Chapter 5

Leibniz

5.1 Introduction

Figure 5.1: Descartes

5.1.1 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

- *Monadology* – written late in life

- *New Essays on Understanding* – answer to Locke's *Essays on Understanding*

• Important figure of the academic society of his time

• Also a diplomat and an historian during his lifetime

5.1.2   Leibniz' philosophy – orientation

Leibniz is a man of compromise. He wants:
- to produce a philosophy which Descartes is reconciled with the scholastic tradition.
- to develop a form of rationalism that answers the challenge of the empiricists (Locke)
Leibniz is a man of religion. He wants:
- to produce a philosophy based on the all perfection of God, and hence on that He created the best possible world.

5.2   Rationalism and Theodicy

5.2.1   Readings and Study questions

• Readings:

  – *Monadology* 25-46

  – *Discourse on Metaphysics*, 1-7

• Study questions:

  1. What kind of thinking do we share with animals according to Leibniz?

  2. Explain what is a truth of reasoning and a truth of fact for Leibniz. How do they relate to the Principle of Contradiction and the Principle of Sufficient Reason?

3. How does Leibniz argue for the existence of God (he gives two arguments)? How do his arguments relate to Descartes' in the Third and Fifth Meditations?

4. How does the nature of God imply that we must not only accept but also be entirely satisfied by the Creation?

5. What view on freedom does Leibniz endorse in Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*? Compare with Descartes.

6. How do you understand the end of the fourth paragraph, p.232 ? What do you think is the lazy reason or lazy argument? How does Leibniz respond to it? Do you find it convincing?

7. How does Leibniz include appearances of disorder and evil within God's most perfect creation?

5.2.2 Men as animals

Men behave like animals in three quarters of their actions, that is, every time they act on the sole basis of perception and memory, two faculties we share with animals

- Animals' senses are 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.

  Charge against the empiricists, who maintain that we cannot do any better than the above: all knowledge originates in experience, and if experience does not lead us far, so be it.

  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.

5.2.3   Eternal truths

The knowledge of eternal truths

- Here is how Leibniz characterizes our knowledge of eternal and necessary truths

  – The knowledge of eternal and necessary truths distinguishes us from the animals

  – It allows us to know: sciences, ourselves, God and other abstract notions (being, substance etc.)

  – The eternal and necessary truths are known by the mind

  – See also Paragraph 46: Eternal truth do not depend on God – Against Descartes.

- What are eternal and necessary truths then?

  – Known by the mind only, they are truth about abstract notions

  – They give us a superior kind of knowledge – *a priori knowledge* – without this kind of knowledge, we are no better than "beasts"

  – But where do they come from? they are *innate*: implicit knowledge that can become actual under certain conditions:

    - 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). Even if Descartes is not as radical as many depict him, he mistrust the senses.

    - 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 scale, 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.

Our reasonings

It is one of Leibniz dearest dream that we could invent a way to "compute" thoughts as we compute numbers (remember that he built the first computing machine). This would be possible, according to him, if we could formulate properly our propositions, such that their structure appears clearly. Then, by combining simple and complex truths, we could automatically produce new true propositions.

Two great Principles:

- The principle of contradiction

  Is true whatever does not imply contradiction, and vice versa

- The principle of sufficient reason

  Nothing can exist and no statement can be true without having a sufficient reason to be so and not otherwise.

To these two principles of reasoning correspond two kinds of eternal truths: necessary and contingent.

Two kinds of Truths

- Two kinds of truth:

  1. Truths of reasoning

  = necessary truths: their opposite is impossible – i.e. implies contradiction

  These are proportions of the type 'A is A', which Leibniz calls "identical propositions" and which we call tautologies, or propositions that are reducible to tautologies.

  Example: all bachelors are non married

  2. Truths of facts

  = contingent truths: their opposite is possible

These are propositions which are not tautologies

Example: Brad is non married

- Truth of reasoning:

  - analytic truths: we can reduce their truths to simpler truths by a logical analysis

  - example: mathematics

- Truths of facts:

  - a logical analysis is impossible for us because would be infinite

  - Claim: contingent truths are of course non necessary, but they must have a sufficient reason – even if we are not necessarily able to see it.

- Pb: does the existence of contingent truths imply that Leibniz does not endorse the idea of a perfect rationally ordered world and of the entire body of true propositions forming a perfectly ordered system?

  There is something important to note here. The distinction between necessary truth and contingent truth is not the "easy" distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions. In fact, Leibniz holds that, *in any true proposition, be it a necessary truth or a contingent truth, the predicate is contained in the subject.*

  - This is an important thesis of Leibniz' philosophy, the consequences of which we shall see later on. The "Inesse Thesis"

  - The important point here is that if 'Brad is non married' is true, then, for Leibniz, the predicate 'non married' is contained in the subject 'Brad'.

  - What is the difference between a necessary and a contingent truth then? Are they not reduced to the same?

  According to Leibniz, the difference between necessary and contingent truth is not that in the former the predicate is contained in the subject and not in the other, but instead that in the former case we are able to proceed to the complete analysis while only God can in the latter case. It is a question of epistemic limitations.

- Hence, while Leibniz is certainly a rationalist in the sense that the world is perfectly ordered, that there are no such things as brute facts,

but only parts of a well organized system, he is not a radical rationalist in the sense that, unlike Descartes, he does not believe that the system of all the truths of the universe is accessible to us. See the qualification at the end of the formulation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

That said, it remains that what Leibniz tells us here is that even contingent truths are truths which could be known a priori in principle (even if they are not as necessary).

Just as in understanding the idea of the triangle we entirely understand the properties of the triangle, God, in understanding the idea of Brad, entirely understand the properties of Brad, one of which being non married this year.

From the last assumption above, which is a strong version of the causal principle (according to which everything has a cause), Leibniz derives the existence of God. The existence and the nature of God are essential in Leibniz' philosophy.

5.2.4 God

The existence of God – a posteriori

- Two infinites in the analysis of the truths of facts:

  1. Infinite number of truths of fact

  2. Infinite analysis of each of them

- We obtained a regression to infinity: for the analysis of contingent truth results in more contingent truths, which needs again an infinite analysis.

- Hence:

  - the ultimate sufficient reason must be outside of the chain of contingent reasons

  - the ultimate sufficient reason must be necessary

- This necessary substance is God:

  - it is the sufficient reason of the entire chain of contingent truths;

- it contains the entire chain of contingencies as potentialities, or possibles.

Whow. What does this mean?

It means that everything that is possible is contained in God. He can "see" all the possibles in ideas. He will choose what he wants to make real among this set of possibles.

The Nature of God

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

- unique

- unlimited

- absolute and infinite perfection

  Creatures derive their perfections from him, and their imperfections are limitations due to their own nature – bodies' inertia for example.

- the source of essences, that is, the source of whatever is real in essences

  - Essences = set of the possibilities

  - Existences = set of the realities

  Anything that is real is possible beforehand: every thing that exist, existed fisrt 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 also the source of the reality of the possibilities.

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

  Argument: 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.

- We have thus derived the nature of God: the necessary being which is such that, if it is possible, then it is real.

- From this, we obtain an ontological argument – a priori:

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

  2. An all perfect infinite being is such that its possibility implies its actuality

  3. Hence, God exists

5.2.5 Theodicy

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

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

- Definition of God: "God is an absolute perfect being"

  What is perfection? to be perfect requires to be perfect in the highest degree:

  - it is not a perfection to be a great number or a great figure.

  - Knowledge and power, on the other hand, can be perfect.

  The point of this is to answer a concern that Leibniz had about Descartes' ontological argument. 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. So, if we want the ontological argument to work, we have to make sure that our idea of God is not incoherent.

  Leibniz holds here that the ideas of perfect knowledge and perfect power are coherent.

- Consequence:

  1. God possess perfect knowledge and perfect power: omniscient and omnipotent

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

What does that mean? Why God's action should conform our morals? Or does Leibniz talk about the absolute morals, which our morals should follow?

3. The more we know about God's perfection, the more we will be happy with our world and our lives

Against the opposite view

- 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' answer:

  - we can discover the goodness and truth of the creation

  - the opposite view is dangerous because:

  1. destroy the value of the creation (if any other creation would have been equally good)

  2. makes God a tyrant ruling in arbitrariness instead of ruling according to the truth and the good

- What the later statement involves: 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

- Aplied to God:

  1. God did not decide, or choose arbitrarily the good and the truths

  2. Instead, God chose to do what he did on the basis of the truths and the good

  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"

- Another consequence: 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.

Our love for God

- to praise and love God implies to praise and love the Creation – that is, to 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

- Against the lazy argument

  - Lazy argument: if every thing is meant to happen, why bother acting at all – stay in bed and wait

  - Leibniz answer:

  1. satisfied with the past, open to the future

  2. always good intentions, see what God has decided to do

  Is this convincing? more on this in the next section

Aspect of the Creation's perfection

- simplicity of the means and richness / variety of the effect

- Order, order, everywhere – the most complex thing on earth is still part of a mathematical formula

- Even miracles conform to God's order