Paul Rateau, and Jean-Luc Solère. *Studia Leibnitiana. Sonderheft*. Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014.

⁹² And the best-possible-world thesis is sometimes even taken to be a straight-forward denial of the existence of evil. Peter van Inwagen sees this as "Leibniz as he has commonly been understood." van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, 58-61.

the mature Leibniz of the *Theodicy*. Thus, there is a Leibniz for whom the best-possible-world thesis answers only some of the theological problems posed by evil, but that is not the Leibniz of the early *Confessio philosophi*.

Bayle's Objections to Permission

In remark F to his article, "Pauliciens," Bayle offers four powerful objections to the idea that God merely permits evil and is, for that reason, not the author of sin. In spite of the strength and rhetorical flourish of these objections to the Christian faith, Bayle describes himself as a fideist, writing,

According to Scripture there is only one principle, a good one, and yet moral and physical evil have been introduced into the human race. Therefore it is not contrary to the nature of the good principle to permit the introduction of moral evil and to punish crimes; for it is no more evident that four and four make eight than it is evident that if a thing has happened, it is possible.⁹³

Elisabeth Labrousse described Bayle's position as rather standard for the Calvinism of that time, according to which,

God is indeed 'the author of sin' for, having foreseen everything as well as created everything, he is responsible for everything that happens in creation – not just for what he causes to happen, but for what he allows to happen as well. Christians have to accept, as something which passes comprehension, that the omnipresence of evil does not detract in any way from God's sanctity.⁹⁴

⁹³ Translations of the *Dictionary* are from *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*. Translations may be slightly modified. The original language text from the 2nd edition from 1702, Rotterdam follows in the footnotes. Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Pauliciens," Remark E, 168; *Dictionnaire*, 3:2323. "Il n'y a, selon l'Écriture, qu'un bon principe; et cependant le mal moral et le mal physique se sont introduits dans le genre humain : il n'est donc pas contre la nature du bon principe qu'il permette l'introduction du mal moral, et qu'il punisse le crime ; car il n'est pas plus évident que 4 et 4 sont 8 qu'il est évident que si une chose est arrivée, elle est possible."

⁹⁴ Labrousse, *Bayle*, 62. Bayle is sometimes read as an atheist. See Hickson's "Theodicy and Toleration in Bayle's *Dictionary*" where a presentation of Bayle's context provides a more plausible reading of Bayle as a genuine Christian using skepticism as grounds for religious toleration.

With the following objections then, Bayle doubts the reasonableness of Christianity, but does not thereby doubt the truth of Christianity. Reason teaches us that a holy being cannot be the author of sin, but since we know by faith that God is holy in spite of being the author of sin, so much the worse for reason. Thus, Bayle's acceptance of Christianity and the holiness of God can have nothing to do with divine permission.

I turn now to the objections to permission themselves. The first two objections consider how sinful actions can occur without God's agency. First, Bayle writes,

It is inconceivable that the first man could have received the faculty for doing wrong from a good principle. This faculty is a vice; and everything that can produce bad is bad, since evil can only arise from a bad cause; and thus the free will of Adam is the result of the action of two contrary principles; insofar as it was able to move in the right way, it depended upon the good principle; but insofar as it was able to embrace evil, it depended upon the bad principle.⁹⁵

If all the creature's faculties come from a good principle, then, says Bayle, the creature should only be capable of doing good. This harkens back to a more traditional worry about how the existence of evil is possible without positing an ultimate evil principle. Manichaeism is often treated in texts which deal with the existence of evil, even in times in which Manichaeism was not a live position.⁹⁶ And so it is unsurprising that Bayle should treat Manichaeism. Of course, Bayle's *position* is quite shocking. He holds that Manichaeism is more successful at explaining the origin of evil than orthodox positions and that orthodoxy should be accepted only on faith in spite of its shortcomings. So, for Bayle, the worry is that since the source of the world is wholly

⁹⁵ Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Pauliciens," Remark F, 179-80; *Dictionnaire*, 3:2326. "On ne conçoit pas que le premier homme ait pu recevoir d'un bon principe la faculté de faire le mal. Cette faculté est un vice ; tout ce qui peut produire le mal est mauvais, puis que le mal ne peut naitre que d'une cause mauvaise : et ainsi le franc arbitre d'Adam est sorti de deux principes contraires ; entant qu'il pouvoit se tourner du côté du bien, il dependoit du bon principe, mais entant qu'il pouvoit embrasser le mal, il dependoit du mauvais principe."

⁹⁶ For example, Francisco Suarez treats Manichaeism under the description of "An old error concerning evil" / "Error vetus de malo." *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, XI.1.2.

good, reason tells us that there can be no evil. Bayle accepts the success of Manichaeism objections when considered only in the tribunal of reason. And presumably, if this aspect of Manichaeism is veridical, then divine permission as an explanation of evil is ruled out. But since permission is intended to explain how there can be evil in the world in spite of there being a single good principle of all things, any proponent of permission as a part of an account of the existence of evil would refuse this principle, making it a rather uninteresting objection in the absence of further argumentation.

If one thinks that there is a radically free will that can direct itself towards good and evil without relying on two principles (thus, denying the first objection), Bayle offers two problems (both as part of his second objection): (1) this seems to contradict divine foreknowledge and (2) a created being cannot be a “source of action.” Concerning the first, he writes, “It is impossible to understand that God only permitted sin; for a simple permission to sin adds nothing to free will and would not have enabled anyone to foresee whether Adam was going to persevere in his innocence or whether he was going to fall from it.”⁹⁷ Here Bayle argues that God’s foreknowledge rules out the kind of radical freedom that is required to justify referring to God’s causal involvement in an action as anything but authoring. Bayle continues, arguing that a radically free will is an impossibility for metaphysical reasons as well. He writes,

Besides, according to the ideas we have of a created being, we cannot comprehend at all that it can be an originating source of action; that it can move itself; and that, while receiving its existence and that of its faculties every moment of its duration, while receiving it, I say, entirely from another cause, it should create in itself any modalities by virtue of something that belongs exclusively to itself. These modalities must be either indistinct from the substance of the soul, as the new philosophers claim, or distinct from the soul’s substance, as the Peripatetics assert. If they are indistinct, then they can only be produced by the cause that is able to produce the substance of the soul itself. Now it is

⁹⁷ Bayle, *Dictionary*, “Pauliciens,” Remark F, 180; *Dictionnaire*, 3:2326-7. “Il est impossible de comprendre que Dieu n’ait fait que permettre le peché ; car une simple permission de pecher n’ajouïtoit rien au franc arbitre, et ne faisoit pas que l’on pût prévoir si Adam persevereroit dans son innocence, ou s’il en decheroit.”

obvious that man is not this cause and that he cannot be it. If they are distinct, they are created beings, beings produced from nothing, since they are not composed of the soul, or of any other pre-existent nature. They can then only be produced by a cause that can create. Now all the sects of philosophy agree that man is not such a cause and that he cannot be one. [Bayle continues, considering and rejecting that the creature can redirect the motion caused by God]⁹⁸

Because the ability to be a source of action requires the ability to create, Bayle concludes that a human is not able to have the independence required to justify calling God's relationship to the human's actions 'permission.' He concludes this second objection by writing, "Seeing therefore that a creature cannot be moved by a simple permission to act, and that it does not have the principle of motion in itself, it must necessarily be the case that God moves it. Therefore, he does something more than just permitting it to sin."⁹⁹ The problem is that for God to permit x , there must be another source by which x can come into being. Without this other source, no sense can be made of divine permission.

The next two objections work together as a disjunctive argument. Either sins can be foreseen perfectly or sins cannot be foreseen perfectly. If the actions of creatures can be foreseen perfectly, then those actions must be determined, and so God did more than permit the creature to sin since permission does nothing to render the sin foreseeable. He writes,

⁹⁸ Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Pauliciens," Remark F, 180; *Dictionnaire*, 3:2327. "Outre que par les idées que nous avons d'un être créé, nous ne pouvons point comprendre qu'il soit un principe d'action, qu'il se puisse mouvoir lui-même, et que recevant dans tous les momens de sa durée son existence et celle de ses facultez, que la recevant, dis-je, toute entière d'une autre cause, il crée en lui-même des modalitez par une vertu qui lui soit propre. Ces modalitez doivent être ou indistinctes de la substance de l'ame, comme veulent les nouveaux philosophes, ou distinctes de la substance de l'ame, comme l'assurent les Peripateticiens. Si elles sont indistinctes, elles ne peuvent être produites que par la cause qui peut produire la substance même de l'ame : or il est manifeste que l'homme n'est point cette cause, et qu'il ne le peut être. Si elles sont distinctes, elles sont des êtres créés, des êtres tirez du neant, puis qu'ils ne sont pas composez de l'ame, ni d'aucune autre nature préexistente ; elles ne peuvent donc être produites que par une cause qui peut créer. Or toutes les sectes de philosophie conviennent que l'homme n'est point une telle cause, et qu'il ne peut l'être."

⁹⁹ Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Pauliciens," Remark F, 180; *Dictionnaire*; 3:2327. "La creature ne pouvant donc pas être muë par une simple permission d'agir, et n'ayant pas elle-même le principe du mouvement, il faut de toute nécessité que Dieu la meuve ; il fait donc quelque autre chose que de lui permettre de pecher."

[O]ne cannot comprehend that a simple permission would bring contingent events out of the class of things that are just possible, or that this would put the divinity in a position of being completely sure that the creature will sin. A simple permission cannot be the basis for divine foreknowledge. It is this fact that has led most theologians to suppose that God has made a decree that declares that the creature will sin. This, according to them, is the foundation of foreknowledge. Others claim that the decree declares that the creature will be placed in the circumstances in which God has foreseen that it would sin. Thus some contend that God foresaw the sin by reason of his decree, and others contend that he made the decree because he had foreseen the sin. No matter how it is explained, it obviously follows that God wished that man sin, and that he preferred this to the perpetual duration of innocence, which was so easy for him to bring about and ordain.¹⁰⁰

Permission by itself is not enough to ground divine foreknowledge. Permission does not determine events, and so events remain undetermined unless God exercises more than permission. That the events happened, then, tells us that God wished that they would happen.

Finally, Bayle's fourth objection assumes that sins cannot be foreseen perfectly. But still, surely God would have known that there was a risk of Adam falling and would have eventually seen that Adam was about to fall. In this case, Bayle writes of God,

Neither his goodness, nor his holiness, nor his wisdom could allow that he risked these events; for our reason convinces us in a most evident manner that a mother, who would allow her daughters to go to a ball when she knew with certainty that they ran a great risk of losing their honor there, would show that she loved neither her daughters nor chastity. And if one supposes that she possesses an infallible preservative against all temptations and that she does not give it to her daughters when she sends them to the dance, one then knows with complete assurance that she is guilty and that she hardly cares whether her daughters keep their virginity.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Pauliciens," Remark F, 180-1. "[O]n ne sauroit comprendre qu'une simple permission tire du nombre des choses purement possibles, les événemens contingens, ni qu'elle mette la Divinité eu état d'être certainement assurée que la creature pechera. Une simple permission ne sauroit fonder la prescience divine. C'est ce qui engage la plupart des Theologiens à suposer, que Dieu a fait un decret qui porte que la creature pechera. C'est selon eux le fondement de la prescience. D'autres veulent que le decret porte, que la creature sera mise dans les circonstances où Dieu a prévu qu'elle pecheroit. Ainsi les uns veulent que Dieu ait prévu le peché à cause de son decret, et les autres qu'il ait fait le decret à cause qu'il avoit prévu le peché. De quelque maniere qu'on s'explique, il s'ensuit manifestement que Dieu a voulu que l'homme pechât, et qu'il a preferé cela à la durée perpetuelle de l'innocence, qu'il lui étoit si facile de procurer et d'ordonner." 3:2327.

¹⁰¹ Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Pauliciens," Remark F, 181; *Dictionnaire*, 3:2327. "Ni sa bonté [i.e., la bonté de Dieu], ni sa sainteté, ni sa sagesse n'ont pu permettre qu'il hazardât ces événemens ; car nôtre raison nous convainc d'une maniere très-évidente qu'une mere qui laisseroit aller ses filles au bal, lors qu'elle sauroit très-certainement qu'elles y courroient un grand risque par raport à leur honneur, temoigneroit qu'elle n'aime ni ses filles, ni la chasteté : et si

Behind Bayle's compelling story is the suggestion that having knowledge of even the possibility of another's wrongdoing or plight with the ability to prevent it makes one complicit in that wrongdoing or plight. In this case, God's permission of sin is guilt-incurring.

And so, in Bayle we have rather forceful arguments against the use of divine permission in Leibniz's day. In brief, these are (1) that God cannot maintain his goodness and create a genuinely free agent (one capable of sin), the existence of which is a necessary condition for divine permission; (2) that regardless of God's maintaining his goodness, creatures are simply not able to be independent sources of their own actions, and so something more is required from God than permission in order for sin to exist; (3) that perfect foreknowledge must be grounded on something determinate, and such determination requires more than simple permission; (4) that having sufficient knowledge and power to stop a bad effect and permitting it makes one complicit in the bad effect even if that knowledge is only of the likelihood of the bad effect.

The Young Leibniz on Authorship and Permission

I turn now to examine one of Leibniz's earliest works on the problem of evil, the *Confessio philosophi*, in which permission is featured prominently. Leibniz's *Confessio* is a tricky document. In it, Leibniz presents a solution to the problem of the author of sin, recognizes that it seems to lead to necessitarianism, and then recasts that solution to avoid the appearance of necessitarianism (or as I have argued elsewhere, to disguise his necessitarianism in order to better appeal to more conservative theologians). In what follows, Leibniz's solution to the problem of the author of sin in the *Confessio* will be examined with particular attention paid to

l'on suppose qu'elle a un preservatif infaillible contre toutes les tentations, et qu'elle ne le donne point à ses filles en les envoyant au bal, on conoît avec la dernière évidence qu'elle est coupable, et qu'elle se soucie peu que ses filles gardent leur virginité."

his accounts of permission and authorship. We will then see how Leibniz's doctrine fares against Bayle's objections.

At the beginning of the *Confessio*, Leibniz proposes two doctrines intended to remove blameworthiness from God: (1) from God's existence, all created things follow ("if God is taken away, so is the entire series of things, and if God is posited, so is the entire series of things [...]") and (2) sins result from God's understanding, not from his will ("I think, therefore, that sins are not due to the divine *will* but rather to the divine *understanding* or, what is the same, to the eternal ideas or the nature of things [...]").¹⁰²

There is good reason to take (1) to be expressing necessitarianism, particularly its connections (similarity of both language and conceptual foundations) to similar statements in the much more forthcoming letter to Magnus Wedderkopf of 1671, written less than two years before the *Confessio*. In that letter, Leibniz writes, "[S]ince God is the most perfect mind, it is impossible that he is not affected by the most perfect harmony and thus must bring about the best by the very ideality of things [...]. [I]t follows that whatever has happened, is happening, or will happen is the best and, accordingly, necessary."¹⁰³ Leibniz sees the world as being the result of God's choice of the best, but does not yet have the modal theory by which he will later claim that this determinate choice is not absolutely necessary. In the *Confessio*, Leibniz writes,

I cannot deny—because it is certain—that if God is taken away, so is the entire series of things, and if God is posited, so is the entire series of things[...] For things are so arranged that were sins taken away, the entire series of things would have been very different. Take away or change the series of things, and the ultimate ground of things, that is, God,

¹⁰² SCP, 41; A VI.3, 121. "[S]ublato Deo tolli, posito poni totam seriem rerum...", "Sentio igitur peccata deberi non voluntati, sed intellectui divino, vel quod idem est, ideis illis aeternis, seu naturae rerum, ne quis somniet bina principia rerum, geminosque sibi inimicos Deos, alterum boni, alterum mali principium esse."

¹⁰³ SCP, 3-5; A II.1, 117. "Cum autem Deus sit mens perfectissima, impossibile est ipsum non affici harmonia perfectissima, atque ita ab ipsa rerum idealitate ad optimum necessitari [...] Quicquid factum est, fit aut fiet, optimum ac proinde necessarium esse, [...]"

will be done away with or changed.¹⁰⁴

Not only does God produce a particular world, but if that world were different, then it could not have been produced by the same God. The strength of the connection between God and the world as well as the overt presence of necessitarianism in the letter to Wedderkopf should lead one to read Leibniz as committed to necessitarianism at this point in time.¹⁰⁵

The second doctrine claims that sins result from God's understanding rather than from God's will. It is in regards to this second doctrine that divine permission comes into play. What does it mean for something to come from the divine intellect for Leibniz? Leibniz clarifies this odd doctrine by offering mathematical truths as examples of things grounded in the divine intellect. "Therefore [because they are not decreed]," he writes, "these theorems must be ascribed to the nature of things, namely to the idea of the number nine or the idea of square, and to the divine intellect in which those ideas of things subsist from all eternity."¹⁰⁶ Leibniz argues that sins are grounded in the same way as these mathematical truths—that is, independently from God's will. This doctrine can helpfully be explained by the first. Since the existence of God specifies one world that exists and since the non-existence of God removes the possibility of any world existing, *every feature of the existing world depends on God*. In his second doctrine, then, Leibniz is providing us with two ways in which the world can be grounded in God: with the divine will or through the divine intellect apart from the will.

But there is an oddity here. Leibniz's description of the will in the *Confessio philosophi*

¹⁰⁴ SCP, 41,45; A VI.3, 121, 123. "[N]on inquam, non possum negare, quia certum est, sublato Deo tolli, posito poni totam seriem rerum, [...] . Ita enim comparatum est cum rebus, ut sublatis peccatis tota rerum series longe alia futura fuerit. Sublata, vel mutata rerum serie, etiam ultima ration rerum, id est Deus e medio tolletur mutabiturque."

¹⁰⁵ For a more detailed argument see Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 150-5.

¹⁰⁶ SCP, 43; A VI.3, 122. "Ergo naturae rerum, ideae scilicet novenarii, vel quadrati, et in quo subsistunt ideae rerum ab aeterno, intellectui divino, haec theoremata tribuenda sunt."

diverges from the more normal description made in the letter to Wedderkopf. In the letter, the divine will has all creative power but is completely determined by the judgment of the understanding.¹⁰⁷ In the *Confessio* though, Leibniz seems to think that the divine understanding brings everything about, while the divine will only makes value judgments about these things. The evidence for this is that Leibniz's definitions of 'willing in favor of' and 'willing against' do not involve any causal efficacy. He writes, "*To will in favor* of something is to be delighted by its existence; *to will against* something is to be sad at its existence or to be delighted at its nonexistence."¹⁰⁸ Rateau's comments on these definitions are particularly helpful. He writes,

If feeling (*sentire*) is the measure of existence, the will is nothing other than the pleasure produced by this feeling. It is not that which initiates an existence by its collaboration with the creative power, but what coming after it, observes it and approves of it. It is moreover not the will but universal harmony which is evoked to describe the passing from the possible to the actual[...]¹⁰⁹

Robert Sleight, however, rejects this kind of interpretation in large part because it is too close to the views of Spinoza which Leibniz would find objectionable.¹¹⁰ But it is not clear that Leibniz was so strongly opposed to or even fully versed in Spinozistic metaphysics as Leibniz was writing this in 1673. Leibniz's earliest criticisms of Spinoza focus instead on politics and

¹⁰⁷ SCP, 3; A II.1, 117. "What, therefore, is the ultimate basis of the divine will? The divine intellect. For God wills those things that he perceives to be the best and, likewise, the most harmonious; and he selects them, so to speak, from the infinite number of all the possibles." "Quae ergo ultima ratio voluntatis divinae? intellectus divinus. Deus enim vult quae optima item harmonicotata intelligit eaque velut seligit ex numero omnium possibilium infinito."

¹⁰⁸ SCP, 55; A VI.3, 127. "*Velle* est existentia alicuius delectari. *Nolle* est existentia alicuius dolere, aut non existentia delectari."

¹⁰⁹ Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 157. "Si le sentiment (*sentire*) est la mesure de l'existence, la volonté n'est rien d'autre que le plaisir produit par ce sentiment. Elle n'est pas ce qui initie une existence, par sa collaboration avec la puissance créatrice, mais ce qui, venant après elle, la constate et l'approuve. Ce n'est d'ailleurs pas la volonté qui est évoquée pour décrire le passage du possible au réel, mais l'harmonie universelle, [...]"

¹¹⁰ Sleight, "Leibniz's First Theodicy," 491-2.

biblical interpretation.¹¹¹ One might still find reason to reject this interpretation since Leibniz writes that God “must be said to will the entire series, not to permit it, and the same for sins also insofar as they are not considered distinctly by themselves but are considered mixed in with the entire series.”¹¹² But while this could be taken to explain the existence of the series, it might merely express that God is pleased by the series as a whole while that series is produced by the intellect. To reject the interpretation which grounds the entire series of things in the divine understanding is to take Leibniz to be careless in his definitions. Regardless of how one interprets Leibniz on this point, it is clear that the God of Leibniz’s *Confessio philosophi* does not will sins themselves, and that sins are grounded in the divine intellect. It is also clear that one determinate world is the result of God’s existence.

Immediately following the definitions of ‘to will in favor’ and ‘to will against,’ Leibniz adds definitions of ‘to permit’ and ‘to author.’¹¹³ He writes, “*To permit* is neither to will in favor nor to will against, and nevertheless to know. *To be the author* is with one’s will to be the ground of something else.”¹¹⁴ Leibniz is offering an ontological taxonomy. Given God’s existence, a certain series of things exists. Those that do exist are either willed or permitted. If they are willed, then God takes delight in them and can properly be called their author; these are the good things that exist. If they are permitted, then God wills neither for them nor against them

¹¹¹ Lærke points out that while Leibniz knows of Spinoza’s *Cartesian Meditations* as early as 1671, there is no evidence of Leibniz giving it serious attention prior to 1677. “G. W. Leibniz’s Two Readings of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*,” n23, see also the previously cited writings by Lærke.

¹¹² SCP, 49; A VI.3, 124. “Totam autem seriem, non permittere sed velle dicendus est, et peccata quoque quatenus non ipsa distincte, sed toti seriei confusa spectantur.”

¹¹³ For an interesting discussion of different uses of “permission” in the *Confessio*, see Echavarría, “Leibniz’s concept of God’s Permissive Will,” 193-6.

¹¹⁴ SCP, 55 ; A VI.3, 127. “*Permittere* est, nec velle nec nolle, et tamen scire. *Autorem* esse, est voluntate sua esse rationem alienae.”

but knows that they will exist in virtue of the universal harmony;¹¹⁵ these are the evil things that exist.¹¹⁶ “God must be said to will against sins in their own right if they are understood not to exist. If sins exist because the harmony of things brings them about, then it must be said that God permits them, i.e., he neither wills in favor of their existence nor wills against it.”

Following these definitions, Leibniz concludes “that it is not God but rather man, or the devil, who alone wills in favor of sin, i.e., take delight in evil.”¹¹⁷ God is not delighted by the existence of evil and so cannot be said to will evil. But neither is he saddened by its existence. God permits sin, knowing that it accords with the general good; humans and demons lack this knowledge and are not so exonerated. Thus, some things exist with God’s will. These are willed. Other things exist without God’s will. These exist by the divine understanding and are said to be permitted.

The Failure of the Young Leibniz’s Account of Permission

So now we have some idea of what Leibniz is up to in the *Confessio philosophi*. All aspects of the world depend on God for their existence, and sins are grounded not in God’s will but in his understanding. For Leibniz, here and in the letter to Wedderkopf, the author of

¹¹⁵ By the universal harmony, Leibniz seems to mean the best series of things, which is what God is necessitated to produce.

¹¹⁶ Leibniz has less to say about those things that do not exist. Clearly, those things that do not exist, do not exist on the basis of their non-inclusion in this harmony. Recall that when discussing *willing against*, Leibniz distinguished two ways that this can occur (SCP, 55; A VI.3, 127). Evils that do not exist make up this class of things that delight God by their non-existence. Leibniz’s protagonist also embraces the Theologian’s assertion that God does not suffer/is never sad (SCP, 61; A VI.3, 130). This, along with the asymmetry between the one-part definition of *willing for* and the two-part definition of *willing against*, leads me to wonder whether Leibniz believed there to be non-existent goods.

¹¹⁷ SCP, 61-63; A VI.3, 130-131. “Deus ipsa per se peccata si non existere intelligantur, nolle ; si ita ferente harmonia rerum, existant, permittere, id est nec velle, nec nolle dicendus est[...] . Non Deum scilicet sed hominem, diabolumve esse, qui soli volunt, id est malo delectantur.”

something is the person who takes pleasure in the thing produced considered on its own.¹¹⁸ In this case, God is certainly not the author of sin, and humans and devils are authors of sin. Of course, Leibniz's account is far from what one would find in an orthodox theologian in his time, and a treatment of the problem of the author of sin does not dissolve all theodical concerns. One must still explain among other things why evils exist at all (which has been explained in part here by Leibniz's necessitarianism and will be explained later in Leibniz's thought by the best-possible-world thesis divorced from this necessitarianism¹¹⁹). One must also consider why natural evils occur, why monsters exist, and why God appears to be so stingy in his distribution of grace. That Leibniz's proposed solution to the problem of the author of sin does not answer all worries is unsurprising. The question Leibniz is asking is whether or not God causes evil in a morally blameworthy way. Leibniz has reason to answer in the negative.

How then does Leibniz's early account of permission fare against Bayle's criticisms? First, Leibniz's account easily evades the first two critiques. In these, Bayle thinks of permission as God's allowing the actions of another agent, but Leibniz's early account of permission makes little mention of creatures. While Bayle is arguing against the reasonableness of God's allowing another agent to sin, Leibniz is instead suggesting that God *allows himself* to produce things without willing them in particular. Rameau makes this point well, writing,

The justification of God does not consist in identifying a distinct, external, and rival principle of evil (as in manichaeism), but in placing the reason of evil at the very heart of

¹¹⁸ Thus there is some similarity between the letter and the *Confessio*, though they differ on whether the will has creative power.

¹¹⁹ These theses are related. Leibniz here holds that this is the best of all possible worlds, but that God's choice of the best is absolutely necessary and renders the best world absolutely necessary (cf. the letter to Wedderkopf). Leibniz will later adopt a more subtle theory of modality by which he will claim that the existence of this world is determined but not absolutely necessary.

the supremely perfect Being. The two “principles” are in God himself: the good and the bad in his understanding, the good solely in his will.¹²⁰

Likewise, Bayle’s third objection, that divine foreknowledge must be grounded in something stronger than permission (a decree), does not land. It seems that here, Bayle is assuming that divine permission requires that God not be the grounding of all events. Leibniz’s necessitarianism based on his strong intellectualist view of divine action is more than sufficient to provide his God with the certainty required for foreknowledge.

However, Bayle’s fourth criticism—that having sufficient knowledge and power to stop a bad effect and permitting it makes one complicit in the bad effect—does seem apt against Leibniz’s position. Here, however, Bayle’s support comes from a compelling story rather than from an argument. Perhaps Leibniz could come up with his own story to prevent us from being persuaded by Bayle’s. Perhaps he would describe the mother as having good reasons to allow her daughter to succumb to temptation while still maintaining her love of ‘her daughters and chastity.’ Given the nature of Bayle’s story, that would be a hard sell. But even if Leibniz were able to find some reason to reject the lesson of Bayle’s story, this seems to put Leibniz in an unfortunate position for the following reason. It seems that Leibniz’s best-possible-world thesis is meant to do *different work* than Leibniz’s theory of permission. The main utility of the best-possible-world thesis is that it explains that God has a reason for admitting evils into the world; that is, that God *qua* economist has done no wrong.¹²¹ Permission, then, is utilized to explain

¹²⁰ Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 149. “La justification de Dieu ne consiste pas à identifier un principe du mal distinct, extérieur et rival (comme dans le manichéisme), mais à placer la raison du mal au cœur même de l’Être souverainement parfait. Les deux « principes » sont en Dieu même : le bien et le mal dans son entendement, le bien seulement dans sa volonté.”

¹²¹ Michael Murray divides the problem of evil in half in a similar way. The primary focus of his list, however, is on what he calls the underachiever problem. For Murray, the best possible world thesis is supposed to be a reaction to a Socinian impulse which argues against the traditional conception of God by noting that if the world were the product of such a God, that God would surely be a great underachiever (Murray, *Leibniz on the Problem of Evil*). It seems that Murray has either misidentified Leibniz’s problem or that Leibniz has entirely missed his mark, as Leibniz

how God *qua* moral agent has done no wrong.¹²² The best-possible-world thesis is meant to explain that God has good reasons driving him to bring about this world. The theory of divine permission is meant to explain how God can keep his hands (or rather his will) clean while bringing about that world. Because Leibniz is not a voluntarist about the moral law, his God must not only be motivated to perform optimally but must also be constrained by his holiness. If there was a world that was the best (considering the ends only) but required that God himself perform moral atrocities to bring it about, other worlds would surpass that world in overall goodness (considering both means and ends).¹²³ God's hands must remain clean in the creation of the best of all possible worlds, and so Leibniz uses permission to explain that God does not author sins.

Given this division of labor, we can see that Leibniz's solution *should* run into problems from Bayle's fourth critique. If the only reason divine permission has any force (that is, has any ability to defend the holiness of God) is because God has a *reason* for creating the world such as he did, then it is not *permission* which has any explanatory value but *only* the best-possible-world thesis. So here, Leibniz must find a way of explaining why God's permission does not make him complicit in the sins of his creatures, and the only apparent way to do this is by appealing to the reasons motivating God's permission. This route destroys the division of labor

typically argues for the best possible world thesis *from* the traditional conception of God *without providing evidence for this world's 'bestness.'* For Leibniz, it is because this world is the result of a perfect being that this must be the best possible world (see *Discourse on Metaphysics* §3 and *Theodicy* §8).

¹²² SCP, 65/A VI.3, 131 posits the existence of the best possible world and *then* suggests a solution to the problem of the author of sin that seems to rely on divine permission.

¹²³ Leibniz will later remark in a letter to Malebranche from the beginning of 1712 that the means of creation are taken into account in God's evaluation of the goodness of worlds. *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, I, 360. Cited and commented on in Nadler, *Occasionalism*, 197.

that makes divine permission attractive and leaves it as an unproductive appendage to the doctrine of the necessity of the best.

So there seems to be a problem with the way Leibniz attempts to divide the labor of the problem of the author of sin. Would Leibniz be dismayed about this? I suggest not. While Leibniz does give us evidence that he is dividing the theodical labor, this may be only for the benefit of those who are nervous about his necessitarianism (which he tries to mask in the *Confessio*). I find evidence for this in that just before the *Confessio*, in his letter to Wedderkopf, Leibniz argues for the *non-existence of evil* from the fact that his doctrine of permission is grounded in his necessitarianism. There Leibniz writes, “On the contrary, there is no permissive will in an omniscient being, except insofar as God conforms himself to the ideality itself of things, i.e., to what is the best. Therefore, nothing is to be considered absolutely evil [...]”¹²⁴ And around the time of the *Confessio* or just after it, Leibniz writes “The Author of Sin” in which he argues that the use of privation in a solution to the problem of evil (a common way of attributing sinfulness to creatures and not to God) removes guilt from humans as well as from God. He, however, offers no explanation in this little piece of how God is not the author of sin.¹²⁵ It is likely that this was because Leibniz did not feel a need to keep God from being the author of sins, since when God is their author, they are not sins. It is enough for him that God necessarily wills the best, willing the discord only for the sake of the harmony. Perhaps in the *Confessio*, ‘permission’ is intended to be a red-herring meant only to render the necessitarian solution to the problem of the author of sin more easily swallowed (and if this is the case, then the oddity of Leibniz’s removing productive power from the divine will in the *Confessio* but not

¹²⁴ SCP, 5; A II.1, 117. “contra, nullam esse in omniscio voluntatem permissivam, nisi quatenus Deus ipsi se rerum idealitati seu optimitati conformat. Nihil ergo absolute malum esse putandum, [...]”

¹²⁵ SCP, 110-3; A VI.3, 150-1.

in the more forthcoming letter to Wedderkopf can also be explained as the odd definitions of ‘to will in favor’ and ‘to will against’ were meant to make room for the definition of ‘to permit’).

Conclusion

Bayle and the young Leibniz are not so far apart as they first appear. If Bayle and Leibniz shared an opponent, that opponent might suggest (1) that the one who brings the sin about is always the author of the sin and (2) that the author of the sin is always morally blameworthy. Leibniz denies the first thesis, while Bayle denies the second. Bayle rejects the reasonableness of permission, holding instead that God authors everything and is mysteriously still holy. Leibniz holds that God grounds everything, but that he grounds sins in a non-guilt incurring way. That is, he reserves ‘authors’ for things that God wants for their own sake—sins are neither willed nor nilled, but exist in virtue of the fact that they are a part of what the divine intellect has determined to be the best possible world. When Leibniz mentions ‘permission,’ he describes it as a way in which God actually produces things without his will. In this way, Leibniz’s position is able to avoid the first three of Bayle’s criticisms. He is able to avoid the last only by denying the reality of evil and making permission a useless appendage to the doctrine of the necessary creation of the best. Because of this we are right to focus nearly exclusively on the (necessary) creation of the best possible world *in the young Leibniz’s* theodical thought, but further study will show us that this is not the case regarding the mature Leibniz. Leibniz changes his mind about the absolute necessity of the best possible world, about the use of privation, and also about the unreality of evil.¹²⁶ These changes allow him a deeper tool box and the possibility of a more theologically acceptable theodicy.

¹²⁶ For contingency in the world, see *On Freedom and Possibility*, AG, 19; A VI.4b, 1444-5. For privation, see *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §30. For the reality of evil, see *On Nature Itself* (AG, 161; *Die Philosophischen*

CHAPTER THREE: PRIVATION

Both Leibniz's attitude towards privation and his conception of privation changed over the course of his life. He appears to have always held that sins are privations, but early in his career he argued that the privative nature of sin has no bearing on theodical issues. By the 1680s, though, he had begun using the privative nature of sin in his own theorizing about the innocence of God. It is perhaps jarring to find a thinker of Leibniz's rank describing privations both as "a subterfuge that a reasonable person will never put up with,"¹²⁷ and "from Augustine and not to be scorned."¹²⁸

In what follows, I track Leibniz's conceptions of privations and their role in his theodicies. I will begin in Section I with a little bit of context about the use of privation in modernity with Section II examining the young Leibniz's critiques thereof. I then track two significant shifts in Leibniz's thinking about privation. Section III examines Leibniz's texts from 1686-1695 in which privation begins to play an important role in Leibniz's theodical thought. In Section IV, I pause to examine original limitation and original sin during this middle period.

schriften, IV, 510) among other places, where Leibniz is now very concerned with human agency in order that God not be considered the cause of the evils that we produce.

¹²⁷ *The Author of Sin*; SCP, 111; A VI.3, 151. "c'est un faux-fuyant dont un homme raisonnable ne se laissera jamais payer."

¹²⁸ *Dissertation on Predestination and Grace*, §14 (e), cited by section and comment. "iam est Augustini nec spernenda."

Section V continues our chronological story, exploring the way Leibniz's conception of sins had changed in his *Theodicy*. Finally, Section VI considers the role of privation in Leibniz's late conception of metaphysical evil and related topics.

Leading up to Leibniz: Descartes and Hobbes on Privation

One might naturally suppose that privations are too closely associated with the ontology of matter and form to be acceptable to many of the new philosophers of the seventeenth century, but, perhaps due to the influence of various forms of Augustinianism in France at that time, it turns out that Descartes and many of those he influenced embraced the evil-as-privation doctrine.¹²⁹ This is perhaps most clear in the *Principles*. Yet, his use of privations is problematic, either as poorly explained or as subject to some rather obvious criticisms. In part one of the *Principles*, Descartes considers, among other things, the relationship between God's governance of the world on the one hand and on the other, human errors and sins, the latter of which he had previously been reticent to talk about. He writes,

23. *God is not corporeal, nor does he sense as we do, nor does he will the evilness of sin.* [In the French translation of 1647 this last phrase reads: n'est point auteur du péché (he is not at all the author of sin)]

For truly there are many things in which, though one recognizes some measure of perfection, still one recognizes in them something also of imperfection and limitation; and hence they are not able to coincide with God[...]. [God] simultaneously understands, wills, and works everything. I say 'everything,' that is to say, all things: indeed, he does not will the evilness of sin, which is not a thing.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ On Descartes and Augustine, see Gouhier, *Cartésianisme et Augustinisme au XVIIe siècle*. For Descartes' and Augustine's *cogito*, see Ariew, *Descartes among the Scholastics*, chapter 10.

¹³⁰ *Principles*, I §23; *Oeuvres de Descartes*, VIIIa,13-4. "Deum non esse corporeum, nec sentire ut nos, nec velle malitiam peccati. Nam sane multa sunt, in quibus etsi nonnihil perfectionis agnoscamus, aliquid tamen etiam imperfectionis sive limitationis deprehendimus; ac proinde competere Deo non possunt. [... Deus] omnia simul intelligat, velit et operetur. Omnia, inquam, hoc est, res omnes: neque enim vult malitiam peccati, quia non est res.

Among the things worth noting here, perhaps the most important is the lack of detail. Descartes suggests that God does not bring about the evilness of sin (or is not the author of sin) because that evilness (not the sin, but the evilness of it) is not a thing. He explains further,

31. *Our errors are but negations with respect to God, while with respect to ourselves they are privations or defects.*

But as it happens that, although God is not a deceiver, we so frequently fall into error, if we desire to investigate the origin and cause of our errors in order to guard against them, we must take care to observe that they do not depend so much on our intellect as on our will, and that they are not such as to require the actual concurrence of God in order that they may be produced. In this way, so far as he is concerned, they are but negations, while with respect to us they are defects or privations.¹³¹

Importantly, these two passages are the fullest account of the problem of the author of sin and the theodical utility of privation that can be found in Descartes' works, and they are simply incomplete. What is clear is that he thinks that because the evilness of sin is not a thing, God is not the author of it. He seems to think further that there is some morally relevant difference between God's role in the causation of our errors (here, not the evilness of sin, not even sin, but errors) and our role in their causation. The reason for that difference and the utility of the distinction is not at all clear.

While it is surprising that Descartes embraced some conception of privation, it is certainly not surprising that Hobbes, who was a strong anti-Aristotelian/anti-scholastic as well as a thoroughgoing naturalist (i.e., anti-supernaturalist), rejected the notion. We find in Hobbes the following powerful objection to privation from the 1668 Latin edition of the *Leviathan*:

Because they say that, if free will is denied, it follows that God is the author of sin (and therefore, that the sinner ought not to be punished), and nevertheless concede that God is the first cause of things and actions, they seek to reconcile this from Aristotle by calling

¹³¹ *Principles*, I §31; Translation from *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, 239; *Oeuvres de Descartes*, VIIIa, I §31 "31. Errores nostros, si ad Deum referantur, esse tantum negationes; si ad nos, privationes. Quia vero, etsi Deus non sit deceptor, nihilominus tamen sæpe contingit nos falli, ut errorum nostrorum originem et causam investigemus, ipsosque præcavere discamus, advertendum est, non tam illos ab intellectu quam a voluntate pendere; nec esse res, ad quarum productionem realis Dei concursus requiratur: sed cum ad ipsum referuntur, esse tantum negationes, et cum ad nos, privationes."

sin *anomia*, i.e., the inconsistency itself with the law, a mere negation, and not a deed or any sort of action. Recognizing, then, that God is the cause of every act and of every law, they deny that he is the cause of the inconsistency [between the act and the law], as if someone were to say that when he drew two lines, one straight and the other curved, he had made both of them, but that someone else made their inconsistency. But by inconsistency Aristotle understood the deed itself, or at least a resolution or plan inconsistent with the law. So, where the scholastics wanted to seem most subtle, they showed most their stupidity.¹³²

Unlike Descartes, Hobbes provides a clear description of just what it is that privation is supposed to do. Hobbes reads its proponent as claiming that there is something distinct from the action—that is, the fact of its unlawfulness or sinfulness—which is not caused by God. Hobbes finds that this fact is the direct result of two real things, the law and the act. Since God is responsible for both, he must be responsible for the fact of its unlawfulness which follows from them. It should be noted that many proponents of privation do allow the human agent the ability to decide the determination of the act—i.e., that which makes it sinful—though God is still the author of everything real in the act—that is, either the performance of the action or the ability to perform the action.

While Hobbes here critiques a traditional theodical tool, he also offers a theodicy he approves of. He writes,

If they [the scholastics] had been subtle, they would easily have discovered the difference between the cause and the author of a deed. The author of a deed is he who commands that it be done; the cause is he through whose powers it is done. God does not command that anyone do (or attempt) anything contrary to the laws; but whatever we do, we do by powers given us by God. Why, then, if God is the cause, are we condemned? If you ask this, tell me why, from eternity, God has elected some, and rejected others, and how he condemned to eternal and most severe punishments those who had not yet done (or thought) evil, and who (unless God was willing and gave them the power) could not do or think evil? Tell me also whether it is lawful for the potter to decide whatever he wishes concerning the vase he has made. Show me, finally, where Scriptures plainly say that all

¹³² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLVI (OL) §22.

those who are excluded from the kingdom of God will live without a second death, to be tortured to eternity.¹³³

Here, as is common in Hobbes, we are provided with definitions that are intended to dissolve the difficulty: “The author of a deed is he who commands that it be done; the cause is he through whose powers it is done.” Following these definitions, Hobbes claims that God is merely the cause of sin and not the author of sin. And if one finds it strange that God is the cause of sin while we are responsible, Hobbes appeals to voluntaristic doctrines supported with pious-sounding language about the potter’s right to rule over the clay. So, while Descartes offers a vague theodicy which depends heavily on privation, Hobbes finds privation problematic and instead offers a two-part theodicy. First, God is not the author of sin since he does not command that sin be done. Second, while God is the cause of sin, God, because of his power, is above being questioned.

Descartes and Hobbes in Leibniz’s Early Theodical Works

Though Leibniz in his maturity was a critic of Hobbes,¹³⁴ Hobbes had tremendous influence on Leibniz’s early thought. Much of Leibniz’s work can be seen as an attempt to balance the fruitfulness of the new mechanical philosophy with concerns for the metaphysical grounding of reality. Leibniz presents himself as a hybrid between a mechanistic thinker like Hobbes or Descartes and a thinker like Aquinas who feels the need to ground the world of experience in non-mechanistic forms and forces.¹³⁵ As such, Leibniz could easily have been a

¹³³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLVI (OL) §22.

¹³⁴ Among other places, this can be seen in the appendix to the *Theodicy* on Hobbes’s dispute with John Bramhall on necessity.

¹³⁵ *Confessio naturae contra atheistas*, (*Philosophical Papers and Letters* 109-113; A VI.1, 489-94) presents an early instance of Leibniz’s acceptance of mechanistic explanations of nature, yet even there he sees these

fan (though not without reservations) of either Descartes or Hobbes. When we look at Leibniz's early work, though, we find harsh criticisms of the French philosopher and praise for the English philosopher. In one place, Leibniz writes that "such great men as Bacon, Gassendi, Hobbes, Digby, and Cornelius van Hoghelande, who are commonly confused with the Cartesians, are definitely to be excluded from their number, since they were either equals or even superiors of Descartes in age and in ability."¹³⁶ The next year, in 1670, Leibniz penned a laudatory letter to Hobbes. Leibniz opens this letter as follows:

I believe I have read almost all your works, in part separately and in part in the collected edition, and I profess that I have profited from them as much as from few others in our century. I am not given to flattery, but everyone who has had the privilege of following your writings on the theory of state will acknowledge, as I do, that nothing can be added in such brevity to its admirable clearness. There is nothing more polished and better adapted to the public good than your definitions.¹³⁷

He closes the letter by adding, "And I shall always profess, both among friends and, God willing, also publicly (since I am myself a writer), that I know no one who has philosophized more exactly, clearly, and elegantly than you, not even excepting that man of divine genius, Descartes himself."¹³⁸ It is bit strange that Leibniz here holds Descartes in such high regard given that he writes the following concerning Descartes in his 1675 letter to Simon Foucher:

explanations as incomplete, requiring a kind of final causality even in non-mental aspects of nature. Here, God's mind supplies what is needed.

¹³⁶ Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 94; A II.1, 25. "ex quo numero magno illi viri Verulamius, Gassendus, Hobbius, Digbaeus, Cornelius ab Hoghelande etc. prorsus eximi debent, quos vulgus Cartesianis confundit, cum tamen vel Cartesio aequales vel etiam superiores aetate et ingenio fuerint [...]"

¹³⁷ Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 105; A II.1, 91. "Opera Tua partim sparsim partim junctim edita pleraque me legisse credo, atque ex iis quantum ex aliis nostro seculo non multis profiteor profecisse. Nihil auribus dare soleo, sed agnoscunt hoc mecum omnes, quibus Tua, in civili doctrina scripta assequi datum est, nihil ad admirabilem in tanta brevitate evidentiam addi posse. Definitionibus nihil et rotundius et usui publico consentaneum magis [...]"

¹³⁸ Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 107; A II.1, 94. "et profiteri me passim apud amicos, et Deo dante etiam publice semper professurum, scitorem me, qui Te et exactius et clarius et elegantius philosophatus sit, ne ipso quidem divini ingenii Cartesio demto, nosse nullum."

I admit that I have not yet been able to read all his writings with all the care I had intended to bring to them, and my friends know that, as it happened, I read almost all the new philosophers before reading him. [...] It is true that I often glanced at Galileo and Descartes, but since I became a geometer only recently, I was soon repelled by their manner of writing, which requires deep meditation.

Leibniz continues with some remarks that can elucidate the way he read Hobbes in this early period:

For, when following one's own meditations one follows a certain natural inclination and gains profit along with pleasure; but one is enormously cramped when having to follow the meditations of others. I always liked books that one could read without stopping, for they aroused ideas in me which I could follow at my fancy and pursue as I pleased. This also prevented me from reading geometry books with care, and I must admit that I have not yet brought myself to read Euclid in any other way than one commonly reads stories.¹³⁹

Leibniz here finds a similarity in style between Descartes and Euclid. Both require their readers to follow them from as they build their positions from simple intuitions or definitions and postulates. Interestingly, in Hobbes's works, one can find the aspiration to build a philosophy in the way Euclid built his geometry.¹⁴⁰ It seems then that though Leibniz had read a large number of Hobbes's works in his youth, he was not yet reading in a manner that would allow him to fully engage with Hobbes's system. This perhaps explains why, in spite of the laudatory nature of Leibniz's 1670 letter to Hobbes, we find in it many statements critical of Hobbes's doctrines (for

¹³⁹ AG, 2-3; A II.1, 388-9. "J'avoue que je n'ay pas pû lire encor ses ecrits avec tout le soin que je me suis proposé d'y apporter; et mes amis sçavent qu'il s'est rencontré que j'ay leu presque tous les nouveaux philosophes plustost que luy. [...] [I] est vray que j'ay jetté souvent les yeux sur Galilée et des Cartes; mais comme je ne suis Geometre que depuis peu, j'estois bien tost rebuté de leur maniere d'écrire, qui avoit besoin d'une forte meditation. [...] [P]ar ce qu'en suivant ses propres meditations on suit un certain penchant naturel, et on profite avec plaisir, au lieu qu'on est gesné furieusement, quand il faut suivre les meditations d'autrui. J'aimois tousjours des livres qui contenoient quelques belles pensées, mais qu'on pouvoit parcourir sans s'arrester, car ils excitoient en moy des idées, que je suivois à ma fantasie, et que je pouissois où bon me sembloit. Cela m'a encor empeché de lire avec soin les livres de Geometrie; et j'ose bien avouer, que je n'ay pas encor pu obtenir de moy de lire Euclide autrement qu'on n'a coustume de lire les histoires."

¹⁴⁰ See Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 152 and Jesseph, *Squaring the Circle*, *passim*.

example, materialism and a certain kind of totalitarianism¹⁴¹), though some are presented in the spirit of defending Hobbes from those who would draw unsavory conclusions from his work (conclusions that really were Hobbes's opinions). Many aspects of Hobbes's thought were undoubtedly attractive to the young Leibniz, and perhaps Leibniz's novel-like reading of Hobbes allowed him an overly sympathetic reading.

Leibniz's works on the problem of evil from the beginning and middle of the 1670s bear out his affinity with Hobbes. In two early documents, Leibniz presents the criticism previously put forth by Hobbes as well as a second criticism, but while it is not clear whether Hobbes had Descartes in mind, Leibniz named Descartes as his opponent. In the first, *On the Omniscience and Omnipotence of God and the Freedom of Man*, Leibniz writes that many have accepted without grounds

[...] that sin is nothing, that it consists in a lack of the appropriate perfection, that God is a cause only of creatures and of actually existing things, not of the originating imperfection. This is as though someone were a cause of the number three and wanted to deny that he was a cause of its oddness [...] . Of course, one says things in order to excuse god that are so lame that a defense attorney with similar arguments before a reasonable judge would be ashamed [...] . And it surprises me that the profound Descartes stumbled here too.¹⁴²

Here one sees Leibniz presenting the same interpretation of privation and the same argument against it as Hobbes did, but also attributing the position to be refuted to Descartes.

Written two or three years after *On the Omniscience and Omnipotence*, Leibniz's *The Author of Sin* provides a more thorough treatment of privation. Instead of simply presenting his objections, Leibniz indicates those things he finds acceptable and those he finds unacceptable regarding privation. Leibniz accepts a lot of the conceptual machinery of the proposed solution,

¹⁴¹ Leibniz tries to clarify what makes a sovereign legitimate in ways that would be foreign to Hobbes. Hobbes did not reply.

¹⁴² *On the Omnipotence and Omniscience of God and the Freedom of Man*, translated by Brandon Look; SCP, 23.

but finds fault with the application of this machinery to the problem of the author of sin. He writes,

The famous distinction between the physical aspect and the moral aspect of sin [...] has been abused somewhat, although it is good in and of itself. For example the physical or real aspect of a robbery is the object or the plunder that irritates the thief's sense of poverty, the visual rays that strike his eyes and penetrate to the depths of his soul, or the imaginings, the uneasiness, and the deliberations that arise thereby, which finally terminate in the conclusion to take advantage of the situation and commit the crime.¹⁴³

After explaining that that termination is what makes a person criminal, Leibniz continues,

Perhaps it will be said that it [the moral aspect of sin] consists in anomie, as holy Scripture calls it, or in the lack of conformity of the action with respect to the law, which is a pure privation. I agree with that, but I do not see what it contributes to the clarification of our question.¹⁴⁴

There are a number of aspects of this approach that Leibniz approves of. He approves of the distinction between the moral and physical aspects of an action and of the characterization of the moral aspect of an action, but he denies that they are of any use in removing culpability from God. As he reads it, this machinery was thought to resolve the problem since God was thought only to be the author only of what is real in the action (i.e. the physical aspect), and so God would not be the author of the moral aspect since it is, in some sense, unreal.

Leibniz's account of privation here gives more detail than either Hobbes's or Descartes' did. His account of the physical aspect of sin echoes Hobbes's accounts of sensation and the will. For Hobbes, sensation is a purely physical process operating only by efficient causes - motion outside the body, causing motion inside the body.¹⁴⁵ Concerning the will, Hobbes writes,

In deliberation, the last appetite or aversion [which appetites and aversions are only endeavours ("small beginnings of motion") towards and away from some object, as

¹⁴³ SCP, 111.

¹⁴⁴ SCP, 111.

¹⁴⁵ See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. i.

Hobbes explains in ch. vi, §§1-2] immediately adhering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is that we call the Will, the act (not the faculty) of *willing*[...] . *Will* therefore is *the last appetite in deliberating* [which deliberating is only the “alternate succession of appetites, aversions” as Hobbes says in ch. vi, §49-51].¹⁴⁶

For Hobbes, to will x is only to have some deliberative process by which there are in the agent the beginnings of motions towards x and away from x which terminate in a motion towards x .

Leibniz’s *The Author of Sin*, presents this Hobbesian picture of sense and will as the physical aspect of sin, even using some of Hobbes’s language. And this is not surprising. Daniel Garber provides us with good evidence for reading Leibniz, at this early point in his development, as a kind of Hobbesian when it comes to physics,¹⁴⁷ and even provides evidence that Leibniz’s early theory of cognition is greatly influenced by Hobbes.¹⁴⁸

Leibniz also accepts that the moral aspect of sin consists in a privation. It is because deliberation’s termination in a motion towards some object fails to conform to the law that that termination is evil. Yet, Leibniz suggests that the conclusion that God is not the author of sin does not follow.

For to say that God is not the author of sin, because he is not the author of a privation, although he can be called the author of everything that is real and positive in the sin—that is a manifest illusion. It is a leftover from the visionary philosophy of the past; it is a subterfuge that a reasonable person will never put up with.¹⁴⁹

Here Leibniz echoes the critique found in the *Leviathan*, suggesting that the moral aspect of an action is a relation between the action itself and the moral law, and all relations depend solely on

¹⁴⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, vi §53.

¹⁴⁷ Garber, *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad*, 14-16.

¹⁴⁸ Garber, *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad*, 32-37.

¹⁴⁹ SCP, 111; A VI.3, 150-1. “Car de dire que Dieu n’est pas l’auteur du peché, par ce qu’il n’est pas auteur d’une privation: quoyque il puisse estre appellé auteur de tout ce qu’il y a de reel et de positif dans le peché, c’est une illusion manifeste; c’est un reste de la philosophie visionnaire du temps passé, c’est un faux-fuyant dont un homme raisonnable ne se laissera jamais payer.” Clearly, Leibniz could not have predicted that he himself would accept the usefulness of privation years later.

their relata. Since God is the cause of the relata, he is the cause of the relation.¹⁵⁰ He then adds a second objection (also found in *On the Omnipotence and Omniscience of God* [...]) suggesting that if one were to deny this, one would deny that humans were authors of sin as well. In short, if privations are caused, then they are caused by God. If they are uncaused, then humans cannot be held responsible for them either.¹⁵¹

Though Leibniz is willing to accept that the moral aspect of an action is a privation, in causing the physical aspect of the action, one causes the moral aspect along with it. There can be no divorce between these two aspects for Leibniz in this period. It seems that if privations are caused, they are caused by God; and if they are not caused, then humans are not guilty either.

Before moving on to Leibniz's later uses of privation, it is worth considering a little further the relationship between Leibniz's early theodicy and Hobbes's sketch of a theodicy presented in the passage above. We already saw that one prong of Leibniz's two-pronged critique of privation can also be found in the 1668 Latin edition of the *Leviathan*. Leibniz's second prong would certainly not be unwelcome to Hobbes. Further we saw that Leibniz's description of privation has much more detail than Hobbes's since he describes the physical aspect of sin, but that description just is a Hobbesian account of willing.

We saw above that Hobbes's alternative to privation consisted of two doctrines. First, he holds that God causes but does not author sin. Second, he justifies God's causation of sin by appeal to Romans 9 (the potter and the clay) and voluntarism. We have also seen in previous

¹⁵⁰ Leibniz says as much when he says that the author of two paintings, with one being the miniature of the other, is the author of the disproportion between the two.

¹⁵¹ SCP, 113; A VI.3, 151. "I am amazed that these people did not go further and try to persuade us that man himself is not the author of sin, since he is only the author of the physical or real aspect, the privation being something for which there is no author." "Je m'estonne que ces gens ne passent plus avant, et ne tachent de nous persuader, que l'homme même n'est pas auteur du peché, par ce qu'il n'est auteur que du physique ou reel, la privation estant une chose dont il n'y a point d'auteur."

chapters that Leibniz's early theodicy is very minimalistic (as can be seen most clearly in the letter to Magnus Wedderkopf of 1671). He claims that God is the *cause* of everything, but that God is not the *author* of sin since the author of sin is the one who delights in the sin itself. God causes the sin since it is intimately tied to the goodness of the world, but he does not delight in the evil itself. So, Leibniz's early theodicy can also be described as claiming that God causes sin without authoring sin.

Regarding voluntarism, though, Leibniz, if he ever accepted it, had most definitely rejected it by 1670.¹⁵² Leibniz not only thinks that voluntarism is false but also that it does not add anything to this theodicy. Authorship *is* where guilt and innocence are decided for Leibniz in the early 1670s, and he has satisfied himself that God is not the author of sin.

Leibniz's Change of Mind: Privations between 1686 and 1695

The texts which feature significant discussions of evil in Leibniz's middle years—I will pay most attention to *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686), *Examination of the Christian Religion* (1686), and the *Dialogue on Human Freedom and the Origin of Evil* (1695)—display notable development in the way Leibniz thought about privation. By 1686, Leibniz no longer presents himself as a critic of privation. Those familiar with Leibniz will not be surprised to find development in the years leading up to these texts. It was in the years leading up to the 1686 *Discourse on Metaphysics* that Leibniz saw the value of substantial forms for explaining natural phenomena and reformulated his theories of human action and substance. In short, Leibniz started sounding more like a strange scholastic than a strange Hobbesian.¹⁵³ These changes

¹⁵² There is some debate about whether Leibniz ever accepted voluntarism. Cf. Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 60-68. Rateau convincingly argues that the early marginalia that had been read as evidence of voluntarism is better interpreted as evidence of a strong necessitarianism.

¹⁵³ In *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad*, 48-53, Daniel Garber excellently chronicles this shift. He goes into great detail describing Leibniz's middle-period theory of substance and the motivations for it in chapters 3-7.

allowed—perhaps even required—Leibniz to re-think his position on privation. Once he made *some* steps back towards Aristotelianism, privation could again be a kind of principle of change.

From 1686, there are two texts in particular in which one can see that Leibniz’s attitude towards privation had clearly changed: the *Examination of the Christian Religion* (*Examen Religionis Christianae*, sometimes called the *Systema Theologicum* [translated as *A System of Theology*, though it would be better rendered *A Theological System*]) and the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. Robert Sleigh’s excellent work on the context of these texts (*Leibniz and Arnauld*, especially chapter 2) gives valuable insight into the connections between these documents as efforts towards the ecclesiastical reunification project with which Leibniz was employed. Sleigh describes them as Leibniz’s “‘one-two punch’ with respect to reunion[...] the *Discourse* [being] the more fundamental document of the two.”¹⁵⁴ The context suggests that the *Discourse on Metaphysics* is intended to be the philosophical basis for a unified theology, and includes philosophical issues relevant to theology, including the existence of God, an explanation of evil, and a reconciliation of free will and providence. The *Examination*, then, takes these philosophical bases and explains issues in revealed theology such as the Eucharist and justification, while also treating the issues found in the *Discourse*. As it happens, the treatments of the origin of evil from these texts are identical but for one being in French and the other in Latin.

And so we find in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Leibniz invoking the privative nature of evil. He writes,

Yet one sees clearly that God is not the cause of evil. For not only did original sin take possession of the soul after the innocence of men had been lost, but even before this, there was an original imperfection or limitation connatural to all creatures, which makes them liable to sin or capable of error. Thus, the supralapsarians raise no more problems

¹⁵⁴ Sleigh, *Leibniz and Arnauld*, 23.

than the others do. And it is to this, in my view, that we must reduce the opinion of Saint Augustine and other authors, the opinion that the root of evil is in nothingness, that is to say, in the privation or limitation of creatures, which God graciously remedies by the degree of perfection it pleases him to give.¹⁵⁵

While I will argue that this passage and related passages evince significant changes in Leibniz's theodicy, it should be noted that there is cause for pause here. What is strikingly obvious from this passage (and its twin in the *Examination*) is that Leibniz's *attitude* towards privation has changed. Samuel Newlands has warned, specifically with regards to these passages and Leibniz's own alignment with the tradition of privation theorists that "although Leibniz's views on the nature and cause of evil do undergo development, it is not the development towards traditionalism that he himself sometimes suggests", and further that, "we ought not always accept Leibniz's own genealogical claims about the origins and shifts of his maturing views."¹⁵⁶

Rather than following Newlands in examining ways in which Leibniz's use of privation differs

¹⁵⁵ *Discourse* §30 ; AG, 62; A VI.4b, 1577. "On voit bien cependant que Dieu n'est pas la cause du mal. Car non seulement après la perte de l'innocence des hommes le peché originel s'est emparé de l'ame ; mais encor auparavant il y avoit une limitation ou imperfection originale connaturelle à toutes les creatures, qui les rend peccables ou capables de manquer. Ainsi il n'y a pas plus de difficulté à l'égard des supralapsaires, qu'à l'égard des autres. c'est à quoy se doit reduire à mon avis le sentiment de S. Augustin et d'autres auteurs, que la racine du mal est dans le neant, c'est à dire dans la privation ou limitation des creatures, à la quelle Dieu remédie gracieusement par le degré de perfection qu'il luy plaist de donner." The *Examination*, in this section, seems to be little more than a Latin translation of the *Discourse* (or vice versa). Leibniz, *A System of Theology*, 5; A VI.4c, 2358. "[I]t is clear that God, the author of all good, cannot be the cause of sin. It must be borne in mind, therefore, that in all creatures, however exalted, there is, antecedent to all sin, a certain inborn and original finiteness, which renders them liable to fall[.] [...] [T]he rational creature, in so far as it is perfect, derives this perfection from the Divine image; but in so far as it is limited and devoid of certain perfections, so far does it partake in privation, or of nothing. And this is the purport of St. Augustine's opinion, that the cause of evil arises not from God, but from nothing; that is, not from the positive, but from the privative;—or, in other words, from that finiteness of creatures of which we have already spoken." "[...] nam Deus autor omnis boni utique causa peccati esse non potest. Considerandum est igitur in omnibus creaturis utcumque eminentibus esse quandam limitationem seu imperfectionem congenitam atque originalem, ante omne peccatum quae facit ut sint labiles. Atque ita intelligendum est quod Jobus significasse videtur, ne sanctissimos quidem Angelos labis hoc est imperfectionis expertes esse. Idque cum justitia originali et imagine Dei non pugnat. In <quantum enim> creatura rationalis perfectione ornata est, hoc habet a Divina imagine, in quantum vero limitata est, et quibusdam perfectionibus caret, eatenus de privatione seu nihilo partem capit. Et huc redit S. Augustini sententia, quod causa mali non sit a Deo, sed a nihilo, hoc est non a positivo, sed a privativo, hoc est ab illa quam diximus limitatione creaturarum."

¹⁵⁶ Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

from traditional uses,¹⁵⁷ I want to focus on the ways in which Leibniz's use of privation in this period is foreign to the young Leibniz's system.

Beyond Newlands warnings, I find further reason for pause in that the young Leibniz—in *The Author of Sin* for instance—does not deny that sins are privations, but only that that fact is of any use in explaining the innocence of God. It is not obvious that the passage from the *Discourse on Metaphysics* is directly responding to the problem of the author of sin. It instead assumes that the problem of the author of sin is resolved without finding God guilty, and then answers the related question, *whence evil?* His answer is that evil is not the result of God's actions but is the result of the imperfections which all creatures have in virtue of their creatureliness.

While one might find space for deep continuity with Leibniz's writings by noting this change in question, there are other considerations that should keep one from doing so. For start, notice that Leibniz's early theodicies followed Hobbes in distinguishing between authoring and causing—accepting that God is the cause of sin but denying that God is the author of sin. In the *Discourse on Metaphysics* §30, Leibniz writes that “one sees clearly that God is not the cause of evil [Dieu n'est pas la cause du mal].” While Leibniz is not strictly treating the problem of the author of sin here but a subsequent problem, neither does he any longer have a place for the author/cause distinction. He has given up his previous position—that God causes sin without authoring it—in favor of the position that God does not cause sin and sins come from privation. Leibniz's previous position is able to answer the *whence evil* question by affirming that God is the cause of evil, but in 1686 Leibniz subscribes to some version of privation theory in which the

¹⁵⁷ It should be noted that Newlands acknowledges development in Leibniz's views on privation, though he focuses his attention on what unity there is in Leibniz's theodicy (which he finds in the “Original Limitation Theory”) and the differences between Leibniz and the scholastics on privation.

agent is able to make some causal contributions to sinful actions. That these actions are sinful is uniquely due to the contribution of the creature. It is in view of the agent's limitation that the action is sinful. God is neither author nor cause of these actions.

Privations, Limitations, and Original Sin

The introduction of privation into Leibniz's theodicy merits a close look at the interconnectedness of a few terms of art. In Leibniz's middle period one finds reference to original limitation, privation, and original sin. Later in his writings, one finds metaphysical evil as well. Several commentators have attempted to sort out the connections between some of these terms with varying levels of success.¹⁵⁸ It is tempting to treat all four as synonymous as each is said to be the source of sinful actions, but this is clearly not the case. Tabling a discussion of metaphysical evil for now (since it does not appear in the texts between 1686 and 1695), I turn to a careful examination of privation, original limitation, original sin, and actual sin.

First let us examine a few texts in our period with the aim of clarifying what is meant by original limitation. Does Leibniz think of this as a privation? Recall that in the passage from the *Discourse on Metaphysics* quoted above, Leibniz writes,

Yet one sees clearly that God is not the cause of evil. For not only did original sin take possession of the soul after the innocence of men had been lost, but even before this, there was an original imperfection or limitation connatural to all creatures, which makes them liable to sin or capable of error. Thus, the supralapsarians raise no more problems than the others do. And it is to this, in my view, that we must reduce the opinion of Saint Augustine and other authors, the opinion that the root of evil is in nothingness, that is to say, in the privation or limitation of creatures, which God graciously remedies by the degree of perfection it pleases him to give.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ See Russell, *A Critical Exposition*, §§121-3; Broad, *Leibniz: An Introduction*, 159-65; Latzer, "Leibniz's Conception of Metaphysical Evil;" Antognazza, "Metaphysical Evil Revisited;" Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 577-85.

¹⁵⁹ *Discourse* §30; AG, 62; A VI.4b, 1577. French text included in an above note.

Leibniz refers to original limitation (and its synonym or near synonym, original imperfection¹⁶⁰) as a version of the Augustinian doctrine that evil has its root in the “privation or limitation of creatures.” It seems then that the original limitation is a privation. This is confirmed in the *Examination* and in the *Dialogue on Human Freedom*.¹⁶¹

Leibniz has already said that the original imperfection is connatural with created essences, but in the *Dialogue on Human Freedom*, the source of these privations is explained in greater detail than in the previous passages. He writes,

¹⁶⁰ A VI.4c, 2351 (Fall 1685 – Spring 1686 (?)). “Omnis perfectio creaturarum est a Deo, omnis imperfectio a propria ipsarum limitatione.” “Every perfection of creatures is from God, every imperfection from the creature’s own limitation.”

¹⁶¹ Leibniz, *A System of Theology*, 5; A VI.4c, 2358. “It must be borne in mind, therefore, that in all creatures, however exalted, there is antecedent to all sin, a certain inborn and original finiteness, which renders them liable to fall; and in this sense is to be understood the sentiment which Job appears to have meant to convey, that not even the holiest of angels are free from stain, that is from imperfection. Nor is this incompatible with the existence or original justice in God’s image; because the rational creature, in so far as it is perfect, derives this perfection from the Divine image; but in so far as it is limited and devoid of certain perfections, so far does it partake of privation, or of nothing. And this is the purport of St. Augustine’s opinion, that the cause of evil arises not from God but from nothing; that is, not from the positive, but from the privative;—or, in other words, from that finiteness of creatures of which we have already spoken.” “Considerandum est igitur in omnibus creaturis utcunque eminentibus esse quandam limitationem seu imperfectionem congenitam atque originalem, ante omne peccatum quae facit ut sint labiles. Atque ita intelligendum est quod Jobus significasse videtur, ne sanctissimos quidem Angelos labis hoc est imperfectionis expertes esse. Idque cum justitia originali et imagine Dei non pugnat. In <quantum enim> creatura rationalis perfectione ornata est, hoc habet a Divina imagine, in quantum vero limitata est, et quibusdam perfectionibus caret, eatenus de privatione seu nihilo partem capit. Et huc redit S. Augustini sententia, quod causa mali non sit a Deo, sed a nihilo, hoc est non a positivo, sed a privativo, hoc est ab illa quam diximus limitatione creaturarum.” *Dialogue on Human Freedom*; AG, 114; *Textés inédits*, 365. “Before all sin, there was an original imperfection in all created things, an imperfection which arises from their limitation. In the same way that an infinite circle is impossible, since any circle is bounded by its circumference, an absolutely perfect created thing is impossible; that is why it is believed that the Sacred Scriptures meant to refer even to angels when they suggested that among the ministers of God, there are none without defects. There was no positive evil in created things at the beginning, but they always lacked many perfections. Thus, because of a lack of attention, the first man was able to turn away from the supreme good and be content with some created thing, and thus, he fell into sin. That is, from an imperfection that was merely privative in the beginning, he fell into a positive evil.” “Avant tout péché, il y a une imperfection originale dans toutes les creatures, qui vient de leur limitation. Comme il est impossible qu’il y ait un cercle infini, puisque tout cercle est terminé par sa circonférence, il est impossible aussi qu’il y ait une Creature absolument parfait <, c’est pourquoy on croit que la Ste Ecriture a voulu parler des Anges mêmes, lorsqu’elle a insinué que parmy les ministres de Dieu il n’y a aucun sans défaut >. Il n’y avoit point d mal <positif> dans les creatures au commencement, mais beaucoup de perfections leur manquoient tousjours. Ainsi faute d’attention le premier homme a pu se détourner du souverain bien, et se borner à quelque creature, et par là il est tombé dans le péché, c’est à dire d’une imperfection qui au commencement n’estoit que privative, il est tombé dans un mal positif.”

A. – But where does the original imperfection antecedent to original sin come from?

B. – It can be said that it arises from the very essences or natures of created things; for the essences of things are eternal, even though the things aren't. It has always been true that three times three is nine and it will always be so. These things do not depend on God's will, but on his understanding. For example, essences or properties of numbers are eternal and immutable, and nine is a perfect square, not because God wants it to be so, but because its definition entails that it is, for it is three times three, and thus it is a result of the multiplication of a number by itself. God's understanding is the source of the essences of created things, such as they are in him, that is, bounded. If they are imperfect, one can only blame their limitation on their boundaries, that is to say, the extent of their participation in nothingness.¹⁶²

The privations or original limitations, which are the principle of sin, are a part of the essences of things. For Leibniz, each creature has its own essence that includes all its actions. He says in this dialogue, "Thus, we must believe that God would not have allowed sin nor *would have created things he knows will sin*, if he could not derive from them a good incomparably greater than the resulting evil."¹⁶³ In the course this dialogue after explaining the cause of evil (that is, the how of evil), Leibniz explained why God would allow sin.

As an aside, it is worth noting that original sin is at least mentioned in all three of our texts. The original limitation existed before innocence was lost, and it was a necessary condition of original sin rather than being equated with the fallen state. In fact, the *Examination of the Christian Religion* makes it clear that the original limitation is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition for the fall. There he writes,

¹⁶² AG, 114-5; *Textes inédits*, 365. "A. – Mais d'où vient cette imperfection originale, qui est antérieure au péché originel? B. – On peut dire qu'elle vient des Essences ou Natures mêmes des creatures; car les essences de choses sont éternelles <quoyque les choses ne le soient pas. Il a été toujours vrai que 3 fois 3 fait 9 et le fera toujours>. Elles ne dependent point de la volonté de Dieu, mais de son entendement; par exemple les Essences ou les propriétés des nombres sont éternelles et immuables et neuf est un nombre carré, non pas parce que Dieu l'a voulu, mais parce que sa definition le porte, car il est trois fois trois, et il provient ainsi par la multiplication d'un nombre par soy même. C'est l'entendement de Dieu qui est la source des essences des creatures, telles qu'elles sont en luy, c'est à dire bornées. Il ne faut se prendre qu'à leur limitation ou bornes, c'est à dire à ce qu'elles participent du neant, si elles sont imparfaites."

¹⁶³ AG, 115; *Textes inédits*, 366. "Ainsi il faut croire que Dieu n'auroit point permis le péché ny créé les creatures dont il sçavoit qu'elles pecheroient, s'il n'avoit sçu le moyen d'en tirer un bien incomparablement plus grand que le mal qui en arrive."

And although it would have been possible for God to have created only such intelligences as, though they possessed the power of falling, yet, in point of fact, never would fall, nevertheless it pleased his inscrutable wisdom to create this present order of things, wherein, from among countless others equally possible, certain possible intelligences, which, in the notion of their possibility, or in the idea of them which exists in God, involve a certain series of free actions and divine helps—of faith, charity, eternal happiness, or the contrary—are selected, and admitted to existence or created [...]¹⁶⁴

While it is necessary that creatures have original limitation, it is not necessary that they fall and are infected with original sin.

Leibniz is emphatic that original sin does not explain the ultimate source of sin. Does it simply drop out of Leibniz's account of sins? Leibniz's *Examination of the Christian Religion* includes a long discussion of original sin, which perhaps is partially explained by the nature of that project (I again refer you to Sleigh's helpful work on this topic). Leibniz does in fact have interesting things to say here. In 1686, he holds that it comes from the body, but later in life, in the correspondence with Des Bosses he holds that it is an imperfection in the soul that corresponds to an imperfection in the body.¹⁶⁵ From 1686 onwards, he holds against the Augsburg confession that original sin is not by itself guilt-incurring, but only that it will inevitably lead to guilt-incurring actual sins given enough time and without the assistance of grace.¹⁶⁶ It seems to me that Leibniz's accounts of original sin are already too independent of Lutheranism to be considered kowtowing to authority. Yet, original sin explains a human

¹⁶⁴ *A System of Theology*, 6; A VI.4c, 2359. "Quamquam autem possibile fuerit Deo eas solum mentes creare, quae etsi labi possent, tamen non essent lapsurae, attamen placuit imperscrutabili sapientiae ejus hunc quem experimur, producere ordinem rerum, in quo quaedam Mentis possibiles, certam quandam seriem actionum liberarum et divinorum auxiliorum itemque fidei, caritatis, beatitudinis aeternae, aut horum contrarii in notione sua possibili, seu existente de ipsis in Deo idea involventes, ex innumeris aliis aequae possibilibus selectae, ad existentiam admitterentur, seu crearentur [...]"

¹⁶⁵ Leibniz, *The Leibniz-Des Bosses Correspondence*, 45.

¹⁶⁶ The Augsburg Confession describes original sin as follows: 'Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.' Leith, ed., *Creeeds of the Churches*, 68.

predilection for sin rather than the explanation of sins themselves. In section 86 and following of the *Theodicy*, the transmission of original sin comes up as its own problem, but one gets the feeling that Leibniz introduces it as an excuse to talk about the generation of souls. It seems then that Leibniz does think original sin plays an important role in his theology and that there really is an inherited propensity to sin in humanity, but original sin is simply not useful in explaining the justice of God.

More relevant to our project are Leibniz's positions regarding actual sins. While it is clear that Leibniz's original limitation is a privation, the passages from 1686 indicate that sins come from privation, but not that sins are privations. In 1695, Leibniz's *Dialogue on Human Freedom* provides more clarity about the nature of actual sins. There, Leibniz's representative, cleverly named 'B,' states that the principle of sin is not God but nothingness, which elicits the following discussion:

A.—Yet you would admit that everything was created good and in such a way that God had reason to be pleased with it, as the Sacred Scriptures tell us. Original sin came after. And that is what I find surprising, namely, how original sin could have arisen in things wholly good.

B.—Before all sin, there was an original imperfection in all created things, an imperfection which arises from their limitation. In the same way that an infinite circle is impossible, since any circle is bounded by its circumference, an absolutely perfect created thing is impossible; that is why it is believed that the Sacred Scriptures meant to refer even to angels when they suggested that among the ministers of God, there are none without defects. There was no positive evil in created things at the beginning, but they always lacked many perfections. Thus, because of a lack of attention, the first man was able to turn away from the supreme good and be content with some created thing, and thus, he fell into sin. That is, from an imperfection that was merely privative in the beginning, he fell into a positive evil.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ AG, 114; *Textes inédits*, 364-5. "A.—Vous m'avouerez cependant que tout a esté créé bon, et tel que Dieu avoit sujet de s'y complaire, comme la S. Ecriture le temoigne. Le peché originel est survenu par apres. Et c'est ce qui m'etonne, comment il a pu naistre des choses toutes bonnes. B.—Avant tout peché, il y a une imperfection originale dans toutes les creatures, qui vient de leur limitation. Comme il est impossible qu'il y ait un cercle infini, puisque tout cercle est terminé par sa circonférence, il est impossible aussi qu'il y ait une Creature absolument parfait, c'est pourquoy on croit que la Ste Ecriture a voulu parler des Anges mêmes, lorsqu'elle a insinué que parmy les ministres de Dieu il n'y a aucun sans defect. Il n'y avoit point d mal positif dans les creatures au commencement, mais beaucoup de perfections leur manquoient tousjours. Ainsi faute d'attention le premier homme

Here Leibniz again assumes that God is not the author of sin and asks, *whence evil?* Two things become clearer here. First, what is it that is a privation? Though Leibniz says in this dialogue “that the cause of good is positive, but that evil is a defect, that is, a privation or negation, and consequently, it arises from nothingness or nonbeing,”¹⁶⁸ privation is only used in this passage to explain where sin comes from, not what a sin is. When he says that evils are privations, he is parroting authorities. When he refers to privations—which he identifies with the original limitation—, he is always talking about the *source* of sins rather than the sins themselves. Leibniz here describes the source of sins as a *merely privative* imperfection; sins, though, are positive things brought about by privations.

Leibniz is clear also that neither the original limitation nor original sin merit guilt for the creature that has them. This means that Leibniz is not terribly far from the position he expressed in the *Author of Sin*—that saying God is innocent of sin because sin is a privation would exonerate humans from guilt as well as God. While Leibniz does have some place for privation in his theodical thought in this period, it isn’t the role he had previously, explicitly denied it. What role, then, does privation play in Leibniz’s theodical project in this middle period?

A close examination of *Discourse* §30 is instructive. Leibniz holds that God is not the ‘cause of evil,’ which leaves one wondering what else could possibly be the cause of evil. He then claims that evil is has it’s ‘root’ in ‘the privation or limitation of creatures’. Divine permission and the best possible world can explain many things, but Leibniz no longer thinks that they provide *another* source of evil, which Leibniz now takes to be required. Leibniz’s early

a pu se détourner du souverain bien, et se borner à quelque creature, et par là il est tombé dans le peché, c’est à dire d’une imperfection qui au commencement n’estoit que privative, il est tombé dans un mal positif.”

¹⁶⁸ AG, 114; *Textes inédits*, 364. “que la cause du bien est positive, mais que le mal est un défaut, c’est à dire une privation ou negation, et par consequent vient du neant ou non estre.”

work finds God to be the source of evil, though in a way that preserves his innocence. Leibniz's early account of permission is only an account of the way in which God permits himself to bring about creatures who necessarily hold evil relationships to the good things in the world. Once Leibniz accepts that there are real evils (beyond the intentions of creatures), he has to find another object of God's permission of evils. Privation fills that role.

Leibniz's Later Texts: Privations Yielding Privations

Towards the end of his life, Leibniz's metaphysics had undergone yet another change as monads took center stage. Here also, we find a development in the way Leibniz thought of privations. Leibniz's treatment of privation in his monadological period can be found in the *Dissertation on Predestination and Grace* from around 1705 and the *Theodicy* of 1710.

Leibniz's *Dissertation on Predestination and Grace* of 1705 is a commentary on Gilbert Burnet's commentary on the *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*. In Leibniz's commentary, we find him responding to a position nearly identical to the one he himself held in *The Author of Sin*. Burnet writes,

To avoid the consequence of making God the author of sin, a distinction was made between the positive act of sin, which was said not to be evil, and the want of its conformity to the law of God, which being a negation was no positive being; so that it was not produced. And thus, though the action was produced jointly by God as the first cause, and by the creature as the second, yet God was not guilty of the sin, but only the creature.¹⁶⁹

Though Burnet here only describes the position and does not provide criticisms until much later in the document, Leibniz takes this opportunity to express his approval of the theodical use of

¹⁶⁹ Burnet, "Article XVII," §14.

privation, writing, “This doctrine also, that sin is of a privative nature, is from Augustine and not to be scorned.”¹⁷⁰

Burnet’s criticism of privation is as follows:

But suppose that sin consisted in a negative, yet that privation does immediately and necessarily result out of the action, without any other thing whatsoever intervening; so that if God does infallibly determine a sinner to commit the action to which that guilt belongs, though that should be a sin only by reason of a privation that is dependent upon it, then it does not appear but that he is really the author of sin [...] Nor is it to be supposed that he can damn men for that, which is the necessary result of an action to which he himself determined them.¹⁷¹

As in *The Author of Sin*, we here have two points: first, that one authors the privation by authoring the positive aspect upon which it depends, and second, that humans cannot be guilty of sin under this conception of privation, though for different reasons than those of *The Author of Sin*. Leibniz’s response tells us both what he now thinks is wrong with this kind of criticism and how he now thinks privation should be understood and used in the context of a theodicy.

Regarding the first, Leibniz rejects this kind of criticism because it relies on incorrect theories of causation and action. In particular, Leibniz now believes that different kinds of causation give different modalities to the actions produced. Leibniz writes, “This should be taken so that we understand that whatever there is of absolute reality or perfection in good or evil acts flows from God and things are connected in such a way that the future is not born out of the past *necessarily* but only *with certainty*.”¹⁷² Regarding causation, Daniel Garber writes, “Leibniz

¹⁷⁰ *Dissertation on Predestination and Grace*, §14 (e). “Haec quoque doctrina, quod peccatum sit naturae privativae, iam est Augustini nec spernenda.”

¹⁷¹ Burnet, “Article XVII,” §§56-7.

¹⁷² Leibniz, *Dissertation on Predestination and Grace*, §14 (c). “Hoc ita capiendum est, ut intelligamus, quicquid perfectionis seu realitatis absolutae est in bonis vel malis, profluere a Deo; resque ita connexas esse, ut ex praeteritis futura non necessario quidem sed tamen certo nascantur.”

seems to have flirted with occasionalism for a fair period of his early years.”¹⁷³ Leibniz had now come to the position that substances cause their own subsequent states.¹⁷⁴ And so, God is no longer the only cause of the creature’s actions. God now concurs with creaturely actions rather than carrying them out on the occasion of the creatures’ desires. Leibniz’s positive account of privation (which we will turn to shortly) will rely on the division of creaturely actions into God’s contributions and those of the creatures.

Additionally, Leibniz no longer thinks of perception as motions outside the body causing motions inside the body. Perception is now a modification of a simple substance. And perception gives rise to action through final causes, not through efficient causes as in the Hobbesian account. Both because the creature uses its own force (rather than being only an occasional cause) and because it is prompted to action by final causes and not pushed, as it were, by efficient causes; Leibniz says with Aquinas that a creature is inclined but not necessitated by the reasons for its action.¹⁷⁵ Leibniz has stepped into that “visionary philosophy of the past” which he once criticized, though with his own twist.

Building on his new metaphysics, Leibniz also gives a positive account of the use of privation. He divides creaturely action into two components. The positive component is from God, while the privative (or deforming) component is from the agent. He writes,

God is not the author of sin or of the sinful act, just as pushing is not the cause of slowness. A ship that is brought downstream by a river is moved more slowly the more

¹⁷³ He argues for this claim in *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad*, 191-3. We have seen some evidence for this in that the theodical writings of the 1670s included the claim that God is the cause even of sin. But it is not clear to me that this is occasionalism since it is not clear whether Leibniz took this to mean that God is the *immediate* cause of sin or merely the first and mediate cause.

¹⁷⁴ See Leibniz’s *New System of Nature*; AG, 138-45.

¹⁷⁵ That the creature is inclined but not necessitated by its reasons can be seen in the letter to Coste of December 1707; AG, 194. cf. Aquinas, *De Malo [On Evil]*, Question 6. See also *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §30, where Leibniz says that in spite of the agent’s being determined by a final cause it still retains the power to do otherwise.

heavily it is loaded. So the force is from the impelling river, the slowness from the inertia of the impelled body. [...] The creature determines itself with respect to the imperfection of an action as an impelled mass determines itself to slowness. Intelligent creatures determine themselves voluntarily, other creatures by a certain brute cause. Augustine and St. Thomas rightly said (see thus *Summa Theologica* 1.2 q. 9, art. 9) that the soul, while it is incited to the highest good by the traces pressed into creatures by God, abandons the impetus of its own inertia or, as it were, power, and adheres to creatures.¹⁷⁶

The ship analogy is instructive. Creatures for Leibniz, receive their forces along with their being from God. But just as a ship receiving its ability to move from the stream has a real influence on its motion, so creatures can contribute to their actions by some kind of influence on what they receive from God. In his *Theodicy*, Leibniz repeats the same position but with greater detail. He writes,

[L]et us compare, I say, the inertia of matter with the natural imperfection of creatures, and the slowness of the laden boat with the defect to be found in the qualities and the action of the creature; and we shall find that there is nothing so just as this comparison. The current is the cause of the boat's movement but not of its retardation; God is the cause of the perfection in the nature and the actions of the creature, but the limitation of the receptivity of the creature is the cause of the defects there are in its action.¹⁷⁷

This deformity is a privation but a real cause of the action, and so, if this privation makes an action sinful, the creature is the cause of the sinfulness though God is still a concurring cause of the action by maintaining the force and existence of the creature.

¹⁷⁶ Leibniz, *Dissertation on Predestination and Grace*, §56 (d), §57 (a). “Deus non est autor peccati vel actionis peccaminosae, ut impellens non est causa tarditatis. Navis, quae a flumine defertur, eo tardius movetur, quo magis onerata est. Vis ergo est a flumine inpellente, tarditas ab inertia impulsu. [...] Creatura se ipsam determinat ad actionis imperfectionem, ut massa impulsa se determinat ad tarditatem. Intelligentes creaturae se determinant voluntarie, caeterae quadam bruta ratione. Beneque Augustinus et Thomas (vide hunc 1. 2. q. 9 art. 9) animam dum impressis a Deo in creaturas vestigiis incitatur ad summum bonum, inertia sua et velut mole destituere impetum et adhaerescere creaturis. Ex quo colligo opus esse vel a Deo augeri impulsu pro praevisis impedimentis. vel minui impedimentorum occursum resistentiasque aut adhaesiones.”

¹⁷⁷ *Theodicy*, §30; *Essais de Théodicée*, §30. “[C]omparons, dis-je, l’inertie de la matière avec l’imperfection naturelle des créatures, et la lenteur du bateau chargé avec le défaut qui se trouve dans les qualités et dans l’action de la créature, et nous trouverons qu’il n’y a rien de si juste que cette comparaison. Le courant est la cause du mouvement du bateau, mais non pas de son retardement; Dieu est la cause de la perfection dans la nature et dans les actions de la créature, mais la limitation de la réceptivité de la créature est la cause des défauts qu’il y a dans son action.”

But what is to be made of this inherent limitation by which creatures can deform what they receive from God? Is God the cause of it? God is a cause of creaturely action for Leibniz since he creates and continually re-creates the forces of creatures, but if God is similarly the cause of the limitation of creatures, then, he will be the cause of the sinfulness of their actions, privative or not. In the *Theodicy*, Leibniz writes,

The imperfections, on the other hand, and the defects in operations come from the original limitation that the creature could not but receive with the first beginning of its being, through the ideal reasons which limit it. For God could not give the creature all without making of it a God; therefore there must needs be different degrees in the perfection of things, and limitations also of every kind.¹⁷⁸

The original limitation of creatures is a lack of some perfections. But because this limitation is privative, might Leibniz be able to renew his earlier criticism? One might think that since the privation follows directly from God's positive act, God is the author of that privation as well.

Both a few years before and a few years after the *Theodicy*, Leibniz explicitly states that original limitation is an "essential" feature of a created being ("an absolutely perfect created thing is impossible").¹⁷⁹ As such, this privation, unlike the moral aspect of sin, is uncaused.

Leibniz appeals to the ideal nature of the creature, writing,

[B]ut that does not preclude that the creature had part in the actions also since the *action* of the creature is a modification of the substance which flows naturally from it and which contains a variation not only in the perfections that God communicated to the creature but also in the limitations that it brings there itself on account of being what it is.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ *Theodicy*, §31; *Essais de Théodicée*, §31. "[A]u lieu que les imperfections et les défauts des opérations viennent de la limitation originale que la créature n'a pu manquer de recevoir avec le premier commencement de son être par les raisons idéales qui la bornent. Car Dieu ne pouvait pas lui donner tout sans en faire un Dieu; il fallait donc qu'il y eût des différents degrés dans la perfection des choses, et qu'il y eût aussi des limitations de toute sorte." Cf. *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §30.

¹⁷⁹ *Dialogue on Human Freedom*; AG, 114; *Textes inédits*, 365.

¹⁸⁰ *Essais de Théodicée*, §32. "[M]ais cela n'empêche pas que la créature n'ait part aux actions aussi, puisque l'*action* de la créature est une modification de la substance qui en coule naturellement, et qui renferme une variation non seulement dans les perfections que Dieu a communiquées à la créature, mais encore dans les limitations qu'elle y apporte d'elle-même, pour être ce qu'elle est."

In a sense, the creature had these limitations even before creation. For Leibniz, the essences of things exist in the realm of eternal verities (i.e. the divine understanding) and are unchangeable.¹⁸¹ God's giving existence and forces to these essences is an action, but God does not have any agency in the actual development of these essences.

And so, Leibniz has two kinds of privations. One kind is the uncaused imperfection of essences which give them the ability to deform actions—that is, to bring about a second kind of privations—for which they are morally culpable. Early in his life, Leibniz acknowledged neither privation, insisting instead that God is the *cause* of everything, though not the *author* of sin. In passages from 1686-1695, Leibniz acknowledged the first of these privations—a real imperfection in the creature, and acknowledged that this privation is the source of evil actions in the world.

Metaphysical Evils and Privations and Negations

Having completed my discussion of the main thesis of this chapter—that Leibniz's attitude towards and conception of privation change prior to 1686 and again after 1695—I now want to discuss more deeply some peculiarities of Leibniz's conception of privation as found in the *Theodicy*. In particular, there are important discussions of the nature of metaphysical evil and the distinction between privations and limitations in Leibniz scholarship, from previous generations and very recently. I want to re-address these topics—reminding us of what hangs on them—, and I then want to point out that they are connected.

Regarding the nature of metaphysical evil, there are roughly two schools of thought. First, some—for example, Russell and Broad—take metaphysical evil just to be original limitation. This is a natural way to read *Theodicy* §21: “One may take evil metaphysically,

¹⁸¹ The dialogue concerning the several Sextuses in *Theodicy* §413-7, artfully illustrates this doctrine.

physically, or morally. *Metaphysical evil* consists in simple imperfection, *physical evil* in suffering, and *moral evil* in sin.”¹⁸² Though there is a strong case to be made against this reading, I believe it is ultimately closer to the truth than its competitor.

Second, some—for example, Latzer and Antognazza—take metaphysical evil to be something more robust than original limitation. As evidence they take Leibniz’s discussion, in part three of the *Theodicy*, of the relationship between metaphysical and physical evil. There Leibniz writes,

It is true that one suffers for the evil actions of others; but when one has no part in the crime, one must take it for certain that these sufferings prepare for us a greater happiness. The question of physical evil, that is to say of the origin of sufferings, has difficulties in common with that of the origin of metaphysical evil, of which monstrosities and other apparent irregularities of the universe furnish some examples. But one must judge that even sufferings and monstrosities are in the order; and it is good to consider not only that it was better to admit these defects and these monstrosities than to violate the general laws, as the Reverend Father Malebranche sometimes reasoned; but also that these monstrosities themselves are in the laws, and find themselves in conformity with the general volitions, though we may not be capable of untangling this conformity.¹⁸³

While Leibniz, in general, does not have much to say about metaphysical evils, in this passage he gives examples of them: monstrosities and irregularities.

Russell and Latzer each take their position to have important implications for our understanding of Leibniz. They both take it that Leibniz is not able to have a workable ethics if he equates metaphysical evil and original limitation. Further, they take it that Leibniz’s theology

¹⁸² “§21. On peut prendre le mal métaphysiquement, physiquement et moralement. Le *mal métaphysique* consiste dans la simple imperfection, le *mal physique* dans la souffrance, et le *mal moral* dans le péché.”

¹⁸³ *Essais de Théodicée*, §241. “Il est vrai qu’on souffre pour les mauvaises actions d’autrui; mais lorsqu’on n’a point de part au crime, l’on doit tenir pour certain que ces souffrances nous préparent un plus grand bonheur. La question du mal physique, c’est-à-dire de l’origine des souffrances, a des difficultés communes avec celle de l’origine du mal métaphysique, dont les monstres et les autres irrégularités apparentes de l’univers fournissent des exemples. Mais il faut juger qu’encore les souffrances et les monstres sont dans l’ordre ; et il est bon de considérer non seulement qu’il valait mieux admettre ces défauts et ces monstres que violer les lois générales, comme raisonne quelquefois le R. P. Malebranche ; mais aussi que ces monstres mêmes sont dans les règles, et se trouvent conformes à des volontés générales, quoique nous ne soyons pas point capables de démêler cette conformité.” Cf. Latzer, “Leibniz’s Conception of Metaphysical Evil,” 10-11; Antognazza, “Metaphysical Evil Revisited,” n.p.

would suffer from conflating the two. Russell is content to consider Leibniz's system as flawed in respect to his ethics, and is happy to consider it evidence of at least highly unorthodox religious views. Latzer, on the hand, defends Leibniz against these claims, taking these potential failures to be one piece of evidence that something else must be going on. In what follows I want to first argue that Leibniz does indeed hold that metaphysical evil is equivalent to original limitation, then show that the bad consequences, both ethical and theological, that Russell and Latzer take to follow from that position are unfounded. I will then conclude by drawing some consequences for our understanding of Leibniz's late theodicy before moving on to discuss the distinction between negation and privation.

I take it that Leibniz thought metaphysical evil just is original limitation first because Leibniz does not offer a robust theodicy of metaphysical evils. Latzer explains what he thinks Leibniz's theodicy must be if he held that metaphysical evil is equivalent to original limitation. He writes,

If every creature were metaphysically evil simply by virtue of not being a god, it would follow that there would be no possible world without evil; and as I indicated earlier, Leibniz's justification of God could plausibly be construed as follows. God chose to communicate his goodness, wisdom, and power by the act of creation but has been unable to prevent evil from infecting his work because every possible creature in every possible world is evil to some degree, perhaps an infinite degree. The presence of evil is not God's fault, since it in some cases consists in, and in others is a consequence of, the inescapable finitude of created being.¹⁸⁴

Because Leibniz does not justify God this way, Latzer suggests that this cannot be Leibniz's conception of metaphysical evil. Latzer goes wrong in a couple of important ways here, chiefly by failing to pay close attention to when Leibniz uses 'evil' to speak of moral and physical evils only as opposed to when Leibniz uses the term to include metaphysical evils—granted much of the fault rests with Leibniz, as he does not indicate which way he uses the term. First, Latzer is

¹⁸⁴ Latzer, "Leibniz's Conception of Metaphysical Evil," 14.

wrong in thinking that there is a world without any evil according to Leibniz. The important passage here—the one, in fact, that Latzer points to—immediately follows Leibniz’s tripartite classification of evils. He writes,

Now, although physical evil and moral evil may not be at all necessary, it suffices that in virtue of the eternal truths they be possible. And as this immense region of the truths contains all the possibles, it must be that there was an infinity of possible worlds, that evil enters into several among them, and that even the best of all includes some; it is this which determined God to permit evil.¹⁸⁵

Latzer sees Leibniz’s claim that evil enters into only several of them as indicating that metaphysical evil is contingent, but this ignores the fact that Leibniz had already limited his discussion to physical and moral evil. Leibniz claims that these two are not necessary. If one asks why Leibniz wrote there of only physical and moral evil, the most obvious answer is that what he says about the two evils does not apply to the third. Metaphysical evil, it seems is necessary. This clearly supports the conclusion that metaphysical evil is any limitation, and is necessarily found in anything that is not God.

Second, Latzer presents what he thinks must be Leibniz’s theodicy if metaphysical evil is original limitation. He follows Russell and Broad in finding metaphysical evil to be the “fountainhead” of the other evils.¹⁸⁶ He assumes that if metaphysical evils are necessary, then Leibniz’s theodicy must rely on this necessity. The way to avoid finding Latzer’s reductio-theodicy in Leibniz is by denying the fountainhead principle. I showed earlier that original limitation in Leibniz’s middle works is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for moral evil. Equating metaphysical evil with original limitation, then, would not necessitate moral and

¹⁸⁵ *Essais de Théodicée*, §21. “Or, quoique le mal physique et le mal moral ne soient point nécessaires, il suffit qu’en vertu des vérités éternelles ils soient possibles. Et comme cette région immense des vérités contient toutes les possibilités, il faut qu’il y ait une infinité de mondes possibles, que le mal entre dans plusieurs d’entre eux, et que même le meilleur de tous en renferme ; c’est ce qui a déterminé Dieu à permettre le mal.”

¹⁸⁶ Latzer, “Leibniz’s Conception of Metaphysical Evil,” 2-4; Russell, *A Critical Exposition*, 198; Broad, *Leibniz: An Introduction*, 159.

physical evil.

Further, Latzer overlooks that Leibniz hardly presents any theodicy of metaphysical evil. While there is one passage that serves as an exception (that we have looked at above and will be treated momentarily), Leibniz gives us the structure of the *Theodicy* very carefully. He begins Part Two by writing,

107. So far we have devoted ourselves to giving a full and distinct exposition of this entire matter, and although we have not yet spoken of the objections of M. Bayle in particular, we have tried to prevent them, and to provide ways of responding to them. But as we have charged ourselves with the task of satisfying them in detail, not only because there will perhaps still be places which will merit being clarified, but also because his entreaties are usually full of wit and erudition, and serve to give a greater day to this controversy, it will be good to relate the chief of them which have found themselves dispersed in his works, and to join to them our solutions. We have remarked before: “*that God contributes to moral evil and to physical evil, and to each in a moral manner and in a physical manner; and that man contributes to them morally and physically as well in a free and active manner, which renders him blamable and punishable.*”¹⁸⁷

As Leibniz sees it, Part 1 is an overview of the theodicy, Parts 2 and 3 are more detailed accounts, applying the general view specifically to Bayle’s objections. Part 2 treats moral evil, split into the physical cause of moral evil (§§107-157) and the moral cause of moral evil (§§158-240).¹⁸⁸ Part 3 treats physical evil. There is no sustained treatment of metaphysical evil.

Leibniz seems to think that metaphysical needs little or no defense. When Leibniz talks about ‘evil’ generally, he refers only to moral and physical evils. Metaphysical evil is the privation of

¹⁸⁷ *Essais de Théodicée* (emphasis added). “107. Jusqu’ici nous nous sommes attachés à donner une exposition ample et distincte de toute cette matière, et quoique nous n’ayons pas encore parlé des objections de M. Bayle en particulier, nous avons tâché de les prévenir, et de donner les moyens d’y répondre. Mais comme nous nous sommes chargés du soin d’y satisfaire en détail, non seulement parce qu’il y aura peut-être encore des endroits qui mériteront d’être éclaircis, mais encore parce que ses instances sont ordinairement pleines d’esprit et d’érudition, et servent à donner un plus grand jour à cette controverse, il sera bon d’en rapporter les principales qui se trouvent dispersées dans ses ouvrages, et d’y joindre nos solutions. Nous avons remarqué d’abord : « que Dieu concourt au mal moral et au mal physique, et à l’un et à l’autre d’une manière morale et d’une manière physique ; et que l’homme y concourt aussi moralement et physiquement d’une manière libre et active, qui le rend blâmable et punissable.”

¹⁸⁸ *Essais de Théodicée*, §157.

a perfection, but it lacks many features shared by other evils in that its neither its existence nor its production carry guilt. Leibniz classifies it as a kind of evil technically, but in general does not consider it to be of the same kind as the other evils.

The one passage which does seem to provide a theodicy of metaphysical evil—the one that justifies my use of ‘hardly’ above—is the passage we looked at previously which compares physical evil with metaphysical evil, giving monstrosities and irregularities as examples of the latter. There Leibniz cites Malebranche’s doctrine of God’s general will to explain these apparent irregularities, but he also cites his own doctrine of miracles. I take it that the latter is more important for understanding the passage, particularly since Leibniz uses his doctrine of miracles to critique Malebranche for not adhering closely enough to the doctrine of the general will. Leibniz’s stance on miracles is that, technically there are none insofar as a miracle is a violation of a general volition. He writes,

207. I even believe that miracles have nothing with which to distinguish them from other events; for the reasons of a higher order than that of nature brings him to make them. So I would not at all say with this father [Malebranche] that God deviates from the general laws at all whenever the order wants it; he deviates from one law only for another, more applicable law, and that which the order wills would not know how to fail to be in conformity with the rule of order which is among the general laws. The nature of miracles, taken in the more rigorous sense, is that one would not know how to explain them by the natures of created things.¹⁸⁹

What we call miracles are not, contrary to the way it seems to us, violations of the laws governing the world. Leibniz feels free to talk about real miracles, but those events we call miraculous are really just a part of the created order.

What then is to be made of the examples Leibniz gives of metaphysical evils? Recall that

¹⁸⁹ *Essais de Théodicée* “207. Je crois même que les miracles n’ont rien en cela qui les distingue des autres événements; car des raisons d’un ordre supérieur à celui de la nature le portent à les faire. Ainsi je ne dirais point avec ce Père que Dieu déroge aux lois générales toutes les fois que l’ordre le veut ; il ne déroge à une loi que par une autre loi plus applicable, et ce que l’ordre veut ne saurait manquer d’être conforme à la règle de l’ordre qui est du nombre des lois générales. Le caractère des miracles, pris dans le sens le plus rigoureux, est qu’on ne les saurait expliquer par les natures des choses créées.”

metaphysical evil is simple imperfection. Recall also that the examples Leibniz provides “monstrosities and other apparent irregularities of the universe.”¹⁹⁰ Note especially his use of “apparent” (*apparentes*). If by metaphysical evils, Leibniz means irregularities or violations of laws determining a normal course of nature, then Leibniz must hold that there really are no metaphysical evils. Further, Leibniz is a kind of nominalist holding that each creature is a lowest species—a *sui generis* kind of thing.¹⁹¹ In this case, if Leibniz thinks of metaphysical evils as a deformation of the perfections proper to things of a certain kind, then Leibniz also must hold that there really are no metaphysical evils. Justin Smith points out that species membership for Leibniz is explained in terms of descent rather than in terms of universals. He writes,

Biological species membership, as we have been seeing, is for Leibniz an all-or-nothing affair determined by descent from the same parents, and wide morphological variation does not have as a result greater or lesser membership in a species. [...] Another way of putting this is that, for Leibniz, monstrosity is not the result of deviation from the morphological standard.¹⁹²

Smith’s reading is based in part on texts from Leibniz’s polemic against Stahl dated from the same period as the *Theodicy*. This suggests that if Leibniz is to explain metaphysical evils in terms of departing from species norms, then this has to be explained in terms of irregularities of processes, which Leibniz can’t appeal to either for a meaningful notion of metaphysical evil.

Since Leibniz is emphatic that there are metaphysical evils, I conclude that the cases of monstrosities and other irregularities just are examples of the normal limitations that all creatures have by virtue of being creatures. In short, because of Leibniz’s positions concerning universals

¹⁹⁰ *Essais de Théodicée*, §241.

¹⁹¹ By “Leibniz’s nominalism” I only mean that Leibniz denies that individuals are individuated from a universal. See Mare and Ariew, “The Individual in Leibniz’s Philosophy, 1683-1686” for how Leibniz’s nominalism and the lowest species doctrine play into Leibniz’s earlier accounts of individuation. For a good treatment of Leibniz’s nominalism, see also: Leduc, “Le commentaire leibnizien du *De veris principiis* de Nizolius.”

¹⁹² Smith, *Divine Machines*, 250-1.

and species membership (the kinds that would provide a robust sense of ‘monstrosity’), any claim he makes about deviations from these standards would simply be claims about irregularities in processes, but it is well-known (particularly in relation to miracles) that Leibniz held that regularities in processes must merely be apparent and ultimately subsumed into a deeper law. Hence, monstrosities and other irregularities are no different than other imperfections (original imperfection) except that they are particularly salient to humans.

Finally, the claims made by Russell, Broad, and Latzer to the effect that the literal omnipresence of evil in creatures precludes any meaningful ethics or orthodox theology are simply false. They point, for instance, to the fact that the devil being the most evil being should have more metaphysical evil, so that he may also have the most moral evil.¹⁹³ But surely, they rightly claim, worms and amoebae have less perfection than Satan. Likewise, they point to the fact that, since God is infinitely perfect, every creature must be infinitely evil.¹⁹⁴ What they have missed though is that metaphysical evil is not like the other evils, and not included in most of Leibniz’s normal uses of the term ‘evil.’ To say that every creature infinitely falls short of the goodness of the creator is perfectly orthodox. Further, since metaphysical evil is a necessary condition for the other evils, but does not correlate with them,¹⁹⁵ there is no difficulty in holding that Satan has a great deal more metaphysical goodness while also having a great deal more moral evil than an earthworm.

Finally, my opinion on the distinction between negations and privations is surely obvious. Traditionally the distinction has been between lacks of perfection and lacks of perfections *that*

¹⁹³ Russell, *A Critical Exposition*, §122.

¹⁹⁴ Broad, *Leibniz: An Introduction*, 159.

¹⁹⁵ See the discussion of original sin above.

one ought to have. A classic example of blindness and a stone can be found in the *Port-Royal*

Logic among other places:

The difference between these last two kinds of oppositions [that between a quality and its privation and that between a quality and its negation] is that privative terms contain the negation of a form in a subject having the capacity for it, whereas negatives do not indicate this capacity. This is why we do not say that a stone is blind or dead, because it is capable of neither sight nor life.¹⁹⁶

Since Leibniz does not offer a robust account of general natures, he is not in a place to distinguish between lacks of perfection and lacks of perfection that one ought to have, and this is borne out by the fact that there is no distinction between privations and negations in Leibniz's texts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I find three phases in Leibniz's development regarding privation. First, he follows Hobbes in rejecting its theodical usefulness. Around the time of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, he uses privation to explain the source of evil. He holds that the evil actions themselves are positive and not caused by God. Finally, culminating in the *Theodicy*, he finds that evils both are privations and come from privations. Actions are divided between the positive component, with which God concurs, and the privative component which springs from the creature's inherent limitation – itself a privation.

¹⁹⁶ Arnauld and Nicole, *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, 188.

CONCLUSION

I believe I have accurately presented Leibniz's work on evil as complex and evolving. Every study must make choices about how to present the material. The division I have made has benefits and drawbacks. In addition to the details of Leibniz's theories presented in the individual chapters, I have two primary theses: first, that Leibniz's work on evil is not as simple as sometimes believed; second, that Leibniz's work on evil develops more significantly than is sometimes believed. I wanted to structure this work in a way that clearly displays the complexity and development of Leibniz's work on evil. Dividing the work thematically, and then proceeding chronologically within the chapters, I believe has done that. Unfortunately, this also has the effect of concealing the overall picture of Leibniz's theodical efforts. Still, I believe this structure has helped me to present Leibniz's work as a subject for study rather than a subject for ridicule, and I'll take that trade-off. In particular because I think I can correct it here by offering a brief synopsis of the development of Leibniz's work—an outline of three different theodicies I find in his texts. After this, I will draw some connections between Leibniz's work on providence and evil and then close with a word about the success of these theodicies.

Leibniz's Theodicies

I would now like to synthesize the findings of the previous chapters by outlining the three theodicies I find in Leibniz's texts. I present here rather quick sketches of these theodicies. The details and relevant texts remain in the preceding chapters. In 1671, Leibniz's letter to

Wedderkopf presents a necessitarian theodicy. In it, he denies that God, being an omniscient and omnipotent being, could merely permit something. The things we take to be evil in the world are there because God wants them there. God really brings them about. Leibniz just doesn't think they are really evil. This should not be confused with a doctrine that evils are privations. The theodicy of the early 1670s harshly criticizes any theodical use given to the concept of privation.

The *Confessio philosophi* of 1672-3 continues clarifying (as well as obfuscating) this theodicy. Leibniz there confirms that God is the cause of everything, but denies that God *authors* sins. It seems that Leibniz denies that sins are evil in an absolute sense in the letter to Wedderkopf and clarifies this in the *Confessio* by explaining that it is humans that are delighted by the existence of what we call evil while God is still the cause of what we call evil. The world itself is without blemish, though humans (and demons) are guilty in that they are delighted by things that they take to be evil.

I just said that Leibniz's *Confessio philosophi* clarifies and obfuscates the theodicy of the early 1670s. The *Confessio* introduces some language of contingency in order to argue that sins are not necessary. My first chapter argues that these appearances of contingency are merely appearances. Leibniz provides definitions that give a sense in which 'sins are necessary' comes out false, but the necessitarian picture presented the year before remains the same. Secondly, The *Confessio* also provides a strange definition of permission. In my second chapter, I argue that the theodicy of the *Confessio* has no place for permission. All the work of the theodicy of the early 1670s is done by the necessitarian best-possible-world thesis and the denial of the absolute reality of evil.

By 1686, Leibniz has abandoned his old theodicy and come up with something which genuinely tries to find a place for contingency, permission, and privation. It is true that God is

still determined by his understanding of the best possible world, but the relationship between God and the world has changed. Instead of God causing and necessitating everything, Leibniz now finds that God is neither author nor cause of evil. There are creatures with genuine power to bring things about—power given by God and determined by their own essences which were also given by God. The big change that can be seen here—the one that requires all these other changes—is that Leibniz is no longer comfortable describing God as the cause of sin. Now there is contingency in the world; now there are agents with real causal power; now there are things that God permits but does not cause. Evil has become more real. When Leibniz thought God brought it about, he thought it wasn't really evil. Now, though, God's holiness cannot be compromised by causing evil. Evil requires another source. It is important to see that when privation is introduced, it is introduced *in order to make evil more real*.¹⁹⁷ Since evil is real, one can ask where it comes from. The answer is that it comes from the imperfections necessarily inherent in creatures given that they are creatures.

Still, Leibniz's rehabilitation of privation is incomplete in his middle-period theodicy. The work done by privation in the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and the *Examination of the Christian Religion*, and more explicitly in the *Dialogue on Human Freedom and the Origin of Evil* is to explain where evil comes from. It is not until sometime around the beginning of the eighteenth century that Leibniz makes sins themselves privations, which gives us the theodicy of the *Theodicy*, which, admittedly is only subtly different. Leibniz is now considering how to go about dividing creaturely action into a component of divine origin and a component of creaturely

¹⁹⁷ Thus, I disagree with Sleigh's excellent article when he says that he never rejected that "Since, in the long term, sin is harmful only to the sinner, it is not absolutely evil." "Remarks on Leibniz's Treatment of the Problem of Evil," 166.

origin. Privations appear twice. They are the cause of sin and sins themselves have a privative component.

Theodicy and Metaphysics

Recently, there has been much debate about the development of Leibniz's metaphysics. I have pointed out ways in which Leibniz's theodicies depend on his metaphysics. For instance, Leibniz's theories of modality, of action, of substance, and to some extent of force all play a role in Leibniz's theodicies. I believe, then, that this picture of the development of Leibniz's theodical thought can provide some modicum of evidence for development in Leibniz's metaphysics. There are three developmental stories I want to briefly discuss below.

First, Christia Mercer's study of the development of Leibniz's metaphysics ends in 1679. Mercer finds that most of Leibniz's mature metaphysics was established prior to Leibniz's arrival in Paris in 1672, and, she writes, "Upon leaving Paris [in 1676], the only one of his prominent mature doctrines that has not yet evolved is his account of truth."¹⁹⁸ Though she thinks Leibniz refines his doctrines, for Mercer, all of the important developments in Leibniz's metaphysics happen well before the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, including the development of pre-established harmony, of his mature theory of substance and substantial form,¹⁹⁹ of the monadology,²⁰⁰ and of his phenomenalism.²⁰¹

Perhaps the most frequently adopted developmental story has Leibniz's mature thought developed in and right before the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and correspondence with Arnauld

¹⁹⁸ Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, 386.

¹⁹⁹ On pre-established harmony and substance, see Mercer and Sleight, "Metaphysics: The Early Period," 93-4, 100

²⁰⁰ See, for instance, Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, 131.

²⁰¹ See Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, chapter 8.

(but certainly not establishing his core doctrines prior to his Paris period, 1672-1676) and then developing the way in which he presented his theory through the rest of his life. Perhaps chief among these thinkers is Robert Adams who argues that Leibniz's metaphysics goes through only changes in presentation and minor alterations from 1686 until Leibniz's death. Adams writes, "Leibniz adhered throughout that period [1686-1716], in essentials if not in every detail or without changes in terminology, to the metaphysical scheme summarized in his 'Monadologie' of 1714."²⁰²

Finally, Daniel Garber's *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad* argues for three stages in the development of Leibniz's metaphysics. Garber argues that Leibniz establishes a metaphysics of hylomorphic corporeal substance *not further grounded in monads* in the late 1670s and transitions from this metaphysics to one grounded in monads around the start of the 18th century. The primary debate between Adams and Garber is about whether Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics* provides a monadological metaphysics.

Now, it would certainly be out of place for me to attempt to resolve this debate in the space of a couple pages, but, as I have noted that Leibniz's theodicies rely on certain of his metaphysical theses, I do believe that I can offer as a rather humble piece of evidence a comparison between the developmental story I have offered of Leibniz's theodical thought with those of his larger metaphysics. In its broadest outlines, I find three theodicies (in texts from 1671-3, 1686-1695, 1705-1710). If we think that the theodical development lines up with the larger metaphysical development, then it seems that this provides some corroboration of Garber's account. Ultimately, I do think this relationship is correct and that my account fits best with Garber's, but, especially given that the difference between the middle theodicy and the late

²⁰² Adams, "Continuity and Development," 51.

theodicy is rather subtle, more should be said about the connection between these theodicies and the differences between Adams and Garber.²⁰³

Could I not have just as easily concluded that there are two theodicies in Leibniz, the latter of which goes through some minor variation towards the end of his life? I have noted two changes between the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and the *Theodicy*. I will now argue a little for their significance, particularly with regard to the metaphysical stories of Garber and Adams. I argued in chapter two that the simplicity/variety criterion of goodness for the world changed in both content and use between the *Discourse* and Leibniz's late writings. The change in content is regarding what it is that is maximized. My reading of the *Discourse* maximizes the happiness of minds, while the *Monadology* maximizes essence. The change in use reflects this change. In the *Discourse*, the simplicity/variety criterion plays a role in arguing for the charity of God. In the later writings, Leibniz uses it to argue for the system of pre-established harmony, mirroring, and ultimately that the independent substances that make up the world must in fact be ordered harmoniously even though they have no causal influence. In short, it plays a role in the monadological metaphysics of the late texts that it doesn't play in the early ones.

Second, there is a change regarding privation between the *Discourse* and the *Theodicy*. As late as 1695, sins have positive being though they result from a privation. As early as 1705, sins not only result from privation but are deformed actions, which is to say they have a privative component. This is a metaphysical change in Leibniz's theodical thought. It isn't clear though that it depends on any disputed thesis of Garber's or Adams's.

I conclude then that Leibniz does present three distinct theodicies. This development is related to the development of Leibniz's metaphysics, and it gives some corroboration to the

²⁰³ Of course, it is still possible that Mercer's account is correct and that these changes in theodicy have little to do with Leibniz's metaphysical development.

tripartite division of Leibniz's metaphysical development though it is also certainly compatible with other developmental stories.

Final Thoughts

One might find it strange that a work devoted to Leibniz's solutions to the problem of evil contains so little evaluation of those solutions. The reason for this is that I find that Leibniz's theodicies—all his theodicies—are successful, but in a terribly uninteresting way. Someone who is willing to accept one of Leibniz's metaphysical systems will have a rather easy time accepting the theodicy appropriate to it. Further, in addition to being bundled together with what we might call unorthodox metaphysical theses, Leibniz's early theodicy in particular requires what are nearly universally considered unorthodox religious theses. Wholesale adoption, then, is only an option for roughly one person. This does of course limit the direct usefulness of the theodicies, but it certainly does nothing to detract from the humanist interest in Leibniz's works on this subject as something to marvel at the way we might marvel at an intricately woven tapestry.

Further, I suggested that there might be indirect uses for this kind of study. One with interests in apologetics might benefit from surveying the work of great minds on the subject of divine providence and evil. A study of Leibniz's theodicies provides both radically innovative moves and level-headed moderation.

I believe that this presentation of Leibniz's theodicies is in keeping with Leibniz's reputation as “the most naturally brilliant polymath of the century.”²⁰⁴ Leibniz's theodicies are more than the best-possible-world thesis. They are more than an “optimistic, fantastic, orthodox,

²⁰⁴ Nadler, *The Best of All Possible Worlds*, 242.

shallow” attempt at international fame.²⁰⁵ These works are the results of a brilliant and careful mind working on an issue of tremendous religious, political, personal, and philosophical importance; and they are a part of one of the most perplexing and intriguing metaphysical systems in the history of philosophy.

²⁰⁵ Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, 531.

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