Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Class 11 - Leibniz's *Monadology*
Parallelism, Theodicy, Freedom

Bodies

- Bodies are the appearances of monads.
  - That is why monads are not in space.
  - But, there is an appearance of space, which Leibniz takes seriously.
  - Bodies in space are governed by laws of efficient causes.
- Three metaphysical positions
  - A materialist thinks that everything is bodies.
  - A dualist thinks that there are both minds and bodies.
  - An idealist thinks that everything is minds.
- Leibniz is really an idealist.
  - Real world (monads with their appearances/bodies)
  - Phenomenal world (bodies)
  - Ideal world (space and time)
- Organized bodies are divine machines, M64

Minds

- All monads are entelechies, or souls.
- We are monads of a particular sort.
  - We have simple unity.
  - Recall Descartes on the unity of the soul.
- Our minds are governed by laws of final causes.
- The final causes guide their series of perceptions.
  - The life of a monad is like unfolding its inner core.
  - For non-soul monads, the series of their perceptions are all unconscious.
  - But, even for conscious monads, the series is often unconscious, as when we sleep.
- Given that they obey different laws, why are the laws governing final causes precisely compatible with the laws governing efficient causes?

Spinoza and the Problem of Interaction

parallelism

- The body is another perspective on the mind.
  - OK with Leibniz
- The singularity of substance
  - Not OK
  - Leibniz embraces the multiplicity.

Causation

- The problem of interaction (between mind and body) is a special case of a general problem of causal interaction.
- Four kinds of causal interactions:
  - CI1. Body-body (e.g. when one curling stone transfers momentum to the next)
  - CI2. Body-mind (e.g. when one's body is harmed and the mind feels pain)
  - CI3. Mind-body (e.g. when I decide to take a walk, and my body gets up and goes)
  - CI4. Intra-mental (e.g. when I think about my children and that causes me joy)
- CI2 and CI3 are obviously problems for the dualist.
- Many of the moderns thought that there was also a problem with CI1.

The Problem of Transeunt Causation

interaction among substances
e.g. body-body causation

- CI1 is a problem for the Cartesian.
  - God both creates and preserves the universe.
  - No one moment in any way necessitates the next.
- Bodies are passive, and thus can exert no force on each other.
  - When I see one ball strike another, my eyes … seem to tell me, that the one is truly the cause of the motion it impresses on the other… . But when I consult my reason I clearly see that since bodies cannot move themselves, and since their motor force is but the will of God that conserves them successively in different places, they cannot communicate a power they do not have and could not communicate even if it were in their possession. For the mind will never conceive that one body, a purely passive substance, can in any way whatsoever transmit to another body the power transporting it. (Malebranche, *The Search for Truth and Elucidations of the Search for Truth*, p 660).
- Communication of motion among substances is thus impossible.
- Bodies can do nothing but respond to the will of an active substance.

The Occasionalist Solution

- Whenever a body is affected, there must be an agent to manage that interaction.
- Occasionalism solves the problems with CI1-CI3.
  - In the case of body-mind events, CI2, God intervenes to create a mental events whenever the body is affected.
  - God always does the moving.
- Some people read Descartes as an occasionalist.
- Leibniz sternly rejects the occasionalist's recourse to appeals to God to guide every interaction.
  - "In solving problems it is not sufficient to make use of the general cause and to invoke what is called a *Deus ex machina*. For when one does that without giving any other explanation derived from the order of secondary causes, it is, properly speaking, having recourse to a miracle" (*New System of Nature*, AW 273a).

Leibniz Against Transeunt Causation

- Leibniz agrees that individual substances can not affect each other.
  - Monads are independent.
  - “Nothing ever enters into our mind naturally from the outside; and we have a bad habit of thinking of our soul as if it received certain species as messengers and as if it has doors and windows...The mind always expresses all its future thoughts and already thinks confusedly about everything it will ever think about distinctly” (DM 26, AW 240b).
- The isolation of each monad is essential to their character, to their completeness.
  - “There is also no way of explaining how a monad can be altered or changed internally by some other creature, since one cannot transpose anything in it, nor can one conceive of any internal motion that can be excited, directed, augmented, or diminished within it, as can be done in composites, where there can be change among the parts. The monads have no windows through which something can enter and leave” (M 7, AW 275b)
- Still there is internal, or immanent, causation, within the monad.

Revenge of the Problem of Interaction

- The denial of the real existence of bodies entails that C1-C3 are all moot.
- Leibniz holds on to CI4, arguing that while there is no transeunt causation, there is internal, or immanent, causation.
- Immanent causation is guided by the will.
- Leibniz's problem of interaction is to explain why, given the laws governing the series of perceptions and representations in the monad is there a parallel series in the appearances of the monad (i.e. the body) which are governed by strict physical laws.
- He must explain why there appear to be transeunt, efficient-causal interactions when there are only immanent, final-causal sequences of perceptions.

Leibniz and Pre-Established Harmony

See *New System of Nature*, 273a-b

- "The soul follows its own laws and the body also follows its own; and they agree in virtue of the harmony pre-established between all substances, since they are all representations of a single universe" (M78, AW 282a).
- God puts the universe in motion in such a way that the mind and body seem to affect each other, and such that monads seem to affect each other.
- But, the truth is that the appearance of transeunt causation is an illusion.
- Immanent causation, the relations among perceptions of a monad, are not impugned, here.
- But the relations among monads are just the effects of the pre-established harmony.
- The appearance of transeunt causation is, as it was for Spinoza, an illusion.
- Pre-established harmony undermines the freedom of the will, by positing a determined sequence of events, it also makes that freedom easier to describe, since interactions among bodies need not be taken as governed by external laws.

Leibniz on Descartes's Error

- Descartes had argued that it would violate the laws of physics for souls to add motion into the universe that was not already accounted for by the laws.
- But, Descartes also thought that it would not violate the laws for a soul to change the direction of motion of a body.
- Descartes believed correctly that quantity of motion (momentum) was conserved in a physical interaction.
  - Maybe; he believed that motion (at least) was conserved.
  - In that, he anticipated Newton's laws of motion.
- Descartes clearly misinterpreted momentum as a scalar quantity, ignoring its vector (or directional) qualities, and leaving open the option for a soul to interact with bodies without violating physical laws.
- Leibniz believes that Descartes would have adopted his view of pre-established harmony, if he had seen the error in his physics.
  - "Descartes recognized that souls cannot impart a force to bodies because there is always the same quantity of force in matter. However, he thought that the soul could change the direction of bodies. But that is because the law of nature, which also affirms the conservation of the same total direction in matter, was not known at the time. If he had known it, he would have hit upon my system of pre-established harmony..." (M80, AW 282b).

Theodicy

1. God is omnipotent and omniscient and benevolent and the free creator of the world.

2. Things could have been otherwise—i.e., there are other possible worlds.

3. If this world is not the best of all possible worlds, then at least one of the following must be the case:

- 3a. God was not powerful enough to bring about a better world; or
- 3b. God did not know how this world would develop after his creation of it; or
- 3c. God did not wish this world to be the best; or
- 3d. God did not create the world.

4. 3a-3d all contradict 1.

5. Therefore, this world is the best of all possible worlds.

What is a Best World?

- We might wonder how worlds get ranked in order of goodness, what the criteria of goodness are.
- Spinoza worried about our anthropocentric projections, especially of the nature of goodness, onto God.
- Leibniz takes the universality of mathematics as paradigmatic, using simplicity and richness as criteria.
- “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, as might be a line in geometry whose construction is easy and whose properties and effects are extremely remarkable and widespread” (D6, AW 227a-b).

The Voltaire Objection

we can imagine better possible worlds

- We might agree with Spinoza in thinking that everything non-contradictory is possible.
- No obvious contradiction arises from the concept of a world just like this one but with, say, less famine and war.
- Thus, there seem to be other possible worlds better than this one.
- Against Modal Realism
  - Spinoza thought that everything non-contradictory is possible.
  - David Lewis, in the 20th Century argued for modal realism: all possible worlds exist.
  - But, Leibniz insists that the possibility of some event alone does not entail its compossibility with other events.
  - Thus, alternative worlds appear possible, but only because we are seeing them incompletely.

Possibility and Compossibility

- This world is the result of God's maximizing various factors which are in tension, even if the tension is not apparent.
- "Just as the same city viewed from different directions appears entirely different and, as it were, multiplied perspectively, in just the same way it happens that, because of the infinite multitude of simple substances, there are, as it were, just as many different universes, which are, nevertheless, only perspectives on a single one, corresponding to the different points of view of each monad... And this 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" (M58, AW 280b).
- Leibniz's view recalls Descartes's claim that the perfection of the whole is not apparent from the view of the finite individual.
  - A world without disasters would be a world with irregular laws, in which science and engineering would be impossible.
  - A world without sin would be a worse world, even if it does not appear to be worse.

Two Accounts of the Illusion

- Leibniz is arguing that the imperfections we see are illusory.
- One typical way to defend the compatibility of evil or error with God's goodness is to value the freedom of the will over goodness.
  - If error is the result of free choice, then the world could only be improved if free will were eliminated.
  - Leibniz does not pursue this route.
- Leibniz defends the creation of our error-filled world by claiming that it is the best alignment of compossibles.
- Leibniz is thus presenting a logical claim, rather than a moral one.

On Descartes's Ontological Argument

- The problem of knowing whether possibilities are compossible explains Leibniz's criticism of Descartes's ontological argument for the existence of God.
- Leibniz complains that Descartes's argument only shows that the concept of God contains existence, if God exists.
- The argument omits a defense of the initial instantiation of the concept, of the claim that the perfections are compossible.
  - "But since we often think of impossible chimeras - for example of the highest degree of speed, of the greatest number, of the intersection of the conchoid with its base of rule - this reasoning is insufficient... There are true and false ideas, depending upon whether the thing in question is possible or not. And it is only when we are certain of its possibility that we can boast of having an idea of the thing" (D23, AW 239a).
- Leibniz argues that perfections are compossible since they are simples, and all simples are compossible.
- See "That a Most Perfect Being Exists."

Leibniz's Cosmological Argument

- "There must be a *sufficient reason* in *contingent truths*, or *truths of fact*, that is, in the series of things distributed throughout the universe of creatures, where the resolution into particular reasons could proceed into unlimited detail...And since all of this *detail* involves nothing but other prior and or more detailed contingents, each of which needs a similar analysis in order to give its reason...It must be the case that the sufficient or ultimate reason is outside the sequence or *series* of this multiplicity of contingencies, however infinite it may be...The ultimate reason of things must be in a necessary substance in which the diversity of changes is only eminent, as in it source. This is what we call *God*"(M336-8, AW 278b).
- From the mere existence of this world, and the principle of sufficient reason, Leibniz thus derives the standard infinite characteristics of God.
  - God, according to Leibniz, must have an infinite understanding, in order to survey all possible worlds.
  - God must have an infinite will which allows him to choose among all possible worlds.
  - And, God must have infinite power to create this world.
- See *Theodicy*, §7, for more on these derivations.