

# **A History of Philosophy**

## **40 Leibniz on Evil**

### **By Arthur Holmes of Wheaton College**

Okay, what we want to do this afternoon in wrapping up our discussion of Leibniz is first of all to make some comments that we did not have time for last time on the problem of freedom in Leibniz, and then, since that is a prerequisite to it, get into the problem of evil. Leibniz's Theodicy, of which you have an abridgment in the anthology, Leibniz's theology is one of the classics in the whole history of thought dealing with the problem of evil. So that's where a lot of the focus will be.

But plainly, if Leibniz, as a Christian thinker, is going to be dealing with evil, moral evil in particular, he will be expected to have recourse to Augustine's free will argument. And consequently, the question of human freedom becomes very important. Now, we've already seen in this period of the 17th century that people like Thomas Hobbes and Benedict Spinoza seem to reject a realistic view of freedom of the will.

If we distinguish between realism and anti-realism on various topics, then they're both anti-realistic about freedom of the will. While we seem to ourselves to make free choices, that experience of a free choice is simply a confused idea. The choice itself is caused by the causal processes that dominate everything else.

On the other hand, the other extreme, if you like, is Descartes' indeterminism. Because by virtue of the mind-body dualism, two separate entities, there is no necessitating the mind in its concepts as distinct from persons, in its conceptualizing, its reasoning, or in the assertion or denial that the will makes in relationship to what it knows. The human will, according to Descartes, seems to operate in something of a causal vacuum, a completely indeterminist situation, which is only possible because mind, of which will is a function, mind is a separate entity, functions independently, not causally dominated, though cause-effect connections between mind and body do occur in relationship to physical stimuli producing sense responses, emotional feelings, and so forth.

But the will remains free. Now, Leibniz then, in this context, is, if you like, caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. Which way is he going to go? But remember that he is developing a different kind of metaphysical system.

His is not the kind of mechanistic materialism of a Hobbes, nor on the other hand is his simply an indeterminist kind of system in which all you have is efficient and material causes, as in the case of Descartes. Remember, he's developing a teleological metaphysic. He talks of intrinsic essences for every monad so that it has its own potency pre-established to be actualized.

And you get the picture from thinking about his theory of monads, that everything a monad does is due to the inner nature of that monad, which is, as it were, pre-programmed to function as it does. Now, at first glance, that seems to imply some kind of inner determinism, some kind of inner self-determination. What I do is determined by my individual nature, and all natures are individual.

Determined by my individual nature. But the question then boils down to this. Whether my choice is determined by who I am, by my nature.

And if it is, whether I can modify who I am, my nature. Let me say that again. Whether my choice is determined by my nature, by who I am.

Or whether I can modify my nature, who I am, within parameters. In other words, am I free to have an effect on my nature even if I'm not completely free to choose? If we grant that my choices are constrained by the essence, which is mine, do I have any power to modify in any regard my essence? That's the way the question seems to come out. Now, initially, you find some passages in Leibniz in which he seems to reject necessitarianism.

The view that choices are necessitated. A matter of causal necessity. Let me draw your attention to two of those.

One of them is in the anthology on page 223, which is the abridgment we have of the theodicy. And let me read what he says in the first column about a third of the way down. The predetermination of events by causes is just what contributes to morality instead of destroying it.

You're familiar with the old objection that determinism would destroy morality because it would rob us of individual responsibility. So, the predetermination of events, he says, is what contributes to morality instead of destroying it. Causes incline the will without compelling it.

Okay, sanctor is some residual freedom. Causes incline the will without compelling it. This is why the determination in question is not necessitation.

It is certain to him who knows all that the effect will follow the inclination. But the effect of which implies contradiction. It is also by an internal inclination such as this that the will is determined without any necessity.

Supposing one has the greatest passion in the world, a great thirst, for example. You'll admit that the soul can find some reason for resisting it if it were only that of showing its power to resist it. Thus, although one may never be in a state of perfect indifference, equilibrium.

There's that causal vacuum. You're never in a state of equilibrium. There may always be a preponderance of inclination for the side taken.

It never renders the resolution taken absolutely necessary. Now he seems to be saying there is always some power of contrary choice granted the inclination. Even if the only reason for resisting the inclination is to show what a he-man you are.

You'll see. There is still that power of contrary choice. Sounds like he's arguing for some degree of freedom.

Page 229 has something similar. This is Section 30 from the Discourse on Metaphysics. Section 30.

Where he is speaking of the way in which, and this is halfway down the first column, God, in cooperating with ordinary actions, only follows the laws that he's established. And what he seems to have been saying in the other passage, in this one as well, is that God, having established laws, also has complete foreknowledge. Complete foreknowledge.

And because he knows what will be done, it can be said to be predetermined. That does not mean it's necessary. Hypothetically, it could be otherwise.

It's as if there is sufficient reason, but not a necessary reason, making that distinction. So, back to the passage then on 229. He follows the laws he's established.

That is to say, he continually preserves and produces our being. Remember that the process of creating is an ongoing one. Fulguration is a continuous imparting of the power to be.

Spontaneously, there's that inner determinism. Or with freedom in that order which the concept of our individual substance carries with itself. So the thinking process and the particular sequencing of ideas is an expression of the freedom to be ourselves.

And if this can be foreseen for all eternity, by virtue of the decree which God has made that the will will always seek the apparent good in certain particular aspects, that's the teleology; he, without at all necessitating our choice, determines it by that which appears most desirable. So it seems that God then, in creating us, creates us with a desire for that which seems most desirable, and that is what we do. Now, of course, God can make certain things appear desirable.

So forth. For absolutely speaking, our will, as contrasted with necessity, is in a state of indifference, being able to act otherwise. Wholly to suspend its action.

Either alternative remains possible. It therefore devolves upon the soul to be on guard against appearances. Appearances, yes, what seems to be good but really isn't.

You see. By means of a firm will. And to reflect.

To reflect. To refuse to act or decide in certain circumstances except after mature deliberation. So he seems to be saying that we can be confused by appearances unless, and this sounds like Descartes and Spinoza, unless we make sure of a clear understanding as a result of reflection, mature deliberation.

Okay. So in that sense, what would happen is that clarity of thought will dispel the confusion about appearances, and you'll see that it's a deceptive appearance. And therefore, you will desire something other than what you are quite free to do.

Free, meaning, out of your natural inclination for what now appears good. So what appears to you to be good, which is what you are naturally inclined to pursue, what naturally appears to you to be good may change that appearance when the mind gains sufficient reflection and mature judgment. Now there's another passage that I think we have to compare with that.

Back on page 208 in the *Monadology*. 208, paragraph 30. He's just been saying that it is the reason that raises human beings to a knowledge of ourselves.

And of God. So that by virtue of rationality, we can have a clearer understanding of ourselves, and we know God as the good. By virtue of rationality.

Now in paragraph 30. By knowledge of necessary truths and their abstraction, we rise to acts of reflection. That's what he was saying earlier, that we need it.

We need to reflect. We rise to acts of reflection which make us think of that which calls itself I, to observe that this or that is within us. It is thus that in thinking of ourselves, we think of a being of substance, of the immaterial, and of God himself.

Conceiving that what is limited in us is in him without limits. So reflection gives us an idea of that which is far better than we, which should be desired. And so the whole natural inclination is tied to clarity of thought and to the rule of reason.

Now, those are the passages that make it seem as if he is arguing for freedom of the will. Now there's a problem there that emerges when we turn to page 233. 233.

Which is in the excerpts from a more fragmentary work labeled here First Truths. First Truths and Necessary Truths. Okay.

And at the very bottom of 232, you have this italicized beginning of a paragraph. The perfect concept of an individual. Okay, there's the essence, the nature.

Includes all its predicates, past, present, and future. So everything about an individual is contained within the nature of the individual. Future predicates.

That is to say, actions which are predicated of an individual. Choices predicated of an individual. All of those things about an individual are contained within the nature of the individual when it's clearly understood.

Now, in the light of that, at the top of the first column of 233, therefore, in the perfect concept of Peter or Judas. Okay, Peter or Judas. Considered just as a possible object abstracted from the divine decree to create him.

There are present in that concept seen by God, foreknown by God, all the things that will happen to him, necessary as well as free. Hence, it's manifest that God chooses from infinite possible individuals those he considers more suited to the supreme and secret ends of his wisdom. So there are many other individuals who could have been created than Peter, who would deny him, and Judas, who would betray him.

Okay. Other possible worlds. This isn't the only possible world.

There are other possible worlds in which there would be no Peter and no Judas. Okay. So, more suited to God's wisdom.

Not that he decrees that Peter should sin, or that Judas be damned, but rather that he decrees in preference to other possible individuals, he decrees the Peter, who will sin, certainly, yet not necessarily, but freely, and decrees to create Judas, who will suffer damnation, they should come into existence. You see, the decree has to do with existence. Or, that a possible concept should become actual.

Now, granted that the future salvation of Peter is contained in the eternal possible concept of Peter, still, this doesn't exclude the intervention of divine grace. How come Peter, who denied him, would be saved? Oh, by virtue of divine grace, making God himself desirable, more than in the case of the denial. You see.

So, by God's grace, God acting in that case, yes, Peter could be saved. So that the aids of divine grace are also contained under the aspect of possibility, that is to say, in the conception of Peter that includes all of his acts and choices. So, he seems to be saying in that passage that there is, yes, still freedom, not necessity, but it's a freedom by virtue of what God does.

A freedom to find salvation. Freedom, if you like, to modify one's own nature. In that regard.

Well, ambiguity then. Is he opting for a conception of freedom as indeterminism? Or is he opting for a conception of freedom rather as a kind of compatibilism? He certainly seems to be saying that freedom is compatible with having a pre-established nature. A preconceived nature.

Predetermined nature. It's compatible with that. He is saying that it's possible that our nature can be modified, but that's part of the predetermination of nature.

He is saying that we are free to modify the direction of our desires, to modify our nature, when, with reflection, we understand what is good. A clear conception of God, and Peter loves him instead of denying him. He was confused at the betrayal.

So, how are you going to take it? The only other missing piece to the puzzle that I can see has to do with the relationship between contingent and necessary truth. When he's talking about epistemology, as we've noted, he distinguishes between those two. Contingent truths depend on certain things happening.

They don't logically have to be. Now, there is a passage, we don't have it in the anthology, where he speaks of God's own knowledge. And seems to say that God's own knowledge is all of necessary truth.

Now, you see, from our standpoint, what happens to Peter is contingent on certain things happening. Contingent on God in his grace reaching Peter. From our standpoint, it's contingent.

But from God's pre-knowledge standpoint, what we regard as contingent is something which is logically necessary to the perfection of the whole. He chooses in terms of the perfection of the whole. So it looks as if the principle of perfection, having to do with the nature of the whole hierarchy and its compactness, requires that there be the Peter and the Judas.

You see. And that Peter be the one who denies, and Judas be the one who betrays. Now, is that a compatibilism which reduces to determinism? That's the question.

And an indeterminist, like, for instance, Bill Hasker, who wrote the little metaphysics book that some of you may have read in the Indiversity series, an ardent indeterminist. I had him as an undergraduate when I taught a theology course. And he was the most anti-Calvinist Arminian, vocally, that I think I ever had in class.

An ardent indeterminist theologically, an ardent indeterminist philosophically now. And he would say, yes, all compatibilism just slides into determinism. It's a mask for determinism.

Nothing more. Well, I leave you to face the question. Is it or is it not? I'm inclined to think that Leibniz does not intend to be a determinist.

But he doesn't want the free will in a vacuum of Descartes. He's too much the Calvinist for that. But he's not Calvinist enough to be a necessitarian.

Not Calvinist enough? I don't think Calvin was a necessitarian either. So, be that as it may. All right, so much on the freedom determinism thing.

Any questions or comments there? I'm curious as to how close Leibniz's view is to what was espoused by Pachelbel. Yeah, I don't think that, at least I've never thought of Leibniz as following that route. It seems to me that it was a route that, in the late Middle Ages, was developed and has been resurrected more recently.

I don't know if there's anybody in the book that's going on on middle knowledge who has tapped into Leibniz on this or not, I don't know. Talking about how it's within us. Some of that sounds like 20th-century thought, like Whitehead.

Yeah, yeah. Is Whitehead influenced by this? You know, I'm inclined to say, wait till we read Whitehead. There are similarities.

I don't think of anything in Whitehead that appeals to Leibniz. He is much more influenced by the 19th-century idealists like Hegel and Bradley. On the other hand, Whitehead worked for a long time with Bertrand Russell.

And one of Russell's first books was on Whitehead. Well, take it back, was on Leibniz. So, it's hard to say.

The ultimate constituents of reality for Whitehead are rather analogous to Leibniz's monads. And it's an analogy that may be rather striking. Now I say, I don't think of anywhere in Whitehead where he expresses debt to Leibniz.

But as I say that, there's one section of his major work that I'd want to check. Where he may, when he's reviewing some historical matters. But there are similarities that are interesting.

David? Well, I think, let me start here. I don't remember any time when I've heard or read Hasker criticizing Leibniz. In effect, what he says, and in his little metaphysics book, he says it.

Is that any kind of compatibilism in which one's free choices are caused by one's own nature? Which nature is itself caused? Even if there is some feedback from our reactions, which are caused by modifications to our nature.

Any kind of compatibilism in which freedom is caused by our own natures. Really is no more than determinism. It's simply a matter of inner causation rather than external causation.

That's the complaint. It seems to me that what Leibniz is trying to do is to preserve not only human freedom in the sense, in a sense. But also the freedom of God to act.

Notice how different Leibniz is from the sort of deistic picture of God. In which God has created a person. And that's it.

Leibniz's God is one who continually imparts existence. One who attracts the choice of an individual by virtue of his grace. So he's much more theologically adequate than the kind of deistic picture.

And it seems to me that what Descartes has given us is sort of a deistic picture of human freedom. Now he's pre-deism, and I think it's unintentional on his part. But the picture seems to be, all right, God gave you free will, now it's up to you.

Well, you know, no Calvinist is going to be happy with that. And I don't think a good Arminian should be happy with that either. No, because God continues to be active, involved with us.

So Leibniz doesn't want the indeterminism of Descartes. That's very clear. Yeah.

Yeah, notice that for Leibniz, because there is no cause-effect relationship between mind and body, there are cause-effect relationships between bodies, which are composites, but not between mind and body, spirit and body. It follows that the mind, the will, is therefore free from physical causation. You see, so there are no external causes that can determine.

All that can be determined is the internal. And the question there is whether I can modify my nature. You see, God can, by virtue of the continual creative process and the grace which is special and attractive.

But yes, I can modify my own nature if I think clearly about what appears to be good. But is that thinking clearly something which is predetermined? That's where the ambiguity is. Yeah, so Hasker's point is if indeterminism, no take it back, if necessitarianism is wrong, if compatibilism reduces to a kind of necessitarianism, then the only alternative is, you see.

And I guess I'd want to at least try out the hypothesis that Leibniz is providing a fourth alternative. You know, any time you get a disjunctive argument, A or B or C, and somebody argues A is wrong, B is wrong, therefore C, well, only provisionally until some smart aleck comes up with D. You see, and I think Leibniz may have come

up with D. All right, now let's turn to the material we have, the outline I passed around on the problem of evil. Did everybody get one of those or any stragglers? You have one? Everybody has one? Pass one along to the end.

Okay, what I've done here is pull together a series of things which will put his treatment of the problem of evil in its larger systematic context. Okay, starting with material from the monadology. The principle of sufficient reason implies a final cause outside the sequence of contingent events.

A teleological argument. That final cause is a necessary and perfect being, altogether good, altogether desirable. In nature, on the other hand, there are imperfections.

Imperfections that are part of the very nature of things. There are apples that rot, and our bodies, too, are recyclable. Imperfections in nature.

On the other hand, he speaks of eternal truths, concepts of everything in nature. In the mind of God, pre-conceives everything. He uses the word archetypes, the Augustinian tradition.

The very essence of God is to exist. And there's an implicit ontological argument there that you're familiar with. But nature, derived by fulguration, as God is the source of all being, nature is harmonized, not just once and for all at the beginning and then messed up.

That's almost a deistic conception. But nature is continually being harmonized by the intervention of God as well as his continued activity. And there are repeated times when he uses the words "intervention" and "adjustment."

So that this is the best of all possible worlds. There are others that God has conceived. Worlds without Judas or Peda.

The best of all possible worlds. And that seems to be an a priori truth. He's not arguing empirically that this is the best of all possible worlds, but on an a priori basis.

Granted, the conceptions that he's been building here in terms of the hierarchy of being. Now it's that notion that this is the best of all possible worlds, which came under satirical attack by Voltaire in his *Candide*. Are you familiar with that work? Voltaire's *Candide*.

In which he pictured somebody traveling the world around and discovering all of the horrible things. And in a catastrophic earthquake in the city of Lisbon, meeting, who is it, Professor Pangloss, which means all talk. You can imagine who that stands for.

Professor Pangloss mutters as he walks through the ruins, this is the best of all possible worlds. The satirical criticism of life. Best of all possible worlds.

Well, you find in a number of places in that passage, sections 53 to 55, also in section 86, a number of passages where the reason why this is the best of all possible worlds is that God is all-wise, God is all-powerful, and God is all-good. It comes back to that again and again. God is all-wise, God is all-powerful, God is all-good.

Now, if you take these as propositions, one, two, three, and add a fourth proposition, you have the classic formulation of the logical problem having to do with evil. Because of the claim that proposition four is logically incompatible with the first three. If God is all-wise, he'd know what to do about it.

If he's all-powerful, he could do it. If he's altogether good, he would want to do it. Evil exists, so at least one of the other premises must be false.

Now, the usual modification is to say, in terms of the greater good argument of Aquinas, and you'll find that in Leibniz as well, oh, but evil is allowed for a greater good. So, the usual response is to edit the fourth and to make it read, purposeless evil exists. Evil serves no greater good.

Purposeless evil exists. And that certainly is what Leibniz is asserting, that there is no purposeless evil, because this best of all possible worlds is not the cross-section there in 170-whatever of the Lisbon earthquake. It's not blowing the whistle on the movement of history and saying, ah, look at it, this is the best of all possible worlds.

No. But it's the overall process actualizing its nature with the grace of God as well as the creative work of nature, of God in nature at work. So the combination of nature and grace is involved in the best of all possible worlds.

So you have to say that in his treatment of the problem of evil, Leibniz is working not with a static view of nature, but with a dynamic one, working with an eschatology in his treatment of evil. And that becomes evident if you notice that the next line in the monadology statements refers to the city of God. That's the telos.

That is to say, he sees the whole process of nature and grace as culminating in the city of God on earth. There's the Augustinian conception. Now, don't assume that that's an oddity in the 17th century.

Remember that Francis Bacon, with his view that knowledge is power and his building on the creation mandate in wanting to bring scientific knowledge to bear on the human condition to improve it, repeatedly speaks of the kingdom of God. His scientific utopia is his vision of the kingdom of God. And the same is true of Thomas Hobbes, you see.

What he is talking about in the Leviathan is a civil society that enforces the law of God through civil law, and he sees this as the kingdom of God on earth. So the notion of a kingdom of God on earth is very common in the 17th century. Movement towards it historically is what gives rise to the idea of progress, which is one of the increasingly dominant ideas in the Enlightenment, you see.

Optimism about the course of history, a progress towards some sort of ideal society, some kingdom of God on earth. The inevitability of progress, it sometimes comes out as, and it generates interest in what we now call the philosophy of history. So that the philosophy of history as a discipline itself, history used to be treated more as what they called belle lettre, good writing, interesting writing.

Then, more interest was in time, historical process, hence the idea of progress in history, you see. And that blossomed in the 19th century in romanticist ways in terms of progress, and we'll see more of that second semester as we get into it. But that has its seeds here in terms of Leibniz's vision of the city of God as the telos, the goal towards which nature and grace conspire.

Well, then, you have some comments on sin and punishment, so that part of the built-in nature of things is that in the course of nature, even sin has its own punishment. That's built into the whole prearrangement. Okay, now there's the overall framework.

And in the theodicy, what do you have? Well, section one of the theodicy, and we have numbered sections in the abridgment, section one is dealing with the greater good argument. Evil simply is part of this larger inclusive teleology. It, like every other kind of thing and property of things that emerge within the whole hierarchy of being, contributes to the perfection of the whole.

And in view of the eschatology, you have to say in the long run. The greater good argument. In Leibniz, this becomes explicitly a greater good argument that includes God's grace and the whole vision of what God is doing in the course of human history.

Section two draws the obvious inference that evil is therefore limited. Evil is limited. It's allowed only with purpose and, therefore, limited to what can serve that purpose.

While the good is unlimited. Yeah, evil is a privation of good, as we see a little later. Well, he moves from that to the free will argument, where the emphasis is on the internal inclination of the will and its ability to resist passion.

That's the passage that I read to you, the first passage I read. And so, section four, it follows that the permission of human freedom, or permitting the exercise of human freedom, and the occurrence of evil, both of these were allowed, were built into the preconceived creation for the greater good. Section five, evil, yes, it's a privation of good, but a limited and purposeful privation of good.

Six and seven, coming back to the nature of God. God is good. Chapter eight, section eight, coming back to the power of God.

God is unrestrained in his creation, creates freely, since he could do otherwise, and he does. There's a distinction between metaphysical necessity and moral necessity, which he draws. Metaphysically, God could have created many different worlds than this one.

Why did he create this one? Well, it was morally necessary that he create the best of all possible worlds. So, God acts under moral necessity rather than metaphysical necessity. And the ambiguity, it seems to me, in Leibniz is whether in God moral necessity really reduces to metaphysical necessity by virtue of God's nature.

Is God able to do anything other than what is morally best? So, that's the picture. If God has perfect knowledge of eternal truths, he has perfect pre-understanding of all things. And he acts in the course of time in nature so that all things do indeed reach their actualization.

Well, do you follow it? One modification of this kind of approach, which some contemporary writers have developed, is to deny that this is the best of all possible worlds. Granted that there are other possible worlds, might there not be other possible worlds that are equally good as this one? Now, you see the benefit of saying that. God still creates the best of all possible worlds, but he was perfectly free to create others, even morally free to create others.

And so, in that concern for the freedom of God, some have argued for other equally best possible worlds rather than just one. Yeah. What about someone who might say that? How would you answer someone who would say that? Well, he's taken that into account.

You see, Leibniz takes that into account, doesn't he? Because you used create in the past tense. Leibniz wants to speak of God creating in the present tense. So, the point is that creation, as he conceives it, is an ongoing relationship between God and nature.

Well, he takes it very literally. What's the difference between the two? The fact that God continues to impart existence to everything that exists is exactly the same as before. God sustains in existence and continues to impart existence to creatures

whose natures he preconceived, whose natures even modified as they have been by their fallenness, you see.

God sustains in existence, if you like, people in their sinning. Yeah. You see? So, he can embrace within this the whole picture of biblical orthodoxy.

You've got to get the historical movement of things into it to get the biblical picture in. And he's gotten it in there. You know, if you say that the classic framework for reformed Protestant thinking is in terms of creation, fall, and redemption.

Well, isn't that precisely what Leibniz is talking about? Creation, fall, redemption. You see? So, he's handling the problem of evil with that theological framework, but he has devised a metaphysical system that supports that theological framework. If you like, what Leibniz was trying to do was to develop a genuinely, intrinsically Christian philosophical scheme, you see, on the model of some of those in the Middle Ages.

But one which would be adequate to the issues of his own day. Since this is the last day of the class, I'm tempted to say, go and do thou likewise. In other words, just try to be thoroughly Christian in your thinking.

Well, we have five minutes for comments and feedback. Was he presumably a Protestant? Yeah, yeah, Protestant, I think. No, I won't say beyond that, but definitely Protestant.

Very active church. Your comment on tempered waters. What does it do? What does that do? Oh, if this isn't the only best possible world, it means that God could have created alternatives to this one.

But he chose not to. Why did he choose not to? Well, it certainly wasn't because he was morally constrained to choose this one and no other. He could have chosen the others.

He wasn't metaphysically constrained. He could have chosen the others. So God freely chose this one.

This makes possible the kind of emphasis that a number of Catholic theologians and philosophers, too, make. That God loved creating. And loves his creation.

He chose it. It was an act of love. Yeah.

Yeah. No, not that God is limited to himself. Rather it's saying that God in his wisdom, power, and goodness sees that allowing free agents to do evil or allowing natural processes of decay to occur, you see, in allowing this, he can make those

things contribute to far greater good by allowing them than he could by disallowing them.

It is better to have people with freedom, as we say, than a world without free creatures. That's the implication. Okay.

Notice how so much of what he's saying has fed into traditional Christian talk about the problem of evil. It's part of the tradition. Okay.

Get all the stuff from you next week, please.