Philosophy 203: History of Modern Western Philosophy Hamilton College
Spring 2014 Russell Marcus

Class #11 - Theodicy, Necessity, and Freedom
Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics* §25-§37; from *Theodicy* 405-417

0. Subliminal Advertising; the best of all possible worlds

I. Theodicy

Leibniz holds, perhaps most famously, that this world is the best of all possible worlds.
He defends this claim in his *Theodicy*, which is one of only two books that Leibniz published in his lifetime.
(The other was his extended commentary on Locke's work, *New Essays on the Human Understanding*.)
The claim about our world being the best of all possible worlds may give us insight into Leibniz's subtle claims about contingency and freedom.
In the *Monadology*, Leibniz argues for this conclusion from one of his two basic principles, the principle of sufficient reason.

T1. God is omnipotent and omniscient and benevolent and the free creator of the world.
T2. Things could have been otherwise—i.e., there are other possible worlds.
T3. If this world is not the best of all possible worlds, then at least one of the following must be the case:
T3a. God was not powerful enough to bring about a better world; or
T3b. God did not know how this world would develop after his creation of it; or
T3c. God did not wish this world to be the best; or
T3d. God did not create the world.
T4. 3a-3d all contradict 1.
T5. Therefore, this world is the best of all possible worlds (adadpted from M53, AW 280a et seq.).

Note that God is, according to Leibniz, obligated to create the best world possible as a requirement of divine benevolence.
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).

Just as he derided Leibniz's claims about monads, Voltaire lampooned Leibniz's claim T5 in *Candide*, and elsewhere, including his Poem on the Lisbon Disaster.
In 1755, an earthquake destroyed Lisbon, killing probably over 100,000 people.
(The population of Lisbon was only 230,000 at the time.)
In *Candide*, Dr. Pangloss espouses Leibniz's optimism despite all evidence to the contrary.
Leibniz's claim, "Whatever is, is good," seemed an embarassment to Voltaire.
Though Leibniz's claim does seem false, even absurd, sneering is not an argument.

The obvious problem with Leibniz's claim is that 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 like this one but with less famine and war.
Thus, there seem to be other possible worlds better than this one.

II. Possibility and Compossibility

In response to the criticism that other possible worlds are better than ours, Leibniz insists that the possibility of an event alone does not entail its compossibility with other events.
Alternative worlds appear possible, but only because we are seeing them incompletely.
If we saw the full set of consequences of even a single change, Leibniz argues, we would find either a contradiction or a worse world, overall.
It looks to us as if the world which is just the same as it is, except that Hamilton College is located on a small Caribbean island with fruited mango trees and sea breezes on campus all year around, is possible.
But, Leibniz argues, to make even one change in the world entails changing other factors in that world.
What seems possible in itself may not be compossible with other changes that moving Hamilton would entail.

We can see the problem of compossibility when we recall Leibniz's complete-concept view of the monad.
I could not live in the Caribbean-Hamilton world.
My complete concept includes living in Clinton, not in the Caribbean.
One could in principle, according to Leibniz, know that I live in Clinton just by analyzing my concept.
If Hamilton were located in the Caribbean, none of us would be members of its community.
There would be people perhaps somewhat like us attending and teaching at that school.
We do not know what other properties of those people would have to be different from us in order to construct a system of compossibilities.
We could call the people in the Caribbean-Hamilton world our counterparts, but they would not be us.

> These worlds are all here, that is, in ideas. I will show you some, wherein shall be found, not absolutely the same Sextus as you have seen (that is not possible, he carries with him always that which he shall be) but several Sextuses resembling him, possessing all that you know already of the true Sextus, but not all that is already in him imperceptibly, nor in consequence all that shall yet happen to him. You will find in one world a very happy and noble Sextus, in another a Sextus content with a mediocre state, a Sextus, indeed, of every kind and endless diversity of forms (Theodicy, ~416).

Note the subtlety of Leibniz's position, here.
There are other Sextuses, in the other possible worlds, but they are not him.

The controversy over whether we exist in other possible worlds, or whether only our counterparts exist in other worlds, continues to be a hot topic in contemporary modal metaphysics.
Saul Kripke, in *Naming and Necessity*, argued that we stipulate other possible worlds, keeping as much as we like the same across worlds.
This claim is related to his assertion that names are rigid designators, that they refer to the same thing across all possible worlds.
According to Kripke, we exist in other possible worlds.
In contrast, David Lewis defended counterpart theory, the claim that I am not the same across all possible worlds.

Any difference in another world entails that my counterpart is not myself.
According to counterpart theory, there are counterpart relations among me and all my dopplegangers in other possible worlds.
Exploring the nature of other possible worlds involves specifying, as far as possible, those counterpart relations.
We might identify me with the set of my counterparts across all possible worlds, but that would be to make me a mathematical object (a set), rather than a person!
Today, we use the term Kripkean semantics to refer to theories of possible worlds with transworld identity in which the same object can exist in more than one world.
We use the term counterpart theory to refer to theories of possible worlds with merely transworld counterpart relations, following Lewis and Leibniz.

Here, for you logicians, are the axioms of counterpart theory, with the given translation key:

Wx: x is a world
Ixy: x is in world y
Ax: x is actual (exists in the actual world)
Cxy x is a counterpart of y

C1. $(\forall x)(\forall y)(Ixy \supset Wy)$	worlds are the containers of objects
C2. $(\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall z)[(Ixy \bullet Ixz) \supset y=z]$	individuals can only exist in one world
C3. $(\forall x)(\forall y)[Cxy \supset (\exists z)Ixz]$	
C4. $(\forall x)(\forall y)[Cxy \supset (\exists z)Iyz]$	all counterparts exist in worlds
C5. $(\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall z)[(Ixy \bullet Izy \bullet Cxz) \supset x=z]$	there are no distinct counterparts in any given world
C6. $(\forall x)(\forall y)(Ixy \supset Cxx)$	a thing is the counterpart of itself
C7. $(\exists x)[Wx \bullet (\forall y)(Iyx \equiv Ay)]$	there is a world which contains all and only actual things
C8. $(\exists x)Ax$	the actual world exists

Let's put aside counterpart theory and return to Leibniz's problem of compossibility, of arguing that this world, despite its flaws, is really the maximization of compossible events.
According to Leibniz, 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, then, recalls Descartes's claim, in the Fourth Meditation, that the perfection of the whole is not apparent from the view of the finite individual.
Leibniz believes that 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.

III. Leibniz's Arguments for the Existence of God

The problem of knowing whether possibilities are compossible explains Leibniz's criticism of Descartes's ontological argument for the existence of God.
We have been taking Leibniz's claim for the existence of God as axiomatic.
In fact, Leibniz presents an improved version of the ontological argument.
Leibniz complains that Descartes's argument only shows that the concept of God contains existence, if God exists.
Descartes's argument omits a defense of the initial instantiation of the concept.

> 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).

It remains for the defender of the ontological argument to show that it is possible for God to exist, that the perfections are compossible.
Leibniz argues that perfections are compossible since they are simples, and all simples are compossible.
You can find a more detailed analysis of Descartes's argument, and Leibniz's improvement of the argument, in an essay called, "That a Most Perfect Being Exists."

Leibniz also presents a cosmological, or causal argument, for the existence of God.

> 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.

IV. Contingent and Necessary Truths

We were looking at Leibniz's claim that this is the best of all possible worlds in order to gain insight into Leibniz's claims about contingency and freedom.
Where Spinoza thought that everything that was possible was actual, Leibniz thinks that there are other possible worlds which are non-actual.
Ordinarily, and for Leibniz, we think of alternate worlds as descriptions of paths not taken, of choices we have not chosen.

Thus, the questions surrounding possible worlds are linked to questions surrounding human freedom.
If there are non-actual possible worlds, they are naturally seen as the result of our freedom to choose this one, rather than another.
The existence of this world, as against other possible worlds, is contingent on our free choice.
Indeed, Leibniz's work is motivated in large part by a rejection of Spinozan necessitarianism, the claim that every decision is determined, since God instantiates every possibility.
Leibniz believes that, for some actions, I could have done otherwise.
Leibniz's account of freedom is not libertarian, like Descartes's.
As we have seen, Leibniz holds, as a basic and fundamental principle, that nothing happens without sufficient reason (PSR).
PSR, combined with God's omniscience, entails that God has foreknowledge of all of our actions.
Further, Leibniz believes that any truth can be discovered by analyzing the complete concept of a substance into its component parts.
By analysis, we will either find a given predicate inside the original concept, or find a contradiction arising from that predication.
Either a property is true of a substance or it is not, both in the future and in the past.
The status of any claim can be evaluated by analyzing the concept of any monad at any time.
There seems to be no room for free choice, for denying that one can act other than one does, that the world can be other than what it is.
Leibniz's account of freedom has to be compatible with his determinism.
The claim that free will and determinism are compatible is puzzling.

We can see three hints at room for a resolution of this conundrum in Leibniz's discussions of contingency and necessity.
First, while Leibniz states that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds, he does accept that such other worlds are possible.
We can look at those possibilities, and on what they depend, more carefully for an account of contingency.
Second, Leibniz claims that contingent claims can by discovered only by infinite analysis, while necessary truths are discoverable by finite analysis.
Third, Leibniz distinguishes between certain truths and necessary ones.

> Everyone grants that future contingents are certain, since God foresees them, but we do not concede that they are necessary on that account (D13, AW 230b).

By exploring these three hints, we can arrive at a characterization of contingency and freedom to see how Leibniz accommodates this view with the necessitarian elements of his work.

Leibniz's claim that there are other possible worlds arises directly from his observation of the phenomenology of free will.
The problem with the phenomenology of free will is that we do not know whether it is an illusion.
The existence of an omniscient God seems to debar any future that was not already, in a sense, settled.
Further, the laws of physics seem, at least on the observable level, to be deterministic.
So, Leibniz's weakest claim about other possibilities, and our freedom to create them, is that they are merely chimerical.
The fact that Leibniz embraces talk about possible worlds does not entail that such talk does not conflict with other of his claims.
In particular, as we have seen, an account of contingency is likely to conflict with Leibniz's complete-world view of substance.

Our second hint is that Leibniz makes a distinction between those truths which require infinite analysis and those which require only finite analysis.
The topics of analysis and conceptual containment are, like the nature of possible worlds, important in contemporary philosophy, and will continue to be relevant through this course.
In a finite analysis, we can unpack a complex concept until we reach what Leibniz calls an identity statement.

$3^2 = \sqrt{81}$
$3 \times 3 = 9$
$3 \times 3 = 3 \times 3$

We start with a desire to show that two terms which are not identical refer to equal quantities.
We transform the first row into the second by noticing that $\sqrt{81} = 9$ (itself an identity worth proving).
We transform the second row into the third by noticing that $9 = 3 \times 3$ (another identity).
Since the terms on each side in the last row are identical, we have shown the original statement necessary.
Later philosophers call such claims analytic truths.
Similarly, given a false statement, we can arrive at a contradiction by analysis.
Leibniz thinks that we can one use the same process of analysis to determine the truth of other statements, including scientific claims.

According to the doctrine of conceptual containment, the truth of R entails that my concept contains, in some way, my having two children.

R Russell has two children.

Nevertheless, there are possible worlds in which I don't have two children.
Correspondingly, when we analyze the concept 'Russell', we will not be able to unpack the claim that I have two children.
God could do so, but we can not.

> The one whose contrary implies a contradiction is absolutely necessary; this deduction occurs in the eternal truths, for example, the truths of geometry. The other is necessary only *ex hypothesi* and, so to speak, accidentally, but it is contingent in itself, since its contrary does not imply a contradiction. And this connection is based not purely on ideas and God's simple understanding, but on his free decrees and on the sequence of the universe (D13, AW 231a).

So, Leibniz claims, it is certain that I have two children; God can see that fact.
It is not necessary that I have two children, since this fact depends on the free choices of my wife and me.

Leibniz illustrates his distinction between certainty and necessity, our third hint, referring to Julius Caesar.

> If someone were able to carry out the whole demonstration by virtues of which he could prove this connection between the subject, Caesar, and the predicate, his successful undertaking, he in fact be showing that Caesar's future dictatorship is grounded in his notion or nature, that there is a reason why he crossed the Rubicon rather than stopped at it and why he won rather than lost at Pharsalus and that it was reasonable, and consequently certain, that this should happen. But this would not show that it was necessary in itself nor that the contrary implies a contradiction... For it will be found that the demonstration of this predicate of Caesar is not as absolute as those of

> numbers or of geometry, but that it supposes the sequence of things that God has freely chosen, a sequence based on God's first free decree always to do what is most perfect and on God's decree with respect to human nature, following out of the first decree, that man will always do (although freely) that which appears to be best. But every truth based on these kinds of decrees is contingent, even though it is certain; for these decrees do not change the possibility of things...it is not its impossibility but its imperfection which causes it to be rejected. And nothing is necessary whose contrary is possible (D13, AW 231b).

Necessary events will have possible contraries.
But, alternative possibilities need not be compossible with other alternatives.
They may be possible only in themselves, not in respect to the broader world.

I am not going to defend Leibniz's distinction between necessity and certainty, which he also calls the distinction between truths of reason and truths of fact.
If my future actions are certain, my free will is denigrated, even if Leibniz calls those actions contingent.
Leibniz may have provided us only a semantic difference, not a real difference.
Putting that complaint aside, let's see how Leibniz's distinction manifests his resultant theory of freedom.

V. Freedom

For freedom, Leibniz is most concerned to establish a theory of will on which God's will is free.
The freedom of God's will is challenged by the claim that God's will is constrained to choose the best.
God's will appears to be determined.

Leibniz's solution is to say that while God's is constrained to choose the best, that choice is still free.
There is nothing in the nature of any possible world that constrains God to create it.
All worlds are contingent, and remain to be brought into existence by God.
Only God could perform the infinite analysis which would yield knowledge of which world is best.

Elsewhere Leibniz argues for what is called the doctrine of striving possibles.
Each possible entity strives for existence against other possible entities.

> Since something rather than nothing exists, there is a certain urge for existence or (so to speak) a straining toward existence in possible things or in possibility or essence itself; in a word, essence in and of itself strives for existence. Furthermore, it follows from this that all possibles, that is, everything that expresses essence or possible reality, strive with equal right for existence in proportion to the amount of essence or reality or the degree of perfection they contain, for perfection is nothing but the amount of essence. 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 ("On the Ultimate Origination of Things").

The actual world is the result of the resolution of the struggle among possibles.
In that struggle contains a hint of freedom, one that will allow us to assimilate the accounts of God's freedom and human freedom.

For human freedom, recall that one of the motivating factors in positing the existence of monads was to capture mental phenomena; bodies can not think.
Leibniz takes active, thinking things as elemental.
The life of the monad consists of the unfolding of its perceptions.
The activity of a monad corresponds to the distinctness of its perceptions.
Some perceptions are unconscious, some perceptions are conscious apperceptions, some perceptions are clear and distinct.
All activity is self-determined, according to laws of final causes; Leibniz denies any transeunt causation.
Leibniz calls the guiding principles of the unfolding of a monad's perceptions appetition.

> The action of the internal principle which brings about the change or passage from one perception to another can be called *appetition*; it is true that the appetite cannot always completely reach the whole perception toward which it tends, but it always obtains something of it, and reaches new perceptions (D15, AW 276b).

As the monads of persons have both conscious experience (distinct perception) and memory, we apperceive our appetition.

Let's say that I desire a milkshake.
My desire for that milkshake is reasonably attributable to some prior beliefs and desires along with some account of my current experiences and surroundings.
An account on which all of those factors are beyond my control is not implausible.
But notice, the more ignorant we are of those factors, the more we take them to be unconscious or hidden, the more likely we are to see our desire for the milkshake as free.
Once we analyze our beliefs, desires and surroundings, we are more likely to see ourselves as constrained.
Consider the strength of subliminal advertising.
We might think that we are freely choosing to have a beverage, though that thought is actually the result of predictable subconscious trains of thought.
So, Leibniz's account of freedom on which our actions are determined (knowable in advance) and yet free, is not incompatible with common sense, in such cases.

Libertarians (in the philosophical sense - defenders of freedom of the will) are more concerned to defend the freedom of our decision to acquire and drink, or not, the milkshake.
Leibniz's account of free will is harder for a libertarian to accept.
For Leibniz, human freedom, like God's freedom, is restricted.
God understands what is best, and freely chooses it; what is possible is independent of God's will, but not his understanding.
Our freedom, like God's, is the name we give to our faculty for striving, for unfolding the internal principles of our essence.
We strive for future states, even if they are states of pain and unhappiness, as these are preferable to the alternative, which is non-existence.
Without defending Leibniz, I will just mention that contemporary discussions of free will are often less concerned with the metaphysical problem.
Most philosophers agree that the arguments for metaphysical determinism are strong.
The focus of contemporary research is mainly on how to rectify determinism with our beliefs about moral responsibility.
Many people hold what is called compatibilist views: we can have free will, in a sense, and moral responsibility in a determined universe.
We will return to free will, and discuss compatibilism, when we get to Hume.