

5.4 Freedom, Responsibility and the Problem of Evil

5.4.1 Readings and Study questions

- Readings:
 - Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, 13 again and 30, 31
 - Voltaire, *Candide*

- Study questions:
 1. Recapitulate the characteristics of Leibniz' notion of individual substances.
 2. Explain again how Leibniz argue that the truth "Brad is non married on the 7th of October 2007" is contingent, even if a sufficiently powerful mind could prove it a priori.
 3. How does Leibniz argue that we are free, even if we are self-contained substances?
 4. 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?
 5. How does Leibniz explain the appearance of evil in the best possible world?

5.4.2 Is Leibniz necessitarist?

The problem

The lazy argument: if everything is already written, why bother doing anything? Stop acting, what God wants to arrive will arrive anyway.

The problem is the seemingly incompatibility between predetermination and free will. If God has decided by decree what we will be and will do, then what we are and do does not depend on free will.

Leibniz' answers

1. Distinction between certain and necessary:

The problem is this: does God's decree make what happen necessary?

It is not because God knows, and even knows for sure, what will happen that he makes it happen.

Example: it is not because you know that you know that your sister is going to scream if you jump on her bed in the middle of the night that you make her doing it.

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

Monads are free in the sense that they deploy there being outside of any external influence.. That God knows what they are going to do does not change this.

2. Distinction between necessary and necessary ex hypothesi:

- a necessary truth is purely necessary – their opposite imply contradiction

- a contingent truth is necessary ex hypothesi: 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 only 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 on the lake is still possible. He is part of another possible world.

As a consequence of a contingent decree based of God's free will, contingent truth are not necessary.

There are demonstration a priori of both necessary and contingent truths. However, while in the former case, on shows that the proposition is reducible to an identity which the Principle of Contradiction

5.4. FREEDOM, RESPONSIBILITY AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL¹¹⁵

guarantee to be necessarily true, in the latter case, one can only understand what sufficient reason God had to decide as He did.

Part of the problem remains

(See Cottingham p.164-166)

- Leibniz has a coherent notion of **individual freedom**: monads deploy themselves outside of external influence.

To act outside of external constraint is a coherent notion of freedom, which moreover is compatible with determinism.

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.

As a monad, you unfold yourself without being constraint by any external influence. In that sense, monads are free.

- However, Leibniz does not give a satisfactory answer to the problem of our **responsibility** for our acts. For, at the end of the day, what we are is the result of God's decree.

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

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

5.4.3 Responsibility

- Here is how Leibniz struggles to preserve our responsibility for our actions: God does not necessitate our actions, but only follows the laws he has established

1. God continually produces and preserves our being, that is, our concept in which all our predicates are contained

2. God has established laws: for example, the law that human beings are always acting according to what appears the most desirable, or the best.
3. In ourselves, we remain in a state of indifference – we could act otherwise in principle even if it is certain that we will act in some way.

- How can we say that we are free to do what we do?

A way to make sense of this: God does not make you do what you do, but has chosen to actualize you, a free being, who he knows is going to do what you do. Hence, you are still responsible for doing what you do: you do it yourself by your own.

- How can we say that we are responsible of your actions?

We may not be responsible for what is happening to be happening, but we are responsible for deciding and acting the way we do, we are responsible for our choices.

In particular, since you do not know (because of your epistemic limitations) what your concept implies you to do, you do not know what is supposed to happen. In this minimal sense, you are in a state of epistemic indifference.

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

5.4.4 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

5.4. FREEDOM, RESPONSIBILITY AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL¹¹⁷

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.

- Note that even grace is part of our concept – but again, nothing is necessitated.