Leibniz - The Principle of Sufficient Reason

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Perceptions in the Simple Substance

- Leibniz asserts that variability in the simple substance (monads) comes from the fact that it can have perceptions.

- This is how he explains thought at the most basic level; he rejects the idea that thought can be explained in terms of moving parts, like other phenomena.

- These are our sensory perceptions, which we retain in the form of “sense memory”, the same way that animals do.

- Leibniz calls them truths of fact.
Reasoning vs. Fact

- What separates us from animals is our *mind*, or our capacity to *reason*, which gives us knowledge of “eternal and necessary truths” (M 29).
- He calls these “truths of reasoning”, as opposed to those of fact.
- “The truths of reasoning are necessary and their opposite is impossible. The truths of facts are contingent, and their opposite is possible.” (M 33)
- Reasoning - “2 + 3 = 5.”
- Fact - “There is snow on the ground.”
- Leibniz will show how both are necessarily true.
Two Great Principles

- There are two principles we use to determine truth.
- **Principle of Contradiction**: If something involves a contradiction, it is false. If something contradicts the false, it is true.
- “2 + 3 = 6” contains a contradiction, “2 + 3 = 5” contradicts that and does not contain a contradiction in itself.
- **Principle of Sufficient Reason**: Nothing can be true without a sufficient reason for it to be true and not false.
- We must find a cause (sufficient reason) for the truth to be true.
Necessary Truths

- These reasons and contradictions are often not readily apparent, we must analyze and find them.
- “When a truth is necessary, its reason can be found by analysis, resoling it into simpler ideas and simpler truths until we reach the primitives” (M 33).
- For truths of reasoning, the analysis is finite.
- When we analyze “2 + 3 = 6” to mean “5 = 6”, the contradiction is apparent.
- This is how we arrive at mathematical and logical truths.
Truths of Fact

”But there must also be a sufficient reason in contingent truths, or truths of fact, that is...where the resolution into particular reasons could proceed into unlimited detail because of the division of bodies into infinity” (M 36).

”There is snow on the ground” is true because we can give a sufficient reason for the presence of snow on the ground, but we are then compelled to give a sufficient reason for that, and so on into infinite analysis...
God is the Sufficient Reason

“And this is why the ultimate reason of things must be in a necessary substance in which the diversity of changes is only eminent, as in its source. This is what we call God” (M 38).

This substance (God) is the source of everything; there is nothing outside of it and it is absolutely perfect, because it contains all possible reality.

All things are derived from it, and get their limited perfections from it.

An absolutely perfect being would not act without sufficient reason, so there is a sufficient reason for the existence of things, and truths of fact.
Questions

- What do we think of this? Is this a valid account of truth?
- Is this a convincing argument for the existence of God? Could we nowadays substitute God for the Big Bang?
- How does this affect free will/determinism?