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THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS  
AND THE CHRISTIAN THESIS OF THE CORRUPTION  
OF THE WORLD

There are only few philosophical theses that have come to be as strongly inscribed in the general consciousness as Leibniz's assertion that the world we inhabit is the very best of all possible worlds. Leibniz's thesis appears to stand in glaring contradiction with our ordinary experience; thus we may maintain with a feeling of obviousness of our affirmation, that this world of ours would surely be better, if at least some of its features and properties were different from what they are now. However, Leibniz himself objected to this point of view and argued at length that any change to the present world would result either in making it worse than it is at present or altogether impossible. Yet this claim seems to contradict the Christian assumption, that our world in its present condition is corrupted as a result of sin, although we hope that at the end of time it is going to be thoroughly renovated to become the world of salvation, that is one that will truly be the very best of all possible worlds.

I

Like every great philosopher, Leibniz possessed unshakable confidence in the power of his own faculty of reason. Of course, he was aware of the limits of reason, of the fact, that reason cannot exceed certain definite lines; in fact this necessary limitation of reason enters into the very essential constitution of reason: reason without limits would not be reason any more. This essen-

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tial limitation appears in the way reason works, it is demonstrative of reason's nature.<sup>1</sup>

This delimiting framework of reason is best captured in the form of two principles, namely the principle of sufficient reason and the principle of contradiction. The former states that "we can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise."<sup>2</sup> On the strength of the latter "we judge that which involves a contradiction to be false, and that which is opposed or contradictory to the false to be true."<sup>3</sup>

The principle of sufficient reason can also be stated as the thesis that every effect has its proper cause. Although the expression "sufficient reason" typically used by Leibniz himself may suggest some very special, metaphysically more fundamental, understanding of causality, yet in other contexts he quotes "received axiom that *nothing is without reason, or there is no effect without a cause*,"<sup>4</sup> which, on the contrary, seems to imply, that "reason" and "cause" in Leibniz refer to one and the same reality. The principle of sufficient reason is grounded in common-sense evidence: "because one of the greatest principles of good sense is that nothing ever happens without a cause or determining reason."<sup>5</sup> It is thus legitimate to suppose, that Leibniz's identification of reason (in the causal sense) with efficient causality derives from a specific conception of efficient causality, namely the one according to which efficient

<sup>1</sup> The essence of a given thing is that, without which this thing would not be this very thing it is. The nature of a given thing is the totality of features owing to which this thing is what it is and operates in its proper way. The mind of a man is the totality of his or her spiritual faculties; reason is mind insofar as knowing and thinking.

<sup>2</sup> G.W. LEIBNIZ, *The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology*, 32. Quoted after: Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 217. In what follows we will quote this edition by the abbreviation AG with a page number. In his *Theodicy* Leibniz uses interchangeably the terms "sufficient reason" and "determinant reason."

<sup>3</sup> G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Monadology*, 31, in AG, 303. In his controversy with Samuel Clarke, Leibniz gives a more concise formulation of this principle: "a proposition cannot be true and false at the same time." AG, 321. A similar formulation is found in his *Theodicy* (I,44).

The principle of contradiction is also called the principle of identity, although some of Leibniz's statements (e.g. in the *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*) seem to imply that he distinguishes between the principle of contradiction and the principle of identity. However, interpreters of Leibniz's philosophy generally think that according to Leibniz the latter principle is entailed in the former. In his edition of *Monadology* Émile Boutroux states concisely: "Mais il est clair que, pour lui, le principe d'identité rentre dans le principe de contradiction." Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *La Monadologie*, ed. Émile Boutroux (Paris: Delagrave, 1880), 157–158, footnote 2.

<sup>4</sup> G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Primary Truths*, in AG 31.

<sup>5</sup> G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Letter to Coste, on Human Freedom*, 19 December 1707, in AG, 194.

causality is ultimately reducible to final causality. Of course, this is not to say, that every efficient cause acts as conscious of the purposive character of its own operation, yet this implies the First and Ultimate Efficient Cause has consciously and purposively fixed once for all the unchangeable order and way of operation of the causal-efficient activity within the created universe and thus, for any effect occurring in the universe, its cause is identical with the reason for the existence of this effect. And this consciously and purposively active First and Ultimate Efficient Cause is no other than God.

Thus, the principle of sufficient reason is the same as the principle of universal purposiveness or teleology. Reality as a whole appears to be a spiritual-material unity, of which every part stands in causal-effective relationship with all other parts. The whole of reality forms a necessary unity and plenitude, even though no single element that enters into the constitution of reality exists of necessity. Thus Leibniz concludes:

Therefore one must seek the reason for the existence of the world, which is the whole assemblage of contingent things, and seek it in the substance which carries with it the reason for its existence, and which in consequence is necessary and eternal.<sup>6</sup>

The universal validity of the principle of sufficient reason forms the ground for proving the existence of God and enables comprehension of the universal laws governing the world.<sup>7</sup>

There, however, arises the question on what grounds we assume that the principle of sufficient reason is itself necessary and universal. Leibniz's answer seems to be that by rejecting this principle we become unable to think sensibly about the world. This appears to have been justification enough for Leibniz; it was only one hundred years later that Immanuel Kant observed that from the fact that we cannot think about the world other than in certain ways it does not follow that the world is in its essence exactly how we think it to be. To Leibniz it was still evident that if we cannot think about the world other than according to the principles of our minds, the world in its essence is as we know it with our minds.

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<sup>6</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, trans. E. M. Huggard (Chicago: Open Court, 1985), 127–128.

<sup>7</sup> “Were it not for this great principle we could never prove the existence of God, and we should lose an infinitude of very just and very profitable arguments whereof it is the foundation.” *Ibidem*, 155. Similarly in the letter to Samuel Clarke: “I dare say that without this great principle one cannot prove the existence of God, nor account for many other important truths.” AG, 346.

To Leibniz the principle of sufficient reason is the way leading to God.<sup>8</sup> Since everything that exists must have a sufficient reason for its existence, then reality as a whole, the organized plenitude of all that exists, must have a proportioned reason for its existence too. And since the principle of sufficient reason is at the same time the principle of universal teleology, the sufficient reason for the world as a whole must be the Being that is absolutely perfect and which acts in a purposeful way. Such a being can be only one in number and must be the reason for both essences and existences within the world. To quote Leibniz himself: “Furthermore, since all is connected together, there is no ground for admitting more than one. Its understanding is the source of essences, and its will is the origin of existences.”<sup>9</sup>

If the world exists, this is because the Reason for the existence of the world exists; yet the Reason for the existence of everything else exists necessarily, that is it cannot not exist. But if it cannot not exist, it cannot not be the Reason for the existence of the world, in other words, it cannot not create the world. This can be understood as follows: God acts in a necessary way, and being necessarily the Creator, He of necessity has to create the world.<sup>10</sup> This means that God is determined by no other than Himself—and this would be, according to Leibniz, the true meaning of the absolute freedom of God.

However, Leibniz objected to the understanding of God’s self-determination according to which God has of necessity to do whatever He can do. This objection he expressed in his polemic against Samuel Clarke: “The author confounds moral necessity, which proceeds from the choice of what is best, with absolute necessity: he confounds the will of God, with his power. God can produce every thing that is possible, or whatever does not imply a contradiction; but he wills only to produce what is the best among things possible.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus God does not act compelled by sheer necessity, but moved by the choice of His will; nevertheless, His choice is determined by His wisdom, which is why, of all possible courses of action, He selects only the very best.

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<sup>8</sup> The essence of the progress of his thinking from the rationality of being to God and from God to the perfection of the created Universe Leibniz outlined in a list of twenty four theses left in manuscript. See Louis COUTURAT, *Opuscles et fragments inédits de Leibniz* (Paris: Alcan, 1903), 533–535.

<sup>9</sup> G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Theodicy*, the quoted edition, 128.

<sup>10</sup> It has been observed that the God of modern philosophers, and in particular Descartes and Leibniz, is the Being whose essence is to be a creator; see Étienne GILSON, *God and philosophy* (London: Yale University Press, 1941), chapter III.

<sup>11</sup> *The Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, ed. Hubert G. Alexander (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956), 81.

God's choice is always the only one that is really possible for Him, not because there are no other courses of action open to Him, but because any other choice would be worse than the one taken, and the infinite wisdom of God always chooses the better and never the worse.<sup>12</sup>

The range of possibilities out of which God selects the very best ones is nevertheless delimited by the principle of contradiction: only that is really possible which is not inherently contradictory nor does it imply contradiction. Leibniz distinguishes two aspects of the principle of contradiction: logical and metaphysical. The principle of contradiction defines not merely the nature of human thinking but also the nature of the world; that means that it is not merely the case that we cannot think without respecting this principle, but it is also the case that nothing can physically exist if it fails to agree with the rule of non-contradiction. In his debate with Clarke Leibniz directly affirms that non-contradiction is what defines the essence of reality:

And I have sufficiently shown in my *Theodicy*, that this moral necessity is a good thing, agreeable to the divine perfection; agreeable to the great principle or ground of existences, which is that of the want of a sufficient reason: whereas absolute and metaphysical necessity, depends upon the other great principle of our reasonings, viz., that of essences; that is, the principle of identity or contradiction: for, what is absolutely necessary, is the only possible way, and its contrary implies a contradiction.<sup>13</sup>

The principle of contradiction is thus defined as the principle of essences, by this Leibniz points to its ontological aspect that is to its regulative role in the processes actually going on in the Universe. The principle of contradiction not only delimits the domain of our coherent thinking processes, it also defines the realm of possible occurrences within the world; thus nothing can physically exist that is intrinsically contradictory.

It is legitimate to say that the principle of contradiction constitutes the frame within which the finite human mind moves, but for Leibniz it was obvious that also the infinite mind of God is confined to the limits of non-con-

<sup>12</sup> Thus for God the principle of sufficient reason is at the same time the principle of the choice of the best and the most perfect possibility. See Stephen GROVER, "West Or Best? Sufficient Reason in the Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence," *Studia Leibnitiana* 28 (1996), 1: 84–92.

<sup>13</sup> *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, 57. What precisely are the both kinds of necessity referred to in the passage Leibniz explained to Clarke as follows: "For we must distinguish between an absolute and an hypothetical necessity. We must also distinguish between a necessity, which takes place because the opposite implies a contradiction; (which necessity is called logical, metaphysical, or mathematical;) and a necessity which is moral, whereby, a wise being chooses the best, and every mind follows the strongest inclination." *Ibidem*, 56.

tradiction. Non-contradiction is binding on God no less than it is on man; perhaps it binds God even more strongly than man, for its power stretches both to His mind and to His will. Whereas man can think erroneously without noticing he has fallen into contradiction, God never errs and thus is always free from contradiction; whereas man can harbour contradictory desires, God's will is uniformly determined by Himself as the Supreme Good.<sup>14</sup> On the strength of the principle of sufficient reason God chooses from among infinitely many possible worlds the one that is the very best; yet on the strength of the principle of contradiction among the infinitely many possible worlds there is no single world that is inherently contradictory, for on this principle only that is possible, whose existence does not imply any logical contradiction. In other words, since God's thinking creates reality, there is no room for any contradiction, either in the divine thought or in the divine work of creation. Leibniz in a way identifies God and the first principles. He emphatically affirms that neither the principle of sufficient reason nor the one of contradiction imposes any limitation upon God's omnipotence, on the contrary, the principle of contradiction makes God's all-power manifest in the creation.

The principle of contradiction, along with other primary principles, is a feature of God's very nature, it determines in a way both the thought and the will of God; it is a kind of emanation of God's mind. God is infinite power, infinite wisdom and infinite goodness and He is in Himself absolute non-contradiction. The consequence of this is that He of necessity abides by the laws He Himself establishes; Leibniz often emphasized: "But here it must be said, with regard to the moral aspect, that God being supremely wise cannot fail to observe certain laws, and to act according to the rules, as well physical as moral, that wisdom has made him choose."<sup>15</sup> There is more to this assertion than the simple statement that God always remains faithful to his own decrees, never changes them and, consequently, we may be absolutely certain that He will never alter the established laws of nature, the principles of human thinking nor the moral sense He had implanted in us. Leibniz makes a much stronger assertion that God cannot change the principles of the operation of the created things, that He could not possibly create a reality that would be governed by other principles than these actually in operation, and could not even entertain a wish for a different creation than the actual one.

So God is in a way bound by the principle of sufficient reason and his field of activity is in a way determined by the principle of contradiction, yet,

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Theodicy*, 427–429.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, 139–140.

according to Leibniz's meaning, this circumstance not only does not make Him unfree and circumscribed but, on the contrary, it manifests His absolute freedom. God alone is absolutely free, for He alone is the absolute reason for any existence and the absolute non-contradiction. The absolutely free Omnipotent God has created the best of all possible worlds and, as a matter of fact, He could not have created any different world. Thus, thanks to God, we live in the very best of all possible worlds, and, thanks to Leibniz, we are aware of this truth. Yet, in spite of the compelling power of Leibniz's deduction, we are not able to believe this.

## II

The Biblical account of the creation of the world says that God Himself, when calling into existence the successive elements of reality, at each successive act appreciated the created element and found it good. Then He repeated his positive evaluation at the end of his work of creation: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." (Gen. 1:31).<sup>16</sup> These words can be taken as an assertion, that not only single elements of creation are good, but so is the world taken in its totality. However, this happy beginning was followed by two disasters of cosmic dimensions, whose result was corruption of God's excellent work of creation. The first of these disasters was the fall of some angels: one part of the number of pure spirits for some reason went into rebellion against God, despite having enjoyed the beatific vision of God face to face. The other catastrophe was the commission of the sin of disobedience by the first humans; the created parents of humankind made use of their free will contrary to the will of God. As a consequence of these two events reality became corrupted and presently it is no longer as good as it was on the day of creation: there appeared physical evil as a consequence of angels' rebellion and moral evil resulted from the sin committed by the first parents. Ever since the general perception of humankind has been that the world we inhabit is no longer the best world possible.

Christianity brought with itself the hope that the present corrupted world will pass away and give way to a new reality. The prophecy of a "new heaven" and a "new earth" to come is found in the Book of Revelation, which is the closing book of the New Testament: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new

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<sup>16</sup> All Biblical citation from: *The Holy Bible. New International Version. Containing The Old Testament and The New Testament* (New York: American Bible Society, 1978).

earth, for the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea” (Rev. 21:1). A similar belief inspired Saint Peter the Apostle, who wrote in his second epistle: “The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare” (2 Peter 3:10).<sup>17</sup> The Apostle is strongly convinced that God will call a new reality into being, one that is going to be free of every imperfection: “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). However, it is far from clear what exactly is meant by the “new heaven” and the “new earth”: should we expect annihilation of the presently existent and creation of entirely new heaven and earth, or is rather that which is implied just a renovation and a restoration of our present heaven and earth to their primeval perfection.

Judging by the literal meaning of the quoted passages, one might think that implied in them is the idea of an entirely new creation; yet all the Church Fathers that commented on this subject unanimously stressed, that this final transformation will not be a new act of creation but a renovation and a restoration of one and only reality that God created as good, but which nevertheless underwent corruption. As an example of the position adopted by the Fathers let us quote St. Cyril of Jerusalem on the Second Coming of Christ:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, then, comes from heaven; and He comes with glory at the end of this world, in the last day. For of this world there is to be an end, and this created world is to be re-made anew. For since corruption, *and theft, and adultery*, and every sort of sins *have been poured forth over the earth, and blood has been mingled with blood* (Hosea 4,2) in the world, therefore, that this wondrous dwelling-place may not remain filled with iniquity, this world passes away, that the fairer world may be made manifest. And would you receive the proof of this out of the words of Scripture? Listen to Isaiah, saying, *And the heaven shall be rolled together as a scroll; and all the stars shall fall, as leaves from a vine, and as leaves fall from a fig-tree* (Isaiah 34, 4). The Gospel also says, *The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven* (Matthew 24, 29). Let us not sorrow, as if we alone died; the stars also shall die; but perhaps rise again. And the Lord rolls up the heavens, not that He may destroy them, but that He may raise them up again more beautiful.<sup>18</sup>

In this quoted passage the end of the present world and the coming of the next are not construed as an annihilation of the old and creation of the new

<sup>17</sup> In some manuscripts instead of “be laid bare” is “be burnet up.”

<sup>18</sup> SAINT CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Catechetical Lecture* 15, 3, New Advent, accessed 11.10.2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310115.htm>.

one, but are clearly presented as a perfecting transformation of the already existent Universe. Saint Augustine is equally, if not more, resolute in rejecting any possibility of annihilation of God-created reality, as he writes in his *magnum opus*, *The City of God*:

For when the judgment is finished, this heaven and earth shall cease to be, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. For this world shall pass away by transmutation, not by absolute destruction. And therefore the apostle says, "For the figure of this world passeth away. I would have you be without anxiety." The figure, therefore, passes away, not the nature.<sup>19</sup>

Quoting St. Paul's words concerning the "passing away of the figure of this world," Augustine, drawing upon the implied distinction between figure and nature, emphasizes the fact that only the former passes away, while the nature of the world will remain the same as the one originally created by God.

At the council convoked in Constantinople in 543 A.D. with the purpose of examining and evaluating the views of Origen, one of his tenets that met with severe censure and condemnation concerned the total annihilation of matter at the end of the present world, so that the new reality to come would be entirely spiritual in nature:

If anyone shall say that the future judgment signifies the destruction of the body and that the end of the story will be an immaterial φύσις, and that thereafter there will no longer be any matter, but only spirit (νοῦς): let him be anathema.<sup>20</sup>

From the theological point of view an affirmation of annihilation of the whole created reality and undertaking by God an entirely new work of creation would be tantamount to acknowledging that the original creation was not really "good", but contained a flaw; yet this would be in contradiction with the thesis of absolute perfection of God. The solution adopted by the Fathers is in agreement with common-sense practical rationality: if something good has been spoiled, yet not damaged beyond repair, it is reasonable to restore it to its former goodness rather than completely destroy it.

On the ground of Christian faith one is, therefore, obliged to acknowledge that the world in which we live can be transformed; and transformed it will

<sup>19</sup> AUGUSTINE, *The City of God*, XX, 14, trans. Marcus Dods, *New Advent*, accessed 11.10.2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120120.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> *The Anathemas Against Origen*, Canon XI, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, accessed 11.10.2016, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.xii.ix.html>.

be: profoundly renovated to become the world of the saved humans. Jesus says: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). For Christians these words are the foundation of the faith that the kingdom of Jesus will become reality; the kingdom of Jesus, which is a new world, free of all flaws and imperfections. This faith in turn engenders hope for an eternal life in a profoundly transformed reality.

### III

On the basis of two fundamental principles: the principle of contradiction and the one of sufficient reason—Leibniz argued that God created the very best of all possible worlds. This means, first, that it is not possible for God to create a better world than ours, for this would be contrary to the principle of contradiction. Secondly, this implies that any substantial change to our present world would result in making this world worse than it is now, as follows from the principle of sufficient reason. In the language of theology this means that God could not create a world that would not undergo some corruption, but this also implies that removing this corruption would be a change for the worse. At least this last mentioned consequence of Leibniz’s standpoint appears to remain in contradiction to the Christian teaching.

In many places in his *Theodicy* Leibniz referred to the problem of salvation, yet he approached this problem solely with respect to the number of the saved humans, which, according to him would be incomparably less than the number of the damned; naturally, the question arises, how this fact, foreseen and approved by God at the moment of creation, could be reconciled with almighty God’s absolute goodness and benevolence. For Leibniz, there is no doubt, and he consistently makes this point in his arguments, that there is no, nor could there be any, contradiction between the absolute goodness of God and the eternal condemnation of most of his creatures. Essential from the point of view of the present discussion is the fact that Leibniz’s position with regard to the problem of salvation shows that he accepted the Christian belief in the coming kingdom of Jesus, which is reality free from any corruption whatever, in which the blessed will eternally live. He remains silent, however, on the ontological status of this coming world as compared with the actually existing one. Nevertheless, there appears to be only one plausible explanation of Leibniz’s silence: for him the actually existing and the future transformed worlds are not two different universes, but two figures of

one and the same God-made reality, reality that is the very best of all possible ones. To articulate this idea differently, the world produced by God, one in number and the only one that could have been created, can develop and thus become a different world exactly in the same way in which a man, developing and achieving perfection (or, conversely, degenerating) can become a “different” man in the process while remaining himself all along.

Thus, we arrive at the question arising from these considerations: namely what forms the ontological ground of the world, the unchangeable substrate of everything changeable.

European philosophy evolved the conception of substance as the ontological substratum that has no need for any further ontological ground in which to exist, that exists in itself and by itself and thus is the ontological ground for all attributes and properties. Leibniz developed his own understanding of substance, which was different from the conceptions of both ancient and modern philosophers. The evolution of modern science seemed to undermine the grounds of the very concept of substance, yet to Leibniz this criticism appeared unacceptable because of his concern to work out a reconciliation between metaphysics and religion. On the other hand, he needed the concept of substance in his physics, substance being that constitutive element of reality that was capable of generating changes in itself. The conception of substance he elaborated was profoundly original, yet it remains as difficult to accept as is his thesis of the actual world as the best world possible.<sup>21</sup>

According to Leibniz’s theory the ontological foundation of the world consists of monads. The philosopher himself explains what a monad is, “*A substance is a being capable of action. It is simple or composite. A simple substance is that which has no parts. A composite substance is a collection of simple substances, or monads. Monas is a Greek word signifying unity, or what is one.*”<sup>22</sup> For Leibniz it was evident that the simple substances, that is monads, must be immaterial. Any particle of matter is divisible in infinity, thus by dividing anything material we never reach ultimate, indivisible parts; in the world of matter there is no absolutely fundamental constitutive

<sup>21</sup> An introduction to Leibniz’s theory of substance which is both lucid and widely accessible yet at the same time free from simplifications can be found in: Franklin PERKINS, *Leibniz: A Guide for Perplexed* (London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 61–107.

<sup>22</sup> G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason*, in AG, 207. He wrote in a similar vein in the *The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology*: “*The Monad [...] is nothing but a simple substance that enters into composites—simple, that is, without parts.*” AG, 213. Leibniz also refers to the monads as “metaphysical points” and “formal atoms.”

element. On the other hand, immaterial elements cannot combine to form anything material, so the material universe is not a composition of immaterial substances. Then what is the material universe in its essence? It can only be one of two things: either a mere illusion or a real phenomenon engendered by the monads. Leibniz famously opts for the latter possibility, in one of his letters he explains his conception by adducing the example of a rainbow, “In just the same way a rainbow is not improperly said to be a thing, even though it is not a substance, that is, it is said to be a phenomenon, a real or well-founded that doesn’t disappoint our expectations based on what precedes. And indeed, not only sight but also touch has its phenomena.”<sup>23</sup>

So the material universe is not anything substantial in nature, its nature is purely phenomenal. Nevertheless, all that which enters into the constitution of this phenomenon, namely space, extension, the multiplicity of things and appearances, are “well-founded” phenomena. Just as a rainbow is a well-founded phenomenon for the sense of sight, so any tangible material thing is a well-founded phenomenon for the sense of touch. The relationship between the monads and the world of well-founded phenomena is characterized by Leibniz in terms of the “doctrine of expression,” a theory invented by himself to describe the relations obtaining between the real world of the monads and the phenomenal physical world. This theory can, most generally, be summarized in the following statements: each monad contains the expression of the whole universe, although each expresses the universe in a different degree; God, being the supreme and the only non-created monad, fully expresses and comprehends in His perception the whole Universe created by Himself and every element entering into the constitution thereof.<sup>24</sup>

Leaving out some particular aspects of Leibniz’s theory of the monads, let us focus our attention on the way he constructs his system. Now everything that Leibniz has to say on the monads is obtained by means of deductive thinking: from the definition of the monad as the elementary immaterial component of reality Leibniz derives by deduction the whole of his metaphysics. First of all, given that the monad is a substance that is simple, which

<sup>23</sup> G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Letter to de Volder*, 1704 or 1705, in AG, 182.

<sup>24</sup> As Leibniz explained to Antoine Arnauld, “each individual substance expresses the whole universe entirely in its way and according to a certain relation, or, so to speak, in accordance with the point of view from which it regards it; and that its subsequent state is a consequence (although free, or contingent) of its preceding state, as if there were only it and God in the world.” G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Letter to Arnauld*, 4/14 July 1686, in Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *Philosophical Texts*, trans. and ed. R.S. Woolhouse and Richard Francks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 112.

means that it is indivisible, it follows that the monad is a spiritual substance and not corporeal, for any corporeal substance is divisible. From the indivisibility of the monad follows its simplicity, for only what is divisible is composed of parts, into which it can be decomposed. The simplicity of the monad implies in its turn that only God can produce it, and only God can annihilate it, for any created agent, for instance man, can only produce things by putting together already existent elements, and destroy them by separating these elements.

It further follows, however, that the monads, being simple, cannot act upon or influence one another, thus any development within a monad can only be a result of self-modification. Thus every modification occurring within a monad is produced by that monad itself, and the sufficient reason for every such modification is a preceding modification within the same monad. As a monad is a spiritual substance, it can only modify itself by changing its inner representations; consequently, the life and activity of a monad consists in the inner production of representations.

Given that the monads have no contact with one another and thus cannot affect one another, the cause-effect relations we observe within the world are a result of an external act to the world. As God created the monads, He implanted in each monad a sequence of representations that corresponded with the sequences of representations of all the other monads, thus representations of all the monads have the same order. Leibniz affirmed that there exists in the world a “pre-established harmony, which relates each substance to all the others.”<sup>25</sup>

The appealing vision of the Universe depicted by Leibniz is a reflection of the beauty inherent in the coherence of logical thinking. God, in His wisdom, created the monads and projected into each of them an ordered set of representations so that each sequence of representations is both unique and, at the same time, in correspondence with the analogous sequence of representations present in every other monad. The ordering principle for all these sets of representation is the cause-effect relationship.

God eternally knows all the sequences of representations ordered by the cause-effect relation in all the created monads and eternally conceives them as mutually synchronized. So every created monad is so related to all the others, that whatever change occurs in a given monad, there occurs a corresponding change in other monads. Every monad potentially contains in itself

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<sup>25</sup> G.W. LEIBNIZ, *Letter to Coste, on Human Freedom*, 19 December 1707, in AG, 195.

all possible states, and an actualization of a given state is the appropriate response to analogous changes occurring elsewhere in the world. Every monad can be said to be perfect in itself and it forms a part of the universal perfect order, eternally established by God. Within this order every alteration occurring in a monad is conditioned by the immediately preceding state, so that successive occurrences form an unbroken sequence in which every preceding state contains in itself every future one: "I have always said that the present is pregnant with the future, and that there is a perfect interconnection between things, no matter how distant they are from one another."<sup>26</sup> In his *Theodicy*, Leibniz emphasizes that the sequence of successive causes and effects established by God is stable, unchangeable and is the object of the divine perception:

It is true that God sees all at once the whole sequence of this universe, when he chooses it, and that thus he has no need of the connexion of effects and causes in order to foresee these effects. But since his wisdom causes him to choose a sequence in perfect connexion, he cannot but see one part of the sequence in the other. It is one of the rules of my system of general harmony, that *the present is big with the future*, and that he who sees all sees in that which is that which shall be. What is more, I have proved conclusively that God sees in each portion of the universe the whole universe, owing to the perfect connexion of things.<sup>27</sup>

So, in Leibniz's metaphysics, the created world is composed of discreet substances, produced immediately by God, each of them an absolute unity. God has conceived and formed the Universe as a system of monads, so the monads must have existed since the beginning of the created Universe, they persist throughout time and will continue in existence eternally.

Since the monads have no parts, they can neither be formed nor destroyed. They can neither begin nor end naturally, and consequently they last as long as the universe, which will be changed but not destroyed.<sup>28</sup>

As we can see, the best of all possible worlds cannot be changed in its essence, yet it can assume diverse forms, evolve through successive stages of its existence, in accordance with the divinely approved plan. Thus Leibniz's metaphysics agrees with the view of the Church Fathers that at the end of time the existing world will not be destroyed, only transformed. Perhaps

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<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, 195.

<sup>27</sup> G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Theodicy*, 341.

<sup>28</sup> G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason*, in AG, 207.

one could say, without betraying Leibniz's meaning, that the actual world is the best of all possible ones for God could not have created another one, yet this best of all possible worlds evolves through diverse phases, and from man's subjective point of view the present phase, the one in which we live is not the very best period in the world's development.

#### IV

One might summarize the Christian message as follows: God created the Universe as good throughout, but then this world underwent corruption and consequently sank to a lower degree of goodness. However, there will be moment in its history that this world will be reformed and it then will become even better than it was at the start, as man will be enriched in his humanity by his experiences from the period of corruption.

Leibniz's monadological conception of the world remains in agreement with this message. It also remains in agreement with the belief, evident on the ground of Christian outlook, that anything that comes about in the world has been planned by God, that is to say, God has predetermined in the moment of creation all the sequences of events to take place within the realm of creation, for, of course, nothing can occur in the world that would be unknown to, or independent of, Him. In still another, theological, formulation, God created the world, in which, after the initial phase of existence in Paradise, there followed the period of corrupted condition, but then the third stage, namely that of reformed reality will come, which will be the condition of eternal salvation for some, while for others it is going to be eternal damnation. The theory of monads, according to which the past is pregnant with that which is to come in the future, is but the philosophical explanation and justification of that view. And this course of events, predetermined by God, is the best one possible.

On the ground and within the framework of Leibniz's theory one can give a theological (or simply humanly comprehensible) explanation, why the course of events outlined in the Christian view should be the best possible one. The starting point of this explanation is the following thesis: man becomes fully conscious of his humanity not owing to an undisturbed existence in the presence of God, but thanks to his striving toward God. Adam and Eve were created humans by God, yet they could not possibly be conscious of their own humanity so long as they happily dwelled in Paradise. God was

then so close to themselves, so much nearby at their side and at the same time so much within and engulfing everything else, that He as though absorbed themselves and closed in His own existence. And when God is too close, man cannot see himself, cannot become aware of his humanity, as his consciousness is totally filled with the awareness of God's presence. Since it is not conceivable that God may abandon man, man must leave God in order to return to Him, as this is the only way for man to become conscious of his own humanity. God gives man freedom and an opportunity to make a choice; allows man to separate from Him and reduces Himself to waiting for man to come back. True, God manifests His wrath against those who have sinned; yet in God all acts and attributes merge into one reality, thus God's anger is but an aspect of His yearning for a man who has gone astray; for a lost man, who has yet to find out his way home. God decided, that man would go away from Him, so that, straying on the paths of his freedom, he might some time find his way back to Him. Original sin was foreseen and approved by God as the starting point for man coming to an awareness of his own humanity; as the beginning of the return journey to God, which man would have to make before he can stand before God in the fullness of his humanity.

Still, the question arises, whether this journey of man's return to God, as foreseen and approved by the Creator as an indispensable part of the best possible sequence of events does necessarily have to lead through the Communist Gulag camps, the Nazi concentration camps, countless battlefields, and the seas of human pain, suffering and wrongdoing?

To this question Leibniz has only an indirect answer, and the premise thereof is the thesis he indefatigably argues for, namely that this world, being created by the unique, absolutely perfect God, is the best of all possible worlds and every other conceivable world would be worse than this one. Does this mean that man, journeying toward God through a world without natural calamities, genocide, crime, meanness and treason would never attain to the fullness of humanity? Or perhaps, by means of evil and suffering God can set those predestined for salvation apart from those who will be eternally damned? Yet it was Himself who created both those to be saved and those to be damned and who assigned in advance each of them their destiny... Leibniz contended that such in advance assignment of destiny does not stand in contradiction with the thesis that God bestowed free will on man.. This and other paradoxes can be deduced from Leibniz's position, but all of them will be argued against on the ground that God cannot create, indeed, He cannot even wish to create anything that is not the best possible of its kind.

Of course, from the mere fact that reality created by God is such as it is and is governed by such laws as we find in the world it does not follow that God could not have created a different reality with different laws. In order for such an inference to be valid, one more premise is needed, namely the thesis that created reality is what it is because God's nature is such and no other. The problem is that we are rather assured that neither Leibniz nor any other man whatever, cannot possess immediate knowledge of God's nature. And indeed, Leibniz's reasoning does not progress from God's nature to the nature of created reality, but the other way round: from the fact that created reality is what it is, one ought to conclude what God's nature must be like. In fact Leibniz characterizes God as though an assured knowledge of the nature of the Absolute Being was given to him. In a way he is entitled to make such a claim, his supposed knowledge follows from his *implicite* accepted assumption that human mind is a reflection or copy on a finite scale of God's infinite mind. That is to say the content and the principles of operation of both God's mind and human mind are identical in their essence and only differ as to power and scope. He seems to regard this assumption as so evident, that he sees no need to give any justification of it. Looking into his own mind, Leibniz thought he got a representation of God's mind, analyzing the operation of his own intelligence, he thought he could discover the principles of the operation of the Creator of this human intelligence that is of God's mind. This was as though by analyzing the operation of a clockwork mechanism he could discover the principles of operation of the clockmaker. Such an assumption would be plausible if it did not rest on an unstated premise that the clockmaker's mind does not and cannot contain other principles of thought than the ones he employs in constructing the clockwork mechanism. One hundred years later David Hume wrote: "the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence."<sup>29</sup> Leibniz was convinced, however, that the resemblance between the principle of universal order and human intelligence was not a remote analogy but a close copying.

Yet the very assumption that man, with his finite mind, should be able to capture the nature of God's mind is surprising and appears to imply a contradiction; though this contradiction went unnoticed by those, who assumed that the principle of contradiction captures the universal essence of all things. How can finite human mind affirm its own nature to be also the

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<sup>29</sup> David HUME, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (London: s.e., 1779), 262.

nature of infinity? What might be a possible basis for such an assertion? However, Leibniz appears not to have posed this question; he seems to have been fascinated by the discoveries made in his century of magnitudes that are infinitely great and those that are infinitely small, the discoveries accomplished, after all, by the finite human mind; he must have felt the power of his own mind that enabled him to create the infinitesimal calculus. All this inspired a conviction that God Himself, when creating the Universe and maintaining it in existence, must have followed the principles discovered and explored in mathematics. *Cum Deus calculat et cogitationem exercet, fit mundus*—he wrote in the margin of one of his texts.<sup>30</sup> He entertained no doubts that the mind of God is a mathematical mind, it surpasses human mind only by its power, not by its essence. To complete the analogy between the divine and human minds one more step is required, namely to assume that man's free will is a copy of the divine freedom of will. By making this step Leibniz completed his reconstruction of the divine mind, a reconstruction following the pattern of his own mind; true, a finite mind, yet at the same time the mind of a genius.

The point of departure of Leibniz's philosophy is thus the apprehension of the essential identity of the nature of his own finite mind with the nature of the Creator of his mind. God appears to Leibniz as a mind not unlike his own, whose power, however, is magnified to infinity. God is no other than Infinite Mind, whose finite image is human mind. Between the Mind and a mind there is no other difference than that of power and scope. That is why Leibniz makes bold to judge that he can discover the nature of God's mind, the nature that is delimited by the characteristics that are the same in nature as the features of his own human mind. And, since Leibniz's mind was the mind of a genius, he found no difficulty in arguing that these delimiting traits of God's mind do not detract from God's omnipotence and that his conception of God does not violate the principle of contradiction.

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<sup>30</sup> In the essay entitled *Dialogus* from 1677; see *Die Philosophischen Schriften von G.W. Leibniz*, vol. VII, ed. Carl Immanuel Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidmann, 1890), 190–193 (with reference to a note on p. 191); an English translation in AG, 268–272. On the integral unity of the mathematical and the metaphysical thinking in Leibniz see Christia MERCER, "Leibniz on Mathematics, Methodology and the Good: A Reconsideration of the Place of Mathematics in Leibniz's Philosophy," *Early Science and Medicine* 11 (2006), 4: 424–454. "His concern with theological matters (in particular his commitment that the world be a proper expression of God) encouraged his mathematical work, while his keen interest with infinitesimals and related matters informed his conception of divinely harmonized minds." *Ibidem*, 441.

Descartes experienced the immediate certainty of his own existence, Leibniz experienced the certainty of the existence of God; it was probably the immediacy of that experience that accounted for the fact that to Leibniz, the God of his philosophy and the God of Christian faith was one and the same God. Yet Leibniz's God was exclusively a being deduced from the philosopher's mind. Leibniz knows his God by means of his intellect, starting from premises that he finds in his own mind, arriving at conclusions describing God's nature that belong to his intellect. His conscious affirmation of these premises is as strong and indubitable as is the Cartesian self-consciousness. This is why Leibniz cannot become aware of the fact, that he constructs his God rather than coming to know Him; using the Cartesian term one may say that Leibniz never gets aware that his idea of God is the idea made or invented by himself.<sup>31</sup> Consequently he cannot realize that his theorizing about God is just a kind of intellectual play. And no construction of the intellect alone, however brilliant, is able to meet the existential queries and anxieties of man, who, confronted with the evil of the world, will find no consolation in the elegant coherence of abstract deductive reasoning.

For one very peculiar feature of this best of all possible worlds is the fact that the soil produced by decomposition and putrefaction enables growth of living plants that bear fruit, while the noble diamond, beautiful in its perfect geometry, remains barren and sterile.

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<sup>31</sup> In the third of his famous *Meditations on First Philosophy* Descartes presents his division of ideas into three kinds: "To consider now the ideas [that are strictly so called], some appear to me to be innate, others to be adventitious, that is to say foreign to me and coming from without, and others to be made or invented by me." René DESCARTES, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: The Modern Library, 1958), 196–197. Thus according to Descartes the ideas "made or invented" by one are all the ideas produced by the mind itself by means of putting together innate and adventitious ideas.

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ŚWIAT NAJLEPSZY Z MOŻLIWYCH  
A CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKA TEZA O SKAŻENIU ŚWIATA

Streszczenie

Twierdzenie Leibniza, że świat, w którym żyjemy, jest najlepszym z możliwych, pozostaje w sprzeczności z naszym doświadczeniem i dlatego utrzymujemy, że ten świat stałby się lepszy, gdyby przynajmniej niektóre z jego cech i właściwości były inne. Leibniz protestował przeciwko takiemu stanowisku i argumentował, że każda zmiana tego świata uczyniłaby go gorszym albo wręcz niemożliwym. To jednak zdaje się przeczyć chrześcijańskiemu przekonaniu, że nasz świat jest skażony grzechem, ale u kresu czasu zostanie odnowiony, stając się rzeczywistością zbawienia, czyli najdoskonalszą z możliwych. W artykule uzasadnia się dwie tezy: (1) twierdzenie Leibniza nie pozostaje w sprzeczności z chrześcijańską tezą o zbawieniu, (2) twierdzenie Leibniza jest sprzeczne z ludzkim doświadczeniem świata, ponieważ jest rezultatem intelektualnej spekulacji opartej na fałszywym założeniu o adekwatności struktury umysłu ludzkiego względem umysłu Boga.

THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS AND THE CHRISTIAN  
BELIEF IN THE CONTAMINATION OF THE WORLD

Summary

Leibniz's claim that we live in the best of all possible worlds is in contradiction with our experience, which is why we tend to maintain that the world would become better if at least some

of its properties and characteristics were different. Leibniz criticized such an approach and argued that every attempt at changing the world would make it worse, or even impossible. His claim seems to be in contradiction with the Christian belief that our world is contaminated with sin, but it will be renewed in the end to become the reality of salvation, i.e. the best of all possible realities. This article puts forward two arguments: (1) Leibniz's claim is not in contradiction with the Christian belief in salvation; (2) Leibniz's claim is in contradiction with the human experience of the world because it is a result of an intellectual speculation based on the false assumption that the structure of the human mind adequately corresponds to the mind of God.

**Key words:** Leibniz; the best of all possible worlds; the contamination of the world; salvation.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Leibniz; najlepszy z możliwych światów; skażenie świata; zbawienie.

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