

THE IDEA OF GOD
LOVEJOY VERSUS LEIBNIZ
(1967/1992/2011)

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In his *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) the reknown American historian of ideas A.O. Lovejoy claims to have shown how the Idea of God that has determined Christian thought for nearly two millenia - viz. the idea of an infinite and infinitely perfect Being, incapable of change, the Creator of an imperfect world populated by an evil mankind, is marred by an immanent schism, or contradiction, of a logical nature.

This idea of God is no *unit idea*, but rather an immensely diversified complex consisting of a number of highly diverging components or ingredients, whose core is the antagonism between life on earth and life in heaven beyond, temporal versus eternal. It is true that numerous attempts have been made to conceal the immanent conflict of this conceptualization through verbal sophistry or subtle dialectics, by portraying the antagonistic ingredients as complementary aspects of one and the same divine nature. According to Lovejoy, however, these attempts were doomed to failure from the outset. Such tensions cannot be united within a single being - they constitute an antinomy.

Historically, the result of all these subterfuges has been that moral norms, which were legitimized by reference to the Divine Being, became the object of incessant strife, whereby they became deprived of their authority. These norms can be implemented only in two different attitudes towards existence, attitudes which cannot be reconciled in the same human person. Lovejoy calls these attitudes, which are amply represented throughout the history of Christianity, 'thisworldliness' and 'otherworldliness'.

Lovejoy's book, in many ways well-written and captivating, was accepted with enthusiasm upon its release; and its viewpoints, which have become the foundation of an entire school of thought, seem convincing - at least after a first superficial reading. Lovejoy is still hailed as the founder and "grand old man" of American History of Ideas. His method still meets with approval in certain scholarly circles, and his conclusions - presented as matters of fact - are even today accepted uncritically by his admirers. Lovejoy's own standard reservations with regard to possible errors apparently do not apply to the central theses of his book, as these are stated with a self-assurance which aims at eliminating any possibility of doubt on the part of his reader.

Most disturbing is not so much the fact that his theses are presented as the basis of a critique of viewpoints and reasonings which strike Lovejoy as obtuse - this might easily be forgiven - but rather that they, in all their presumed self-evidence, are taken to substantiate the arrogant conclusion that no other thinker, however cunning, can diverge from his opinion without exposing his personal motives and moral integrity to mistrust. This is comes to the fore in his maltreatment of the philosophic genius of Leibniz.

One might certainly wish to confer more justice on Lovejoy than he is willing to bestow on one of the greatest thinkers of all times - even though it might indeed be difficult to attain that purpose in this brief sketch of his views. Probably the most positive evaluation that can be made of Lovejoy's book is that it is thought-provoking. Here we shall restrict our comments to his discussion of Leibnizian metaphysics.

One might give several reasons for regarding this discussion as representative. Firstly, Leibniz's metaphysics distinguishes itself from those of other philosophers in so far as it incorporates a number of extremely divergent ideas and conjoins them to a totality of admirable consistency - an extremely rich, but nevertheless coherent system. Secondly, those chapters which deal with Leibnizian metaphysics and its relation to Spinozian philosophy seem to be the central chapters in the whole book.

It appears that all of Lovejoy's threads are bound together in these few chapters; here they are gathered up and from here they are dispersed anew and run further. By discussing these chapters, we can elucidate essential aspects of the problem areas of his whole work without focusing on its actual theme, which is the idea of the world as *scala naturalis* and *plenum formarum*. At the same time we can perhaps hope to shed some new light on the *method* proper to the *history of ideas*.

Lovejoy begins by making a comparison between the method of a chemical analyst and the practice of a historian of ideas. Just as the chemist attempts to dissolve an unknown substance into its original components, so - he says - does the historian try to divide a complex of ideas or notions into its basic constituents, its individual ideas. In accordance with this method, a philosophical system can be regarded as an aggregate of independently existing components, or 'unit ideas'.

In Lovejoy's opinion, the task of the historian of ideas is fairly simple, namely to isolate and identify certain timeless atomic ideas and to classify their type in analogy to the periodical table of chemical elements. Clearly, when the problem at hand is the investigation of a philosophical system like that of Leibniz, such a methodology will have devastating consequences for our conceptualization of the object of our inquiry. Moreover, meant as an example illustrating the history of ideas, any analysis that is purely atomistic must be unscientific simply because it is not historical.

The question must likewise be raised as to whether the analogy referred to is postulated as a guiding principle of the inquiry, or whether it be regarded as the actual result of an independent examination. Justified doubts on this issue would appear to be pertinent in judging the validity of the purportedly empirical character of the criticism. Lovejoy does not seem to distinguish clearly at this point, nor does he make reference to other investigations. The way in which his presentation is shaped easily gives the reader a feeling that the result is given in advance on the strength of the guiding principle.

It is therefore not particularly surprising to see that Lovejoy, the historian, thought himself able to pin-point logical inconsistencies in the philosophical system developed by Leibniz, the logician. A similar belief has been upheld by other and more acute thinkers before him. What *is* surprising, however, is the manner in which he exposes the alleged inconsistencies as commonplaces and then proceeds to exploit them as the safe foundation of his own perfidious insinuations.

One can perhaps, to a certain extent, find some reasons for excusing Lovejoy. After Voltaire, it has been the custom of anyone who regards himself as a member of the enlightened *intelligentsia* to take his liberty of haughtily dismissing Leibniz. But is it not the obligation of a serious historian to ignore that kind of prejudice? Lovejoy's attitude towards Leibniz might of course also follow from a rational motive: If he had felt himself compelled to take Leibnizian metaphysics seriously he could not possibly have believed in his own far-reaching conclusions.

However, before we can proceed with this discussion of Lovejoy's objections towards Leibniz, we must attempt to present some of the background for his criticism. Lovejoy traces the essence of Leibnizian metaphysics back to Plato. Like Whitehead, he tends to see the whole of Western philosophy as a series of "footnotes to Plato". The contents of these so-called footnotes emerge in their most complex form in Leibniz, whereas their most consistent expression allegedly is to be found in Spinoza.

Just as the Christian notion of God can be viewed as an accidental conglomerate dissolvable into many different elements, so the Leibnizian concept of God appears to be divided in its core between two conflicting ideas. The first is the idea of the divine as something which is perfect, immutable and eternal, totally self-sufficient, independent of everything else. The second is the idea of divinity as something transcending itself, whose perfection manifests itself in the fact that it is the origin of everything in time; the latter is the idea of a being whose goodness is the ultimate source of creation.

It is now obvious that the opposition between these ideas can be construed as a logical contradiction, and as such it should cease to be of interest to philosophers. Nevertheless, it is a conspicuous fact that, in the course of history, the two ideas in question seem to have been immensely attractive to some of mankind's greatest thinkers

- and that presumably because they have *not* found it incumbent to construe them as contradictory in any direct sense. They have *not* viewed the contradiction as inevitable, since they have found it possible to evade it by way of making distinctions.

Hence, when a historian of ideas after more than two thousand years claims that there must be some misunderstanding, because the Platonic solution to the question of the origin of ideas in the One results in contradiction, it may seem sensational to some. But if one is not disposed to be affected by this kind of proclamation, it is natural to consider whether or not the ideas mentioned above can be united on the basis of a logic somewhat more sophisticated and delicately variegated than that proposed by Lovejoy. The dominant tendency of the age of positivism to dismantle the essential metaphysical questions as 'pseudo-problems' in order to be rid of them for good, anyway, appears today not only unsatisfactory, but also trite, to say the very least.

Plato, who distinguished sharply between the atemporal existence of *ideas* as objects of intellectual *reflection* and the temporal appearance of *phenomena* as objects of sensory *perception*, explained the latter by means of the former: phenomena have no separate or independent existence, but assimilate eternity temporally by participating in the timeless existence of the forms, or ideas. Now the crucial difference is this one: whereas ideas are what they are on their own merits, phenomena manifest themselves as the mimicry of something else inasmuch as they participate in the relevant ideas.

The expression 'participation' remains undefined, and that for a very good reason. In Plato, to explain something (*explanatio*) means referring to the participation of the conditional (*explanandum*) in the unconditional (*explanans*). So the attempt to explain the concept of participation by something else would be equivalent to the attempt to explain the concept of explanation by something else - i.e., by a non-explanation.

According to the myth of the Demiourge, as it was presented in Plato's '*Timaios*', it was the *demiourgos* (God as master or craftsman) who created *kósmos* from *cháos*. And God did this because, in his goodness, he did not know of envy. Since he wanted everything to resemble himself as much as possible he made becoming similar to being, and by the very same act he formed *time* as a 'moving image' of *eternity*. For that reason *kósmos* (world) and *chrónos* (time) were created simultaneously.

Plotinus later adopted Plato's theory of ideas and modified it by changing it into a teaching on the emanation of the world from a divine principle: from original oneness (*hén*) radiates first the divine reason (*noûs*) and, subsequently, the world soul (*psyché*), containing the eternal paradigms of everything; finally, the world of natural phenomena stems from these paradigmatic ideas. Plotinus held that the universe manifests itself as a natural order of precedence, whose lowest level is lost in the twilight of multiplicity.

Here, according to Lovejoy, we see how the answer to the *question of the cause* of existence of itself generates an answer to the *question of the structure* of the universe. The universe constitutes a *hierarchy* of things having an absolute *order* of precedence. It is like a *chain* wherein nothing is omitted and where each individual link is structured by its particular function. The very same law of thought which forced the universe to emerge from the source of goodness does not permit God to leave anything undone. Hence everything possible must eventually be realized. The universe, which reflects the deity, must therefore possess a structure which imitates the perfection of God.

Lovejoy believed this reasoning to prove that the universe could not possibly have been different from what it is, and therefore his central philosophical point is that Platonic essentialism necessarily amounts to Spinozian determinism. I flatly reject that. But to Lovejoy, any consequence which can be construed as absolute determinism is inherently absurd. All existence is temporally conditioned and accordingly contingent, determinism being irrational. I wholly agree with him on this latter issue.

Incidentally, the Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation ends up with a paradox. The hypothesis of the divine emanation appears of necessity to presuppose that a created world of living beings was in itself desirable and that, despite its inevitable imperfection, its creation was an exercise in virtue. How could we else explain that an absolutely perfect, self-sufficient and self-absorbed divine being could suddenly change itself into a self-transgressing source of life? Reason demands an explanation.

But then we must admit that the absolute has become dependent on the relative, that the world of ideas, when imagined without the world of phenomena, is deficient and, accordingly, that the divine would be unable to express its own exalted existence except by creating what is profane. Further, since the perfect is thereby determined to be the origin of the imperfect, so goodness is likewise determined to be the source of evil. In this way imperfection, originally thought of as deficiency, i.e. something innocent, gradually develops into an independent reality: evil incarnate.

Lovejoy's persistent attempt to make nonsense of the Platonic tradition confronts its adherents with a quandary aimed precisely at its most vulnerable point: the liaison between ideas and phenomena. Using modern terms of language, we might speak of *rationality* instead of ideas and of *factuality* instead of phenomena. The quandary is expressible as a dilemma: rationality must be related to factuality either as something transcendent or as something immanent, *tertium non datur*. But if the rational level transgresses the factual, then factual existence is irrational; and if the rational factor penetrates existing facts, then factuality should present itself more rational than it does. Both alternatives seem equally unpleasant and, indeed, unacceptable.

Whether or not Plato can be held responsible for some conceptual difficulties which were first discovered by later thinkers of his tradition remains an open question. Platonic thought was clearly dialectic, and within modern analytical philosophy it is customary to equate dialectics to sophistry. However, it was clearly a matter of urgency for Plato to distinguish his own dialectics from arguments of a sophistic character. Thus, in the important dialogue '*Sophistes*', he demonstrates how the sophist's inmost essence of being precisely manifests itself as non-being.

Plato was fully cognizant of the fact that dialectics is an art which must be exercised judiciously. In his pivotal work '*Parmenides*' he visualizes how a shrewd dialectician can prove almost anything if he is allowed unopposed to avail himself of sophisms. His reservations are stated in the introductory dialogue of the '*Parmenides*' where he let the young untrained Socrates, after having realized that he was unable to defeat the older more cunning Parmenides, profess his belief in reason: after all there *must* be *some* sort of connection between phenomena (factuality) and ideas (rationality)! And who can possibly deny this rather obvious conclusion?

Nevertheless, in the main body of the same work, Plato allowed Parmenides, the dialectician, to formulate a vision of the mutual intertwinement of concepts and of their common origin from the unutterable One. In this vision Parmenides anticipates the entire Neo-platonic system together with its doctrine of emanation. Plato, however, was well aware that the idea of emanation had to be interpreted dynamically, not statically. Thus he first presented, and then retracted, this idea in a way resembling the *retractio* made over 2000 years later by Kierkegaard in the epilogue to his '*Postscript*'.

Any philosophically trained person who is an analyst without concurrently being a dialectician will probably disapprove of this trick and prefer to quote Wittgenstein: '*Wovon mann nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen*'. However, as his famous seventh epistle bears witness to, Plato was acutely aware of precisely that rule. Thus, in the first hypothesis of his '*Parmenides*', he refers to the One as unutterable. By contrast, in the second hypothesis he demonstrates how everything, including its contradictorily opposite, can be predicated of it. However, one should not conclude from this that Plato excels in contradictions and misuses his talents to suspend logic.

On the contrary, he attempts to deduce, as it were, the basic principles of logic. Now this should not be interpreted too literally. What he tries to deduce or demonstrate is simply the need for a proviso to their formulation: Nothing can be expressed about the One, unless it is presumed to be identical to itself. Thus the One is unspeakable until the same (*idem*) hypothesis is repeated. Everything can be expressed about the One as long as we do not utter the same, together with its denial, at the same (*simul*) time. Seen that way the One is utterable and a subject of temporal development.

From this Plato concluded that the principle of *identity* should contain a proviso relating to the timeless *repetition* of the same, just as the principle of *contradiction* should contain a proviso relating to the *simultaneity* of contradictories. This is why he, in an interlude on *time*, separating the second hypothesis from the third, demonstrates both how the concept of change is conditioned by the mediation of contradictions in the course of time, and how this same mediation presupposes the introduction of 'suddenness', or 'an eye's twinkle', as a logical category.

We now pass over from the teachings of Plato to the doctrines of St. Augustine - that is, from Greek philosophy to Christian theology. Within the Christian tradition it is common to speak of God as 'trinitarian': Father, Son and Spirit together form a Holy Trinity. How did this idea of a Divine Triad emerge? There cannot be much doubt that the idea of a 'triune' God stems from a Greek source: Pythagoreanism. But its path from Pythagoreanism to Christianity was mediated by Neo-Platonism.

St. Augustine played a major rôle in the formation of the Christian Idea of God. The transplantation to Christian soil of the philosophical Idea of God, albeit a God with triune attributes, resulted in two novelties: the concept of *Creation* and the doctrine of *Atonement*. That the ultimate result of the syncretistic currents in the ancient Church, in which Augustine was one of the most prominent figures, was a mixture of rather heterogeneous ideas, cannot be explained away.

Some traits, however, should be emphasized as being of crucial importance. The Idea of God as a concrete person, and not simply an abstract concept, is an unforsakeable notion distinctive of Christianity. Taken this way we must say that both the Hebrew and the Christian concepts of Divinity have always been anthropomorphic. And this Idea of a personal God - a Divine Creator - is clearly incompatible with a metaphysical system which is wholly determined by its own immanent logic.

In contradistinction to the Neo-Platonic idea of emanation, *Creation* in a Christian context cannot be interpreted as an automatic genesis. Unless God can be thought of as a Person who, by virtue of his infinite Power, utilizes his infinite Wisdom to display his infinite Goodness, the word 'God' is reduced to idle noise (*flatus vocis*). To Augustine, at least, it was clear that the Christian notion of Creation could not be adapted to the pattern established by the Neo-Platonic form of dialectics.

His, and the early Church's, solution to this problem was a doctrine of faith holding that God Almighty (the Father), by His Word or Wisdom (the Son), out of His pure Love or Goodness (the Spirit), created the universe from nothing. Therefore the instant of Creation becomes synonymous with a beginning of Time: prior to the creation of the world nothing existed: in fact, there was no 'prior'. But God is eternally present, i.e., his time is a forever standing unremittent Now (*nunc stans*).

In the aftermath Augustine also had a new view on the issue of the origin of evil. A perfect God cannot possibly duplicate Himself in His work of creation for the reason that two co-eternal gods would mutually limit each other. From this it follows that the perfection of the created world is necessarily limited. Now God's perfection consists in the fact that he is incapable of committing sin: *non potest peccare*. He knows sin only as the opposite to his own divine being. God therefore could not bestow his own perfection upon his creatures. Sin is offence against the will of God. The most a created being can ever aspire to, as regards perfection, is: *posse non peccare*, it can desist from sin, and this freedom to resist sin is a sign of its being created in the image of God. Similarly, an inevitable consequence of man's limited freedom as a created being was: *posse peccare*, hence man was capable of sinning if he decided to abuse his freedom. Following a "Darwinian" logic, we might say, it was then only a matter of time when the Fall would occur - the Fall was probable and predictable, though not necessary.

God's righteousness manifests itself in the fact that the sinner is punished in exact proportion to his sin, and justice is done when God leaves a sinner to his vice. From the beginning, sin was man's abuse of freedom in submitting to his desires (*concupiscentia*), and his punishment was the corruption of freedom and his subsequent enslavement by his desires. The actual punishment is therefore lust itself, the fact that the sinner cannot abstain from his desires. Lust has overtaken him and become his being, and thus sin has sullied the image of divinity in his nature. From this ensues the necessity of salvation.

God's mercy is divine love which ensures the possibility of salvation in spite of human sinfulness. How was the salvation to be carried into effect? In only one way: God assumed human form and submitted himself to those conditions of humanity which imply that man may freely choose to be enslaved by his own desires. God incarnate as the man Jesus of Nazareth took upon himself the burden of man's sin. By living a life free from sin he provided man with a Divine Ideal: *posse non peccare*. By dying as an innocent, he demonstrated definitively his own claims to the Divine mark of distinction: *non posse peccare*. In dying the death of a sinner, he vanquished, once and for all, the dominion of death which is: *non posse non peccare*.

According to Lovejoy, however, both the concept of Creation and the concepts of Providence, Freedom and Salvation present difficulties left unsolved by Augustine. If God was perfect even without the Creation, why then did he create the world at all? The principles of reason require an explanation, but the divine act of creation seems to be a fact of the utmost irrationality. If God did not need his creatures to celebrate his own divinity, what reason could have motivated him to create anything like a world? In the event that he knew a reason so important that it could convince his Wisdom, his act of creation would have been forced, and so he could be neither almighty nor free.

The creator must necessarily be superior to his own creatures, and his decision to create can hardly be explained rationally with reference to something that did not yet exist. But if he acted without a good reason, then his creation is not rooted in goodness, and if his act occurred rashly or by accident, the wisdom of the creator is obliterated.

All these difficulties were left to Thomas Aquinas. Thomas, who distinguished a creation in the beginning of time (*creatio in principio*) from a creation of eternity (*creatio ab aeterno*), felt obliged to defend the validity of the former by reference to the book of 'Genesis'. At the same time he felt it urgent to provide a reason for the creation. According to him, God always acts spontaneously, but never without a good reason. God's own goodness constitutes the original and true motive for his act of creation: unmoved, and at rest in himself, he animates all living beings through his infinite love. So Thomas conjoins the Christian concept of creation to Aristotelian characteristics: God is 'the first cause', 'the unmoved mover', etc. One may feel that the incorporation of Aristotelian elements in the Christian tradition contributed to accentuate the difficulties emphasized by Lovejoy. Aristotle identified God with Being in a way that obliterates the distinction between transcendence and immanence. But we must discriminate these two if we are to keep apart the doctrine of creation from that of emanation.

In this context one must remember that Neo-Platonism originated as an attempt to unify the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. But any such attempt would seem to be doomed to result in a static and non-dialectically conceived system. The pivotal idea of Aristotelian scholasticism, that of the *hierarchy*, is itself static. Likewise, the concept of God as 'unmoved mover' and 'first efficient cause, is just another expression for the difficulties emphasized by Lovejoy. Here, by contrast, it is pertinent to refer to Leibniz, who clarified the issue by pointing out that the ultimate cause must transcend its effects in very much the same way in which goodness must transcend being according to Plato. In order to justify God's freedom in the very act of creation, Thomas made an important distinction between two forms of *necessity*: a relative (*hypothetical*) and an absolute (*metaphysical*). This distinction, which can be traced back at least to Anselm, is the same distinction which Leibniz adopted. It is precisely this distinction Lovejoy attacks, though we shall later prove it to be indispensable to a solution of his problems.

Now, according to Thomas as well as to most other philosophers educated in logic (with the exception of Kierkegaard, who constructs an exceedingly original alternative) the *actual* is always *possible*, whereas the *possible* is not always *actual*. Armed with this distinction Leibniz tried to justify the view that God, in his supreme wisdom, conceives all possibilities by virtue of absolute necessity while he, in his supreme goodness, freely selects one of these possibilities to be realized in time and hence to develop by virtue of relative necessity. It is at this point that Lovejoy simply does not, or

will not, understand. According to him, there can be only one kind of necessity - viz. the absolute, or metaphysical one. In Lovejoy's opinion, Thomas and Leibniz should have inferred the absolute necessity of creation from the absolute goodness of its creator. Hence Lovejoy concludes categorically that it is impossible to ascribe freedom to God. Spinozian determinism is just the unavoidable consequence of Leibnizian rationalism. The Idea of Creation is reducible to that of a necessary unfolding in time.

Leibniz, Thomas, and Anselm all confessed that the infinite wisdom of God must encompass every conceivable possibility. Whatever is possible participates in the divine being and is therefore also aimed at by the divine goodness, albeit to a varying degree. Now all such gradation is flatly rejected by Lovejoy: God wills his own being with absolute necessity, and every possibility is actualized by virtue of a similar necessity. This argument entails the ultimate denial of all modal distinctions: the possible, the real and the necessary coincide, thereby eliminating all need for rational discrimination. Such modal collapse has absurd consequences for the traditional concept of God.

The only alternative to theistic determinism is theistic voluntarism. Duns Scotus, Thomas' antagonist, is an exponent of theistic voluntarism. Duns developed his position by exalting the primacy of the sovereign will in God. God's will is not compelled to follow his reason, rather his reason is subordinated to his will, that is, to his goodness. So it still holds that God is supreme goodness. This divine goodness, however, depends ultimately on divine omnipotence. God does not will something because reason has shown it to be good; no, what God decides to do is good because God has decided it. This, of course, does ensure God's freedom and omnipotence, but hardly his goodness. With theistic voluntarism, the idea of divine goodness loses its transparency.

The problem relating to will and reason, and the primacy of the one or the other, is at the heart of the philosophical controversy between Leibniz and Bayle. Kierkegaard comments upon this famous debate in his papers: "*The very conflict between Leibniz and Bayle is important, and when one compares it to the polemics of our own times one must be astonished, for we have truly regressed*". The Scotian doctrine of the primacy of the will was firmly repudiated by Leibniz. In this dispute he sided with Thomas against Duns, while but acknowledging some inadequacies of the Thomist solution to the difficulties. In order to defend rationalism against the assault of voluntarism and determinism, God's goodness and freedom would have to be assured in unison. A new philosophy which would combine dialectical sensitivity and acumen with the solid basis of a refined logical theory of necessity and contingency was called for.

The philosophy of Leibniz got its most pregnant expression in the monadology with its doctrine of the pre-established harmony of the monads. An informative sample of its ideas is conveyed by the first sections of the '*Theodicée*' (P.i, §§7-8):

God is the primary source of all things. Like everything else we experience, limited things are contingent and possess nothing that necessitates their existence. Obviously, time, space and matter, being themselves uniform, similar and inactive, might have assumed wholly different shapes and movements in a wholly different order.

Thus a reason for the existence of the world, as the ultimate totality of all contingent things, must be sought for, and this reason must be found in a nature which in itself has the reason for its own existence, being both necessary and eternal. This cause must be rational, for the world is contingent, and an infinity of other worlds are equally possible, each of them tending of itself to exist, just like the real world. Therefore the cause of the world must have compared each of these possible worlds to all the other in order to be able to select a specific one for actual existence.

But a real being's relation to, or consideration of, pure possibilities cannot be other than imaginative thought, just as the realization of a single possibility cannot be other than selective will. The power of this being provides the will with the ability to accomplish its intention. Hence power is directed towards being, just as wisdom, or intelligence, is directed towards truth, and will towards goodness. This intelligent cause must furthermore be infinite in every way, and its power, wisdom and goodness must also be absolute as regards perfection, as it embraces every imaginable possibility ...

What I refer to as 'the world' is the sum total of all existing things with reference to time and space; this obviates the possibility of saying that it is possible that there be other worlds at different times and places; one would have to consider them all to be one single universe. But even though one imagines all of time and space to be filled up, it remains nevertheless true that this could be done in infinitely many ways. So there is an infinite number of possible worlds, from among which God must needs have chosen the best one, as He never acts in a way that is at variance with supreme reason.

It is now befitting to consider the arguments of his opponent, Lovejoy:

Thus far Leibniz's argument seems to place him on the side of Spinoza ... The primary being exists by a logical necessity; it is also necessary that all the things .. should have 'reasons' for existence lying in its nature and in their own; and this might seem to mean that all things follow ex necessitate divinae naturae, and that the existent universe is .. logically inevitable in its least detail, so that no alternative could ever have been so much as conceived by an infinite intellect. From this consequence, however, Leibniz professed to have found a way of escape.

Spinoza had, Leibniz observes, failed to see that existence must be limited not only to the possible, in the logical sense, but also to the compossible .. In maintaining that the divine will must necessarily be determined by the most sufficient reason and must therefore infallibly choose the one best out of the many possible worlds, he is not ... asserting the 'brutal metaphysical necessity' of Spinoza, but a 'moral necessity'. For the opposite, i.e. the choice of one of the other worlds, would not be impossible in the metaphysical sense; it would not imply contradiction. The will, according to the principle of sufficient reason, is 'always more inclined to the alternative which it takes, but it is not under necessity ... Thus a residuum of contingency is left ...

The distinction which Leibniz here attempts to set up is manifestly without logical substance; the fact is so apparent that it is impossible to believe that a thinker of his power can have been altogether unaware of it himself. Without abandoning all that is most essential to the principle of sufficient reason he could not possibly admit that a sufficient reason 'inclines' the will without necessitating its choice, and least of all in the case of a will supposed to be enlightened with an infinite intelligence .. The mere concept of the existence of any of the inferior and non-existent worlds is, by hypothesis, free from contradiction; but it was absolutely impossible that it could be selected for existence, since this would contradict both the perfection of God and the very notion of voluntary choice of which the principle of sufficient reason is an expression ...

The worth of an object is involved in its idea in precisely the same way in which divisibility by other whole numbers without a remainder is involved in the idea of certain whole numbers. If God had pronounced any other world best he would have contradicted himself as absolutely as if he had asserted that four is not a multiple of two. .. An absolute logical determinism, then, is as characteristic of the metaphysics of Leibniz as of that of Spinoza .. though Leibniz lacked the candor and courage to express the certain, and almost obvious, outcome of his reasonings in his more popular writings without obscuring it by edifying phraseology .. especially the verbal distinction, absolutely meaningless in the light of his other doctrines, between 'necessitating' and 'infallibly inclining' reasons.

'The Great Chain of Being, p.169f.

It is indeed fortunate that Leibniz has discussed the basis of the distinction in question in a minor and undated dissertation with the title '*De Contingentia*' (1686-89). In this treatise he anticipates all the points of Lovejoy's subsequent criticism.

For the sake of clarity the contents of his little dissertation should be collated with the remainder of his philosophy:

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Everything that is true about one or another world is founded in the very nature of that world and can accordingly be deduced from its concept through logical analysis. In this way all truth is analytically anchored in the essence of the divine intellect. Whereas the possible is that which is true in a single possible world, the necessary is that which cannot be denied without contradiction and which is therefore true in all and every possible world. However, not everything which is actual is also necessary. Naturally, some statements are true without being necessary. Likewise, some statements are false without being impossible. Hence there are some truths which are contingent; for example, true statements concerning the facts of experience are contingently true. Nevertheless, it is always possible to view contingent truths as relatively necessary, granted that their truth is assessed in relation to a freedom of a higher order.

The set of all possible worlds can be divided into subsets and subsets of subsets with progressively finer designation of their characteristics. If we consider the whole set without any restriction, we refer to the modalities as absolute, *logical* or metaphysical. If we then limit ourselves to the set of all worlds which have their laws in common with the world we know and describe as real, the concepts of possibility and necessity are defined relative to these laws, and we then designate the modalities as *physical*. The laws of nature, Leibniz insists, are ordained by God in his free Act of Creation, and He could have chosen others. If we proceed to a further limitation, confining ourselves to speaking of the set of worlds which have their past in common with the real world until e.g. midnight on the *ides martii 44 b.C.*, everything pertaining to the life and death of Caesar is complete and inevitable with *historical* necessity, while the necessity compelling his successors to avenge the murder was *political*, or *ethical*.

The question of whether a true statement is necessary or contingent and, if necessary, whether this necessity is absolute or relative, is decidable by logical analysis attempting to reduce the statement to a self-evident statement of identity. The difference between the two kinds of necessity is dependent on the number of operations necessary to accomplish the logical analysis. If the reduction can be made with a finite number of operations, necessity is termed absolute. If the reduction can be completed only with an infinite number of operations, necessity is termed relative, implying that the truth of the statement, from another viewpoint, can be considered to be more or less contingent.

The divine freedom is the freedom to realize one of the set of possible worlds. God, in choosing, is bound only by the need of consistency or freedom of contradiction. The act being a free commitment to the principle of choosing a world *sub specie boni*, the creation of a world is an expression of the fact that God freely acts out of goodness. But it is nonsense that God had contradicted himself, had he not acted out of goodness.

Since there was no goodness before the act of creation, there was nothing to contradict. God's choice to be good and his choice of the best are *simultaneous* choices.

Leibniz's little treatise now provides us with a crucial argument against Lovejoy. Let us assume, contrary to better judgement, that God's goodness was not chosen in freedom, but that it obliged Him to choose the best of worlds with absolute necessity. From this it does not follow that the world selected by God with absolute necessity was indeed the best of all worlds. Lovejoy's error is to confuse the necessity of the inference, *necessitas consequentiae*, with the necessity of the conclusion, *necessitas consequentis*. In order to emphasize the significance of this distinction we can even make do with a single concept of necessity, viz. the absolute, logical, or metaphysical.

Nowadays we have learned to express logical problems through formulas which employ symbols, and it is generally accepted that the Leibnizian logic is identical to **S5**, a system devised by C.I. Lewis. This system contains the axiom $L(p \Rightarrow q) \Rightarrow (Lp \Rightarrow Lq)$, which, granted the premisses $L(p \Rightarrow q)$ and Lp , allows us to infer the conclusion Lq . Lovejoy's blunder is that he claims to infer the conclusion Lq solely from the premiss $L(p \Rightarrow q)$, without applying the premiss Lp (which is *not* granted)!

Let p stand for the statement '*God realizes that world W_1 is the best*', and let q stand for the statement '*God decides that world W_1 is to be realized*'. Let us further, contrary to better judgement, assume that God's goodness obliges him absolutely, prior to his own choice; thus the assumption $L(p \Rightarrow q)$ applies. From this alone it does not follow that Lq : '*It is necessary that (God decides that) the world W_1 is to be realized*'. We still need to demonstrate the other assumption, that is Lp : '*It is necessary that (God realizes that) the world W_1 is the best*', but this assumption does *not* follow directly from God's infinite wisdom alone. Let us provisionally grant that the wisdom of God is of absolute necessity infinite; from this it does *not* follow that God necessarily knows that world W_1 is the best. Let us nevertheless grant that if the world W_1 is *in fact* the best, then God will *necessarily* know it; does it then follow that the world W_1 is necessarily the best? *No*, not if the fact that W_1 is the best is in itself not necessary, but contingent! The infinite wisdom of *God, of course, must know what is necessary as necessary, and what is contingent as contingent!* How could it be otherwise?

The assumption Lp is fulfilled only inasmuch as it is not a contingent but, rather, a necessary truth that world W_1 is in fact the best of all possible worlds. This might be the case if necessity were hidden in the very concept of world W_1 in such a way that a denial of the primacy of world W_1 would lead to contradiction. However, it is precisely *a characteristic of absolutely necessary truths that they apply to all possible worlds without exception, while it characterizes contingent truths that they apply to particular possible worlds, or to groups of such worlds.* As a verification of the primacy of W_1

involves an infinite comparison, it is hard to see how the primacy of W_1 can be hidden in the concept of any particular world, whether itself or another - such a fact could only be hidden in the nature of God. But if it was, and if it was also necessarily true that world W_1 is the best of all, the consequence would be that one world is both possible and necessary: viz. W_1 . Then there would be no distinction any longer between necessity and contingency. However, *it is obvious that the ultimate evaluation of W_1 must emerge from a comparison encompassing the entire infinity of possible worlds, of which infinitely many will be infinite* not only with respect to space but also with respect to time. This comparison, infinite as to exponential power, cannot be terminated. But why should it be? Can we not imagine creation as an experiment made by God? *God may very well have decided to make an experiment, the detailed results of which are unpredictable even to himself, though its general outline may be clear and obvious.* Such a conjecture, however, is of course very foreign to Leibniz.

Lovejoy's erroneous conclusions are, in fact, both exceedingly simple and trivial. The innocent *'This is necessarily true: God sees that world W_1 is best'* is confused with the obnoxious *'God sees that this is necessarily true: world W_1 is the best'*. Let e.g. p signify that *'God is good'*, and let q represent that *'God wills what is best'*. Now grant $L(p \Rightarrow q)$, *'This is necessarily true: if God is good then he wills what is best'*. From this, can we not infer that *'This is necessarily true: God wills what is best'*? No! That follows only if it also applies that Lp , *'This is necessarily true: God is good'*. Now let us provisionally assume that this is indeed the case: *'God is necessarily good'*. Let us furthermore, in contrast to Leibniz, assume that world W_1 is necessarily the best. Does it then follow that *'God could not have created any other world, for example W_2 , without departing from His own goodness and contradicting His own being'*? Yes! Does it further follow that *'God was compelled to create the best world, W_1 '*? No! *Naturally, God still had the freedom to abstain from creating anything whatsoever!* Precisely for that reason was the Creator free, hence also good.

Therefore, in agreement with Leibniz, we shall reach the following conclusion, which is *not* the outcome of a scientific demonstration, but a free option of belief:

- 1) *God created the best of all worlds - a world as perfect as a world could ever be.*
 - 2) *The natural perfection of the world is rooted in its laws which are fixed forever.*
 - 3) *The moral perfection of its intelligent creatures may increase without any limit.*
- From this it follows that even the best of worlds will always remain imperfect.

In which sense, then, can we maintain to have vindicated the Idea of God? Can we claim to have shown that the God Idea is a 'unit idea' in the sense of Lovejoy? No, not at all! In fact, we shall have to reject the Lovejoyean methodology altogether. But the Idea of God here discussed *is* 'unitary' because it presupposes monotheism.

Can we claim to have demonstrated that the Idea of God has a legitimate function in human language which is that of being an ultimate referent, an absolute *signifié*? No! The rationality of monotheism ultimately rests on faith and cannot be demonstrated. What we have shown is the lack of integrity of certain scatterbrains whose unfounded objections have cast doubt upon the intellectual respectability of faith in God.

For the Christian believer, this saying of Jesus from Nazareth remains still valid: *'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me!'* The philosophical Idea of God, therefore, is *never* in itself a passable way to God. But *if* the Idea of God *were* logically inconsistent, there could be *no way* to God. What the above discussion has shown is that pseudo-philosophical criticism pretending to prove the Idea of God to be pure nonsense cannot count as evidence that believers are unable to reason clearly about the focal point of their faith.

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