

# Chapter 6

## Leibniz

### 6.1 Introduction



Figure 6.1: Leibniz

#### 6.1.1 Life and work

- Leibniz: 1646 - 1716 – Germany
- One of the last person who knew everything there was to know at his time in every domain of science and philosophy
- Discovered infinitesimal calculus independently of Newton
- Works:
  - *Theodicy* – the sole book he published during his lifetime

- *Discourse on Metaphysics* – written early in life
- *New Essays on Understanding* – answer to Locke's *Essays on Understanding*
- *Monadology* – written late in life
- Important figure of the academic society of his time
- Also a diplomat and an historian during his lifetime

### 6.1.2 Leibniz' philosophy – Basic Orientations

**Leibniz is a man of compromise** – Concerning philosophy, his main aims are:

1. To produce a philosophy which Descartes is reconciled with the scholastic tradition.
2. To develop a form of rationalism that answers the challenge of the empiricists (Locke)

**Leibniz is a man of religion** – Religion, and the idea that an all perfect God created the best world possible comes first.

Doctrines of metaphysics and epistemology should serve the purpose of explaining that this is true, despite the appearances of imperfections and of evil in the world. In other words, the horizon of Leibniz' metaphysics and epistemology is to produce a *theodicy*. (contrast this with the horizons of Descartes' and Spinoza' philosophies, i.e. to provide the new science with a secured foundation, and to provide the means of the most happy life, respectively).

**Leibniz and the best possible world :**

Leibniz' worldview is something along the following lines: The world as it exists is contingent. It could have been otherwise. That said, there is a sufficient reason which explains why everything is the way it is. Such a sufficient reason is understood by God. God surveyed all the possible worlds in their minute details. On the basis of his knowledge of the good, he chose to actualize the best possible world. This is the world in which we live.

—→ *If we take seriously the idea that God is omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent, then this world must be the best possible.*

## 6.2 Leibniz's Original Version of Rationalism

As noted before, the best way to understand Leibniz' version of rationalism is in understanding that Leibniz takes the challenge of the empiricist account seriously. Leibniz will thus recognize the importance of the senses for our knowledge, but will still maintains that the senses alone cannot explain all knowledge.

### 6.2.1 Readings and Study questions

- Readings: *New Essays*, Preface, beginning up to p. 376, end of first column (first edition), to p. 424, top of second column (second edition)
- Study questions:
  1. What kind of thinking do humans share with animals? What kind of thinking and knowledge does distinguish humans from animals?
  2. Why does Leibniz think that our knowledge of necessary truth does not rely on the senses only? What is the other basis of our knowledge of necessary truths? To what extent does it rely on the senses?

### 6.2.2 Perceptions, Memory, and Induction

Concerning how they gain knowledge, men behave like animals in three quarters of their actions, that is, every time they make inductions on the sole basis of perception and memory, two faculties we share with animals.

- Animals have sense-perception just as we do. If anything, animals' senses are often more powerful tool than humans.
- Memory is basically the same in both animals and humans.
- In both animals and humans: induction to a general rule from the memory of the conjunction of two perceptions (stick – pain)

- Hence, every time we behave on the sole basis of such rules, obtained by induction from empirical observation, we behave like animals.
- Note in passing that this is a charge against Descartes' view that the animals are just machines with no mental lives.
- The problem with induction is that it is only a "shadow of reasoning": the generalizations drawn by induction can turn out to be false. They rely on the observation of similarities in the appearances, not on the understanding of the causes.

Example: 'The sun rises every 24 hours on Earth' is an empirical generalization which turns out to be false. Only the understanding of astronomy can allow us to understand why it is (approximately) true in our climates, but false in the North Pole.

—→ *This idea that empirical knowledge gained through memory and inductive reasoning is something we share with the animals can be read as a charge against the empiricists: if it is true that inductive reasoning is the sole source of knowledge for humans, then we are no better than animals.*

—→ *Leibniz is one of the only rationalists who developed a fully articulated criticism of the empiricist view: according to Leibniz, abstraction, induction and combination of ideas from our perceptions are not enough to give an account of all human cognitive abilities.*

### 6.2.3 Eternal and Necessary Truths (Humans Only)

Beyond empirical knowledge, humans are capable of grasping eternal and necessary truths.

- Leibniz' argument for such a claim is simple:
  - If we can know something which cannot be based on the senses, then there is another source of knowledge
  - We can something that the senses cannot provide: universal and necessary truths:

Inductive reasoning can *never* allow us to draw a universal and necessary law. It only allows us to draw contingent generalizations

- Hence, there must be another source. If not the senses, then it is reason and innate ideas.

- Among the necessary et eternal truths, one counts:
  - the truths of mathematics and logic of course
  - but also: some truths in metaphysics, morals, theology and jurisprudence are of this kind

—→ *The senses are not the sole source of knowledge, because otherwise we would not be able to know any necessary or universal truth*

### 6.2.4 The Respective Roles of Reason and the Senses

Where does the knowledge of eternal truths come from? such knowledge is *innate*. But Leibniz warns us: “we must not imagine that we can read these eternal laws of reason in the soul from an open book”. Innate knowledge is implicit knowledge that can become actual under certain conditions. In particular, the senses function as both *necessary triggers* and *verification devices* that are crucial for the actualization of innate knowledge.

- For Descartes, implicit knowledge can be actualized by using your reason with the proper method (forget about the needs and requests of your body, turn your full attention to your mind and what is in there). The senses do not play any significant role in the discovery of clear and distinct ideas
- For Leibniz, we may actualize our innate ideas through sense experience – senses might even be necessary in order to thought to occur. However, sense experience is not enough: it is just a trigger.

Leibniz has a beautiful metaphor to explain this: our mind is not a blank slate, nor is it a pre-made sculpture. Our mind is like a piece of marble, the veins of which correspond to our innate ideas (this is in the *New essays concerning human understanding* – an answer to Locke). The sculptor discovers and has to follow the veins of the marble when he works on a piece of art. The student also discovers and has the contours of his ideas when he works to gain knowledge.

—→ *Leibniz thus manages to develop a compromised view between empiricism and radical rationalism. The senses play an important role even in our knowledge of eternal and necessary truths. That said, while they play an important role in all kinds of knowledge, they are not the sole source when it comes to knowledge of necessary truths.*

### 6.2.5 Conclusion on Leibniz' Rationalism

Leibniz' version of rationalism has an important original aspect which is that he takes seriously the challenge of the empiricists and design a proper answer to it.

- He does not deny that some of our knowledge comes from experience. Nor does he deny that sense perception may have something to do with us discovering necessary and eternal truths. It may well be the case that the way in which you learned about the truths of mathematics and the truths of logic is through your senses.

- From this, however, it does not follow that mathematical and logical truths do not have a special status. Even if we may need the senses to trigger our grasping of such truths, such truths remains independent of experience, necessary and eternal.

## 6.3 Leibniz' Theodicy

### 6.3.1 Readings and Study Questions

- Readings: *Discourse on Metaphysics* (p.184 (1st edition) / 224 (2nd edition)) paragraphs 1-7
- Study questions:
  1. What are Leibniz' arguments for the existence of God? Which of his proofs are original in comparison to Descartes' and Spinoza's? How so?
  2. Are the truths of mathematics and morals the results of God's decree according to Leibniz? What argument does he provide in support of his view?
  3. How does the nature of God imply that we must be entirely satisfied by his Creation, according to Leibniz?
  4. What does Leibniz understand by "best possible" when he claims that God has created the best possible world? Does he imply by this that everything in the world is wonderful?

### 6.3.2 God's existence

#### Proofs of God's existence

1. Cosmological Argument 1: God as the necessary and sufficient cause of contingent effects (what actually exists)

Truths of facts are contingents, that is, non necessary. The infinite series of non-necessary causes and effect must find a first, necessary cause: God.

2. Cosmological Argument 2: God as the source of the essences / possibles / eternal truths.

- Essences = set of the possibilities

- Existences = set of the actual realities

Anything that is real is possible beforehand: every thing that exist, existed first in the realm of possibles. However, not every possible get realized. The set of possibles is far larger than the set of realities.

Now, the possibilities, even if not real in the usual sense, have some kind of reality. What Leibniz says is then that God is the necessary source of the reality of the possibilities.

God possess in his understanding the entire realm of possible essences.

This is a new version of the cosmological argument: the reality of the possibles (essences) must not be based on anything only possible, or we find a regression ad infinitum again. Only a being *whose essence implies its existence, or in other words, whose sole possibility implies its actuality* can be the base of the reality of possibles.

3. Ontological Argument: Leibniz provides a modal version of the ontological argument

1. An all perfect infinite being is such that its possibility implies its actuality (that is to say, 'if God is possible, then God is')

2. It is possible that an all perfect infinite being exists

3. Hence, God exists

—→ *In short, if a necessary being is possible, then this being necessarily exist actually.*

The reason for such a modified ontological argument is that Leibniz had a worry concerning Descartes' ontological argument. Remember that Descartes argued that we have a clear and distinct idea of God, in which God's definition implies its very existence. Leibniz very early raised the objection against Descartes' argument that our idea of God could be incoherent. It so happens that we have ideas but do not realize that they are problematic. It could be well the case for the idea of God. Leibniz is not convinced that our ideas are so transparent. So, if we want the ontological argument to work, we have to make sure that our idea of God is not incoherent.

In other words, before the ontological argument can be put into work, it must shown that God is possible, that is, that the idea of God does not imply contradiction.

Leibniz holds here that the ideas of perfect knowledge and perfect power are consistent with one another. These constitute the idea of God, which thus is coherent. Since the idea of God is coherent, then the existence of God is possible. But since the idea of God is the idea of a necessary being, then its possibility entails its existence.

### God's nature

Follows the derivation of the nature of God. God is:

- unique
- unlimited
- absolute and infinitely perfect
- contains the entire realm of possibles

In the *Theodicy*, par. 7, Leibniz develops his argument:

- because God must have been able to grasp the entire realm of possibles, he has understanding
- because God must have chosen which possible world was to be actual, he has will
- because God was able to actualize such a world, he has power
- because the entire realm of possibles is infinite, God's understanding, will and power are infinite



- because everything is connected together, we need to postulate only one God

—→ *That God is all perfect is a crucial pillar of Leibniz' philosophy. From there comes the need of a theodicy: a defense of God's perfection in the view of the appearances of evil in the world.*

### 6.3.3 Theodicy – our world as the best possible world

According to Leibniz, that we live in the best possible world derives from the analysis of God's nature, that is, from God's being all the perfections unified in one.

**That God is all perfect implies that he does everything perfectly, even morally**

- **Leibniz' starting point:** "God is an absolutely perfect being"
- **Consequence:** If God possess perfect knowledge and perfect power, that is if he is both omniscient and omnipotent, then:

God acts in the most perfect manner – not only metaphysically but also morally

What does this mean?

- Is Leibniz claiming that God's action should conform our human (too human?) moral values? – this seems unacceptable
- Or does Leibniz refer to absolute moral values – which human's moral action as well God's should follow? – but then is he saying that there exists some truths which exists beyond the absolute power of God?

**Leibniz: God follows the truth and the good**

- **The opposite view:** God does not depend on what is good and what is true. He decides on all those things. He is not "limited" by morals and sciences.
- **Leibniz' Objections:**
  - we can discover the goodness and truth of the creation
  - the opposite view is dangerous because:

1. it destroy the value of the creation (if any other creation would have been equally good)
  2. it makes God a tyrant ruling in arbitrariness instead of ruling according to the truth and the good
- **Enlightened Freedom:** What the later statement involves is that, like Descartes, Leibniz holds that we are more free when our will is enlightened
    1. We *always* act for some reason
    2. We act *truly freely* if we know the reasons why we act like we do
    3. Indifference is not true liberty, acting according to a enlightened decision is true freedom
  - **Consequence 1: God's Freedom:**
    1. God's freedom does not consists in his choosing arbitrarily the good and the truths
    2. Instead, God is most free when deciding what to do on the basis of his perfect knowledge of moral truths
    3. and hence, God has created the best possible creation

Here again, Leibniz holds that "the highest liberty [is] to act in perfection according to the sovereign reason"
  - **Consequence 2: Eternal Truths and God**

Leibniz disagrees with Descartes, who maintained that nothing was preceeding God: He created us, mids, bodies but also ideas and principles of logic and of morals. See also *Monadology*, 46

### Consequence: our love for God

If we take seriously all the above, then we must:

- praise and love God, that is, praise and love the Creation – that is, want what God wants, and not want what he does not want
- Hence, not only must we accept the Creation as it is, but we must also be *entirely satisfied by the Creation*

### The Best Possible World

What does it mean that the Creation is perfect? Here is Leibniz' main ideas on the world's perfection:

- Simplicity of the means and richness and variety of the effects
  - A world with a single beautiful being would be less perfect because less rich
  - Our world has the most perfect balance between richness and simplicity of the principles and laws.
- Order, order, everywhere – the most complex thing on earth is still part of a mathematical formula
- Even miracles conform to God's order

—→ *Of course, Leibniz does not say that everything is wonderful in the world we live in. What he claims instead is that the world we live in is the most perfect possible world.*

### 6.3.4 Conclusion on Leibniz and God

- Leibniz, like most of his contemporaries, tries to “prove” the existence of God. As Descartes and Spinoza, he uses variations on the cosmological and the ontological arguments. The originality of Leibniz' argument is their *modal character*:
  - For the cosmological arguments: God is the sources of all possibles (by contrast to the cause of what actually exists)
  - For the ontological argument: God, being without limits, is the only being whose mere possibility implies actuality.
- Unlike his contemporaries, Leibniz takes seriously and tries to answer the problem of evil. One of his important aims in developing a philosophy is to defend God's justice and benevolence. The idea is that we should take seriously the notion of God's being all perfect.

—→ *We live in the best possible world.*

For a mockery of Leibniz' theodicy, see Voltaire, *Candide*

## 6.4 Leibniz' metaphysics: Individual Substances as the Fundamental Constituents of the World

### 6.4.1 Readings and Study questions

- Readings: Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics* 8-12 + 14-15
- Study questions:
  1. What are the most fundamental constituents of the world according to Leibniz? What are the characteristics of Leibniz notion of substance? What does it mean that substances are self-contained? Explain with the example of Alexander The Great
  2. How should we understand Leibniz's claim that: "every substance is a complete world and like a mirror of God or of the whole universe, which each one expresses in its own way"?
  3. Why does Leibniz think that we should not despise the scholastic notion of substantial form? For which domain of knowledge can such a notion be useful? Why?
  4. If each of us, being an individual substance, is a complete independent world, how come that we appear to be interacting in a common world?

### 6.4.2 Introduction

What is the world made of according to Leibniz? As should be expected, his metaphysics is highly related to his religious agenda. Leibniz was impressed with the systems of Descartes (there are two substances – dualism) and Spinoza (there is only one substance – monism). The problem he saw with these two systems is that they can easily lead to materialism (i.e. the view that only matter exists and nothing else), which in turn leads to atheism, which again – at least according to Leibniz – leads to the disappearance of morality.

So, according to Leibniz, it is crucial to understand what the world is like in such a way that is compatible both with God's omnipotence and with human moral responsibility.

### 6.4.3 What does count as a substance? Individual Substances as the Subject of Predication

We have already discussed the notion of substance, with both Descartes and Spinoza. Just as his contemporary rationalists, Leibniz holds that the fundamental constituents of the world are substances. Leibniz has, however, a slightly different take on what count as a substance.

- We have already discussed the following two notions of substance:
  1. Substance as a being whose existence does not depend on anything else  
Example: the color of your hair is not a substance: it does exist independently of your hair.  
Both Descartes and Spinoza used this notion of substance: self-sufficient being
  2. Substance as what remains constant under accidental changes  
The idea is that any being is characterized by
    - essential properties – or primary qualities
    - accidental properties – or secondary qualitiesExample: Aristotle would say being human is essential to us. However, that our hair is brown, blond or blue is accidental. It does not define our essence, our fundamental nature.  
Accidental properties can change without the essential properties being affected (you can die your skin). What remains the same under all changes is the substance.  
This is the sense of substance that Descartes used in the analysis of the piece of wax
- Leibniz adds to this a third notion of substance, i.e. the notion of substance as **the subject of predication**
  - Predication:  
Even if you may not know the term, you know what to predicate is:  
Examples:

Jalisco is black

Jalisco is a cat

Cats are vicious animals

Sentences like the above contain a subject (Jalisco, cats) and a predicate ( is black, is a cat, are vicious animals)

—→ *To predicate is then simply to assign an attribute to a subject.*

– Predication and Substance

It is an old idea that *substances are referred to by these subjects which cannot be predicated.*

Consider the term ‘black’. It can be a subject, as in ‘black is beautiful’. However it can also be a predicate, as in ‘Jalisco is black’. This is sufficient to say that the term ‘black’ does not refer to a substance, because the terms referring to substances cannot be predicated of anything.

Similarly for the word ‘cat’, or ‘animal’

By contrast, the term ‘Jalisco’ cannot be used as a predicate: nothing can be said to be ‘a Jalisco’. All you could do is to point at Jalisco (the actual cat), and say: “this is Jalisco”. But this is not a predication, rather, this is just identifying Jalisco as such. The reason for this is that the term Jalisco does not refer to a class of beings but to a single individual.

—→ *If then we accept the idea that substances are whatever correspond in the world to the terms which cannot be predicated, then substances are individual particulars, like Jalisco, you, me, this particular table and tree.*

—→ *For Leibniz, one way to recognize which are the fundamental constituents of the world is to look into the structure of our language. Substances are then the beings which we refer to with terms that cannot be predicated. That is to say, the fundamental constituents of the world are individual particulars.*

#### 6.4.4 Individual Substances as the fundamental constituents of the world

So, individual substances as the ultimate constituents of the world.

#### 6.4. LEIBNIZ' METAPHYSICS: INDIVIDUAL SUBSTANCES AS THE FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUENTS

What does it imply for the nature of such substances?

1. Each individual substance is unique of its kind: Principle of identity of indiscernibles: Two substances cannot have the same properties and yet differ in number.
2. Individual substances are indivisible  
Individual substances lay at the end of the division of the universe into individuals.
3. Individual substances do not perish, do not appear naturally – only by creation of God.

4. In fact, individual substances are independent of everything else than God

This means that *there is no interaction between substances. As an individual substance, you are neither acting on, nor acted upon by other substances.*

5. Individual substances depend on God: continual production and preservation

Individual substances do not perish, do not appear naturally – only by creation of God

Analogy: God produces the substances as we produce thoughts – substances emanate from God when he decides to actualize his thought.

→ *If we understand correctly the notion of individual substance, we understand that an individual substance is what remains stable at the fundamental level. Individual particulars, or individual substances do not suffer change, even less any kind of influence from a supposed external world: they are the building blocks of reality which always remain exactly what they are.*

##### 6.4.5 Individual Substances are “Self-Contained”

###### The problem

So, from his analysis of what counts as a substance, Leibniz has derived the following view: the building blocks of reality are individual particulars

that are substances in the sense that they are unique and perfectly stable beings, incapable of acting on, or being acted upon by, other substances.

Now here is the problem: how can the individual substances be stable in the way described above? Isn't it the case that individual substances, you, me, the tree outside and Jalisco undergo some changes? We learn, we get old, we love and then stop loving, in short we live!

So, how does an individual remain the same while always seeming to undergo changes? Leibniz' answer is : in being "self-contained".

### Self-contained substances

- This is one of the most controversial, most intriguing, and most interesting thesis that Leibniz holds: *the concept of an individual substance contains in itself all the predicates that the substance has, has had, and will have*:

...the nature of an individual substance or of a complete being is to have a notion so complete that it is sufficient to contain and to allow us to deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which this notion is attributed. (p. 188)

- Examples:

Jalisco

Alexander the Great

Caesar

- This implies that, according to Leibniz, *there are no accidental properties*. All the properties a substance will have are contained in its complete notion.

—→ *So, for Leibniz, a substance is an individual, concrete and complete being, which, which, when completely understood, contains all its predicates. Of course, our finite understanding does not allow us to grasp the complete notions of individual substances. God, however, has an infinite understanding and chose to actualize these individual substances which he understood would together make the best possible world.*



### 6.4.6 Individual Substances Are Defined by their Substantial Forms

Leibniz defends an old scholastic notion in order to give an account of the nature of the individual substances: the notion of substantial form. What is it and why does Leibniz want us to reconsider this notion?

- What is a substantial form?

This is an old notion that the Scholastics inherited from Aristotle.

For example, consider a cat. The ancient philosophers and the medieval philosophers after them took that what fundamentally makes a cat a cat is its form “cathood”.

Another example: Socrates. What does make Socrates what he is? His “Socrateshood”

→ *The substantial form of something is what makes it what it is.*

- Why was it despised by the founding fathers of the new science?

Appeals to substantial forms were considered vacuous by the modern philosophers concerned with the new science:

Moliere's mockery: *The imaginary invalid* 1673

FIRST DOCTOR:

Most learned bachelor

Whom I esteem and honor,

I would like to ask you the cause and reason why

Opium makes one sleep.

ARGAN:

....The reason is that in opium resides

A dormitive virtue,

Of which it is the nature

To stupefy the senses.

CHORUS:

Well, well, well, well has he answered!

Worthy, worthy is he to enter

Into our learned body.

Well, well has he answered!

→ *The notion of substantial form seems to have no explanatory power whatsoever. Appealing to the “X-ness” or “X-hood” of X does not explain the way in which X works.*

- Why does Leibniz hold that it is necessary to appeal to substantial forms in metaphysics?

- Leibniz admits that, within the domain of physics and natural science, appeals to substantial forms is unsatisfactory:

Leibniz’ example: the workings of a clock are not properly explained by its “clockness”, but by its internal mechanism

That said, he maintains that the notion of substantial form is still useful in the domain of metaphysics. Why?

- *A principle of unity is necessary to give an account of individuality in our world.*

According to Leibniz, the mechanical explanation of the world does not allow us to make sense of the way the world is. Extension, figure and movement (Descartes’ notion of bodies) are just not enough to give an account of the intrinsic unity of individuals. But the world is fundamentally made of individuals, not of extension and movement. So, if metaphysics is about explaining what the ultimate nature of reality is, it should give an account of what individuals are and how they exist.

On the side: remember that Spinoza gave an account of individuals.

- Leibniz thinks the notion of substantial form can do the job.

It is useful in order to give an account of things that appear to possess an intrinsic unity, by contrast to things that are mere aggregate, collections of elements.

For Leibniz, every individual has an intrinsic principle of true unity. This applies to everything: not only humans, but to everything.

**panpsychism:** everything has a soul (even if, of course, not everything has a mind and consciousness)

- From substantial forms to monads:

#### 6.4. LEIBNIZ' METAPHYSICS: INDIVIDUAL SUBSTANCES AS THE FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUENTS

While in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Leibniz appeals to the notions of substantial forms and souls, he will dub his own term to refer to it later: *Monads – literally solitary units*.

—→ *While an account of the world in terms of extension and movement is satisfactory for the natural sciences, it is not enough for metaphysics. If metaphysics is about giving an account of the fundamental constituents of the world, and if the world is made of individual particulars, then a satisfactory metaphysical account of the world must give an account of individual particulars. The mere mechanistic view of the world fails to do so. Leibniz holds that the notion of substantial is appropriate for giving an account of individual particulars.*

##### 6.4.7 Individual Substances as Independent Mirrors of the Universe

###### The problem

1. According to Leibniz, the world is made of independent and complete individual substances, which can be said to remain what they are because they contain all what they were, are, and will become right from the outset;
2. A crucial requirement for any metaphysical account is that it has to recover the appearances. That is to say, he has to explain how the world appears to us as it is given that it is fundamentally made of individual substances;
3. Now, the appearances are that we live in constant interaction with the external world. We don't seem to be independent or autonomous, but rather intimately embedded in a complex universe.

How is this possible?

###### Individual Substances as Independent Mirrors

*An individual substance expresses the entire universe: it is a perspective on the entire creation*

Each individual substance is like a movie theater, in which the entire story of the whole universe is played. This is how Leibniz accounts for the

fact that you and me, as individual substances, seem to have some kind of contact with the world even if we are independent substances.

Leibniz: comparison with a performance in the theater – multiple perspectives of the spectators

This is a radical claim: individual substances (you and me and Jalisco) perceive the entire universe. This idea will be fleshed out by Leibniz in the *New Essays* with the notion of small perceptions. You can read the Preface to get an idea.

### **Each individual substance has something of God's omniscience and omnipotence**

- omniscience: expresses the entire – even if from a limited perspective
- omnipotence: is part of all other substance and influence their being – even if never by direct action

What does it mean that they share some of the omnipotence of God?

*Individual Substances are active* – Whenever an individual substances evolves, it does it itself. Individual substances are never influenced by other individual substances. They are independent of one another. Each individual substance unfold actively its own individual nature. This is how they share with God's power.

—→ *So: Individual substances are unique, active, concrete and complete being. An individual substance's life is nothing else than the independent unfolding of its intrinsic nature. In their unfolding, each of them deploy the entire world. Each of them do it uniquely, that is, from one of the infinite possible perspectives on the universe.*

### **6.4.8 Pre-established Harmony**

With the above idea that substances individually and independently play the entire story of the universe from a particular perspective, Leibniz has not yet recovered all the appearances. In particular, he has not recovered the appearance that we substances interact in a commonly share and external world.

#### 6.4. LEIBNIZ' METAPHYSICS: INDIVIDUAL SUBSTANCES AS THE FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUENTS

##### The Problem

1. Leibniz wants to argue that the fundamental constituents of the world are individual substances or monads, which are completely independent of one another;
2. A crucial requirement for any metaphysical account is that it has to recover the appearances. That is to say, he has to explain how the world appears to us as it is given that it is fundamentally made of individual substances;
3. The world as it appears to us, however, seems to be constituted of *interacting systems*. We naturally construe the world as made of a common background in which a set of systems (particles, atoms, or larger systems) are interacting causally.
4. Such causal interactions appear to us as following some order – what we call the laws of nature.

—→ *If all substances are self-contained and independent beings, how come that they appear to be interacting within the same, ordered world? In other words, how come that we feel that we are not watching movies independently but rather playing all together in the same movie?*

##### Correlations and causation

How do we deal with correlations between phenomena?

- What are correlations?

There is a correlation whenever two events occurs more often together than independently.

Examples: Tom and Bill and their hats

- How do we deal with correlations?

- either direct causal relationship
- or pre-synchronization

In both cases, we take that there is a causal explanation.

- Of course, not all correlations are relevant:

Alsace: amount of storks and natality rate are correlated

—→ *We usually interpret correlations in terms either of direct, last-minute direct causal influence, or as the result of a synchronization in the past.*

### Leibniz's notion of pre-established harmony

Leibniz' idea is to consider that the correlations between each of the worlds of each of the individual substances are due to an synchronization at the beginning of time.

- All the correlations that we take to be indicative of causal relationship are really due to a common cause: God's decree.
- Every single individual substance is independent, but all individual substances have been synchronized at the beginning, like independent clocks.
- The appearance of a causal order at the level of phenomena is the result of the synchronization of all the otherwise independent individual substances.
- In other worlds, God has made sure that our various movies be coherent with one another.

—→ *We all watch the same movie after all, but independently and from different perspectives.*

### What it is to act and to be acted upon

- The problem:

At the fundamental level, the only real things are individual substances, their perceptions and thoughts.

At the level of the phenomena, we perceive and think that we act upon the rest of the world and that we are acted upon

Leibniz has to give an account of this too.

#### 6.4. *LEIBNIZ' METAPHYSICS: INDIVIDUAL SUBSTANCES AS THE FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTION*

- To act, or to cause is to pass to a more perfect expression, and to be acted upon is to pass to less perfect expression.
- We attribute to ourselves just what we express the most perfectly
- What we call a “causal influence” consists:
  1. in the cause, in an augmentation of what it expresses the most perfectly, and
  2. in the effect, a diminution of what it expresses the most perfectly
- Hence:
  - to act is to expand the domain of expression which is more perfect
  - to be acted upon is to have this domain diminished
- Further: to act, expanding and change for the better is accompanied with pleasure, whereas to be acted upon, shrinking, and change for the less perfect is accompanied with pain

#### 6.4.9 Conclusion on Individual Substances

At the end of the day, Leibniz' metaphysical account of the world contains two levels of reality:

1. At the fundamental level, all there exists are the independent, self sufficient, self contained, unique of their kind, indivisible and unchanging building blocks of reality: the individual substances, which emanate from God. They are best characterized by their intrinsic principle of unity: their substantial form. The substantial form of an individual substance contains right from the outset all the developments that the individual substance is going to express. When expressing itself, each individual substance expresses the universe from its particular, unique perspective.

So: At the fundamental level, there is no physical world made of causally interacting physical systems. Instead, there are independent individual substances.

2. At the level of the phenomena, we perceive and conceive the world as constituted of physical systems causally interacting with one another

and that such interactions follow the structure of a causal order. This is because all substances are synchronized by a decree of God. So, whenever we appear to interact, in fact, the action and the reaction are nothing but the two synchronized ways in which the same action is conceived from different perspectives.

—→ *The existence of causation and of a causal order are illusions in the sense that it does not correspond to anything physical in the world. That said, they are well grounded illusions, for they emerge from the harmony between all individual substances that God has pre-established.*



## 6.5 Freedom, Responsibility and the Problem of Evil

### 6.5.1 Readings and Study questions

- Readings: *Discourse on Metaphysics*, 13 and 30, 31
- Study questions:
  1. How does Leibniz argue that we are free, even if we are self-contained substances?
  2. How does Leibniz argue that we are responsible for our actions, even if it is God who decided to create us as we are in the first place?
  3. How does Leibniz explain the appearance of evil in the best possible world?

### 6.5.2 Leibniz' account of individual freedom

**The problem: Necessitarianism is incompatible with freedom**

- The lazy argument: if everything is already written, why bother doing anything? Stop acting altogether, whatever God has planned on happening will happen anyway.
- The problem is the seemingly incompatibility between predetermination, free will and moral responsibility. If from God's decree on, it has been decided what we will be and will do, then how is it possible for Leibniz to hold that what we are and do does depend on us?
- We will have to distinguish between two questions:
  1. Are we free to do what we do?
  2. Are we responsible to do what we do?

Leibniz needs both in order to recover our moral responsibility. Freedom being a necessary condition of responsibility, we'll start with freedom.

### Leibniz's rejection of necessitarianism

So, the existence of contingency is a *conditio sine qua non* for the existence of freedom. Well, within Leibniz' view, the world is contingent, since it is the result of God's choice. The world could have been otherwise.

- Distinction between necessary and necessary ex hypothesi:
  1. a necessary truth is absolutely necessary – their opposite implies contradiction
  2. a contingent truth is necessary ex hypothesi: necessary under the hypothesis of God's decree
- That you came today in class is a necessary consequence of God's decree to create you as you are. It is a necessary part of your complete concept which God, and only God, understands entirely.
- However, God's decree itself was not necessary, and an different choice, a choice in which you would not have come to class today was possible. It does not imply contradiction. God will not make that choice because He created this world as the best world possible. But your twin, staying home or taking a walk in the woods is still possible. He is part of another possible world.
- There are demonstration a priori of both necessary and contingent truths. However, while in the former case, one shows that the proposition is reducible to an identity which the Principle of Contradiction guarantee to be necessarily true, in the latter case, one can only understand what sufficient reason God had to decide as He did.

—→ *Because they are the consequences of a contingent decree based of God's free will, contingent truths are not necessary. This does not show that we are free, but shows that the first requirement for the possibility of freedom is satisfied within Leibniz' philosophy: not everything that happens in the world is necessary.*

### Leibniz' solution – Distinction between certainty and necessity

- While one can easily agree that Leibniz does not endorse necessitarianism, there still remains a question of whether we, as created by God's decree, are free or not. The problem is that even if everything that happens is contingent, it is contingent on God's decree. When God decided to create this world, he could see exactly everything that will happen, because God understands the complete notion of all individual substances, and that in the complete notion of the individual substances is contained everything that will happen.

So: it seems that God, in creating us, made us do what we do!

- Leibniz' responses: what is certain is different from what is necessary  
It is not because God can foresee, and even foresee with certainty, what we will do with our lives that he is the one that makes it happen.  
Example: your little sister, the horror movie on the TV table, and her nightmares.

Let us say you have a little sister. You know that she is always eager to do what grown ups do, including watching horror movies. You also know very well that whenever she watches one of these movies, she has awful nightmares for a week. Now let's say you leave the DVD of *Friday the 13th* on the TV table.

You can easily foresee that (1) she is going to watch the movie and (2) she is going to have nightmares for the coming week. But from this it does not follow that you made her watch the movie! She was free to do it, and did it by herself.

—→ *In the same way, God foresees everything you will do but does not make you do it.*

- So: Leibniz has a coherent notion of **individual freedom**: individual substances unfold themselves outside of any external influence. They do what they do "by themselves".

*Freedom for Leibniz' individual substances amounts to the ability to act outside of external constraint. This is a coherent notion of freedom, which moreover is compatible with determinism.*

Note that this is a similar notion of freedom to Spinoza's.

As Leibniz says, it would be absurd to ask that Caesar's crossing the Rubicon be without a cause: there is a cause, and it is Caesar.

—→ *Individual Substances are free in the sense that they deploy themselves outside of any external influence. That God knows what they are going to do does not change that they are free.*

### 6.5.3 Leibniz' account of individual responsibility

#### The problem of responsibility

- We have seen above that Leibniz has a coherent notion of individual freedom. But this does not solve the problem of the compatibility between pre-determination and moral responsibility.
- The problem is not that God make us do what we do. It is true that even God can foresee the entirety of our future actions, is not the one who is actually acting when we act.

The problem is instead that, once God has decided to create an individual substance, all what will happen to this substance comes with it. This seems to imply that, while we are *free* to do what we do, we are not *responsible* for it:

Here goes the argument

- That "what we do" happens depends solely on our complete nature's being part of the actual world
- that our complete nature is part of the actual world solely depends on God's decree

CC: That "what we do" happens depends solely God's decree and is not our responsibility

- For this reason, Leibniz does not seem to give a satisfactory answer to the problem of our **responsibility** for our acts.

That another me is part of another possible world does not change the fact that the actual me, the one which was actualized by God, cannot be or do anything else than what I am.

## 6.5. FREEDOM, RESPONSIBILITY AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL<sup>181</sup>

- Classic examples:
  - Ceasar and the Rubicon
  - Adam and the apple

### Leibniz' attempts to save moral responsibility

Here is how Leibniz struggles to preserve our responsibility for our actions. God does not necessitate our actions, but only inclines us to do whatever seems the best:

- God has established the laws of nature. The law that we, human being, are always following, is to do what appears the most desirable, or the best.  
Our fundamental nature is to aim for the best.
- God has also made us such that we are in a state of ignorance as to which particular actions our nature bounds us to accomplish.
- Thus, we remain in a state of (epistemic) indifference – we could act otherwise in principle even if it is certain that we will act in some way.

—→ *We may not be responsible for the fact that whatever happens in fact does happen, but we are responsible for deciding and acting the way we do, which is another way to say that we are responsible for our choices.*

Does this solve the problem of responsibility? Is not God responsible for making you real in the first place?

### 6.5.4 The problem of evil

The problem of evil is a classical problem for all philosophers who take God as a perfect creator as part of their system. The problem is to account for what we take as evil in the world. In Leibniz' case, it is of outermost importance to make the appearance of evil consistent with the idea that God created the best possible world.

Here are his arguments:

- The greater good:  
What appears as evil is a necessary part of a better world

For example, that sin exists might be for the greater good for we are then responsible for our actions, and we have to possibility to act in the right way. If we did not have the possibility to act in the wrong way, we would not be responsible for acting in the right way either.

- That we do not understand what greater good a given seemingly evil serves is due to our epistemic limitations.

All we need to know are the general rule: that everything happens for the best. We cannot know the details

- Evil is not evil, but *mere negativity*.

Evil and Sin only come from the fact that creatures are limited and not perfect.

—→ *Overall, Leibniz gives very traditional solutions to the problem of evil.*

## 6.6 Conclusion on Leibniz

The core aspects of Leibniz' philosophy are the following:

**The central idea** – God being absolutely perfect must have created the most perfect world

That the world is perfect does not mean that everything is wonderful, but that this world features the best balance between the simplicity of the means and the richness of the result.

**Epistemology** – A mitigated rationalism:

- empirical knowledge does exist
- knowledge of eternal and necessary truths is possible, superior, and, while it is triggered by the senses, it is ultimately grounded in pure reason

**Metaphysics** – Individual Substances

- Leibniz puts the notion of individuality at the center of its metaphysics: the fundamental constituents of the universe are individual substances, each of which is unique of its kind.

- As substances, they are self-sufficient, that is to say, they are self-contained and independent from one another. The only way they can be influenced is in being created or destroyed by God.
- The appearances of our world as constituted of causally interacting physical systems is a well grounded illusion. It is an illusion because in fact individual substances are independent from one another. It is well grounded though, because of the pre-established harmony.

**Necessity, Freedom and Responsibility** – Leibniz' version of compatibilism:

- Leibniz reject the idea of sheer necessity. Contingency exists, that is, the world could have been otherwise
- That said, Leibniz rejects the idea of chance as well: nothing happens in our world which was not planned by God. God does not make things happen, but he chooses which individual substances get created, knowing exactly what these substances are going to accomplish.
- Leibniz has a coherent notion of individual freedom
- It is not clear that he manages to design a coherent theory of moral responsibility

