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.
- <u>Principle of Contradiction</u>: 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.
- <u>Principle of Sufficient Reason</u>: 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?