

## LEIBNIZ

There was a rebellion on the part of some philosophers in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries against what was taken to be mechanistic materialism of the scientific revolution of Copernicus, Galileo and Descartes. These philosophers included George Berkeley and Gottfried Leibniz. We will consider Leibniz first.

Gottfried Leibniz (died 1716) also thought the mechanical theory of matter and causation was deficient. He had himself once been attracted to atomistic materialism and, when he was a young man, corresponded with the person he thought was its greatest modern exponent, Thomas Hobbes. Later, he came to think that there were severe difficulties in this view of nature. Unlike Berkeley, Leibniz did not reject the concept of mechanical causality altogether. It is a valid concept up to a point, he said in his mature writings. What must be understood, he said is that the validity of the idea of mechanical causation is compatible with there also being a non-mechanical form of causation that is really present in the way things work. This non-mechanical form of causation is not a new idea that Leibniz was advocating. It is Aristotle's idea of final causation. Leibniz thought that those (such as Bacon and Galileo) who had attacked this part of Aristotle's philosophy had gone too far by banishing it completely from science.

To speak of a thing's final cause is to refer to its purposes, functions or goals. To say that a thing has final causes does not necessarily mean that it has no mechanical causes and vice versa. Cartesian mechanical philosophy cannot explain various natural phenomena such as hardness, magnetism, generation of living beings or the recovery from disease or injury. The old doctrine of final causes had been invoked in part to explain such phenomena. According to Leibniz, an event can be both a mechanical outcome of prior events and a means to some end that Nature pursues.

Not only is it logically acceptable to ask for the final cause as well as for the mechanical cause, we have not given a sufficient explanation of anything until we establish its final cause.

Leibniz tried to revive the ancient and medieval philosophical theme that Nature aims at the Good. What Leibniz added to the ancient and medieval versions of this theme is that there are clear reasons to suppose that Nature employs mechanical causes as a means to good ends. The ancient principle that things are so constituted that they naturally aim at or contribute to some good was transformed in the middle ages into the principle that God has so created things that each thing contributes in its way to the well-being of humanity, and that this well-being consists of a harmonious and loving relationship with God.

This was called the principle of Grace. All evil or unhappiness in the world, according to the medieval version of the principle of Grace, can only be due to human sinfulness. Leibniz tried to make this idea more plausible by arguing that even the human capacity for sin is really something that contributes to the overall goodness of the world. More about this later.

Leibniz also opposed the totally mechanical conception of matter that is presented in Descartes' philosophy. According to Descartes, matter is totally inert, has no force or power of action in itself. All force is the result of motion. According to Descartes, the only created things that have a power of action within themselves are human minds. Minds and bodies are completely different kinds of things for Descartes and he argued that nonhuman animals do not have minds, only mechanical responses to stimuli.

Leibniz pointed out that the original philosophical notion of the soul was that the soul is the principle of life. There can be no minds, no intelligence or rationality without living substance. But there is no reason to deny that there are souls that are not rational (human) beings.

Some souls, such as those of dogs and horses are not rational in the sense that they cannot know eternal truths of Logic, mathematics, ethics, etc. but these animals have souls nevertheless. Non-human animals are capable of an inferior sort of knowledge, empirical knowledge of particular observable things. They act from memory of associated past experiences. But, Leibniz argued, the same is true of human beings in 3/4 of their actions.

Descartes tried to replace the (Aristotelian) principle of life with a purely mechanical set of principles. Nonhuman creatures are essentially just robots made by God. Leibniz rejects this part of Descartes's philosophy, and along with this he rejects Descartes conception of Matter. Just as there can be no power of thought except in a living being, so there can be no life except as a property of some sort of body.

Furthermore, Leibniz argued, no body is totally inert, not even inorganic things. There is a force of action (*vis viva*) inherent in all substances. There is no matter without force and no force without matter, with the exception of God. Material things not only follow mechanical laws, they also act for goals. There is no incompatibility between acting mechanically and acting for a goal. For example, the digestive system is governed by physical and chemical laws and it acts for the general health of the body.

The idea of a harmony between mechanical and goal-directed processes provides the key to solving Descartes' problem of how the mind and body are related to one another. Leibniz argued that Descartes was wrong to assert that minds and bodies interact. They cannot interact because bodies can only move and be moved by other bodies. Perceptions and desires of the mind can only be stimulated by and produce other perceptions and desires. Minds and bodies act as if they interact but they do not really do so. They are in correspondence with each other and this correspondence exists because it is for the best that it exists. This correspondence of minds and bodies is part of a *pre-established harmony* among all things.

Without this, the actual world would not be the best of all possible worlds. But it can be demonstrated that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds.

To do so, one must first present an account of what a rational explanation is.

There are two basic principles of all rational explanation.

1) Contradiction and Identity.

- a) No self-contradictory proposition can be true.
- b) No identical proposition ( $X = X$ ) can be false.

2. Sufficient Reason: For any fact, there must be a sufficient reason why it is a fact rather than some other possibility.

These two principles are the basis for two types of truths.

- 1) Truths of Reason: those propositions whose truth is necessary and whose falsehood is impossible. The sufficient reason of their truth can be demonstrated in a finite series of steps of analysing the definitions of their subject concepts.
- 2) Truths of Fact: those propositions whose truth cannot be demonstrated in any finite series of steps of analysis. Such propositions are contingent.

Primary truths of fact : the particular contents of one's present immediate experience (perceiving, conceiving, willing).

The nature of the world may be disputed, but its existence is beyond doubt.

Descartes' claim that extended bodies are basic kinds of beings is open to some criticism but there was no need for him to have proved their existence. This truth of fact is as certain as any other.

His opinion that the whole essential nature of bodies is extension is deeply flawed. Bodies also have different types and degrees of active and passive powers. Extended things are not basic kinds of things but are the appearances of things that are not essentially extended (souls).

Leibniz argued for this claim on the grounds that extended things are infinitely divisible. So, their smallest parts must have no magnitude. Yet they must be something, even though they are absolutely simple and without parts. They do have various qualities and these qualities change from one time to the next. These changes can only happen according to each of these things' ("monads") internal principles. All of its changes must be the unfolding of its inner nature, which was established by God. An unextended thing's qualities can only be perceptions and appetitions. In the lowest sort of monad, these are totally unconscious states. Descartes was wrong to suppose that all mental states are necessarily conscious.

### **Leibniz's proof for the existence of God based on the Principle of Contradiction and Identity**

- 1) One has an idea of a perfect being (see Descartes' Trademark argument).
- 2) The idea of a perfect being contains no contradictions.
- 3) Existence is a perfection.
- 4) So, God necessarily exists

Regarding premises 2, Descartes neglected the important task of showing that the idea of God contains no contradiction. Leibniz argued for this claim. The essential features of God are His infinite power, infinite will and infinite knowledge. These are logically compatible with each other, according to Leibniz.

## **Leibniz's proof for the existence of God based on the Principle of Sufficient Reason.**

- 1) Something exists ('the world')
- 2) There must be a sufficient reason why there is something (a world of finite, contingent things) rather than nothing.
- 3) The reason for the existence of something contingent can only be another existing thing.
- 4) Even if the world had existed from eternity, there must be a sufficient reason for its existence.
- 5) Only something that exists necessarily could be a sufficient reason for the existence of the world because a thing that existed contingently would require a sufficient reason for its existence that comes from something else.
- 6) Only God would be a necessarily existent thing since only He would have a sufficient reason of his existence simply from the absolute perfection of his nature. (See the argument based on the Principle of contradiction and Identity)
- 7) There is a God who is the sufficient reason for the existence of the world.

## **Leibniz on problem of Evil.**

- 1) Infinitely many worlds other than the actually existing world are possible.
- 2) There must be a sufficient reason why this world actually exists instead of one of the infinitely many other possible worlds.
- 3) There must be some real difference between any two beings.

- 4) So, the actual world must be different in some ways from all other possible worlds. These differences must be the sufficient reason why this world exists and the others do not.
- 5) Since the world exists because it was created by a perfectly benevolent god, it must be better than all other possible worlds. It must be the world that contains the greatest possible harmonious combination of things. Each thing in it contributes in some way to the harmony of the whole.
- 6) So, everything in the world, even the evils of natural disaster and human sinfulness are necessary parts of this, the best of all possible worlds.