

# The "Theodicee" of Leibniz

By Mary Lake Rose

Of all the readers of East-West Magazine throughout the world, this article will appeal in particular to those who are vitally interested in the fields of philosophy and religion. It is the result of a University research project of considerable extent, covering the work of Leibniz in what is known as his "Theodicee." Due to the fact that some of his work has never been translated, much time and effort has been put forth in securing the contents within this article. Because few people have access to the works of these great philosophers, it is my joy to share the findings with those interested.

Would not a slight acquaintance with Leibniz add a deeper appreciation of his philosophy? With that view in mind, let us look briefly into his life. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was born at Leipzig, Saxony, June 25, 1646. He was the son of a Professor, and his mother was also the daughter of a Professor. This probably accounts, at least in part, for his early training in Latin; he profited also from the principle of individuality. At the age of twenty he received his doctorate degree in law, and for many years thereafter his chief interest was in the field of law and politics; in this respect he became widely known throughout Europe. It was not until 1686 that his attention was turned to the field of metaphysics and philosophy, to which he devoted the remainder of his life.

Among the great minds which he contacted, and which perhaps had some bearing upon his philosophy, were Hobbes, Spinoza, Bayle, Locke, and Newton. Turning our attention to his philosophy, we find that his "Theodicee" was written in memory of Queen

Sophia Charlotte of Prussia. It was the outgrowth of discussions and conversations with her as a pupil, on the problem of the vindication of God in view of the evil in the world. It was occasioned also by objections which she found to Bayle's Dictionary.

The "Theodicee" appeared in 1710, the one great work which was published during the lifetime of Leibniz. It was written at different intervals in a very diffuse and discursive style. However, Duncan says it is considered the most celebrated work on the subject. In fact, the "Theodicee" is properly a reply to the skeptical objections of Bayle against the possibility of a rational interpretation of the universe when considered as the object of Divine creation and control.

## The Nature of God

He presents God as the first principle of existence, and says that the world does not contain within itself the cause or reason of its own existence. As to God Himself, God must either exist or be impossible; in the cosmological proof, he passes from the infinite series of finite causes to their sufficient reason, which contains all changes in the series necessarily in itself. He argues teleologically from the existence of harmony among the monads without any mutual influence, and God as the author of this harmony. He also speaks of God as the "universal harmony." God, a purely active, and therefore perfect monad, is the source

of all things; God is also spoken of as the highest of all monads and of created substance proceeding from Him continually, "By a sort of emanation, as we produce our thoughts."

### **Metaphysical Necessity**

Leibniz holds that by metaphysical necessity God was limited in His choice to one world; by MORAL NECESSITY his choice was limited to a certain one. Infinite goodness obliged Him to choose the best of all possible worlds. God's reasoning is good; He created the world; therefore, it is THE BEST.

### **Predominating Philosophical Principles**

Two principles control the reasoning of Leibniz. They control thought and existence and are:

1. The Law of Contradiction, which says that: "Of two contradictory propositions, one is true, the other false." A TRUTH which is necessary in the absolute sense is one whose opposite is impossible because implying contradiction.

2. The second principle is that of "Sufficient or Determinant Reason." According to this law, he says that: "A reason may be rendered for every truth which is not immediate, or an identical proposition." Nothing ever happens without a DETERMINANT REASON, and free action comes under this law. Freedom implies two elements:

1. Spontaneity.
2. Choice.

There is in man a certain wonderful spontaneity which renders the Soul in its volitions independent of all physical influence. This SPONTANIETY is an essential element in the system of pre-established harmony. This pre-established harmony holds that: "God from the beginning so created the mind that it should produce and represent in itself in order whatever happened in the body; and the body He so created that it should perform whatever the mind ordained." The action of the body occurs at the moment the mind wills it. The mind has some control, though indirect, over the passions.

This ideal dependence of BODY

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UPON SOUL existed in the mind of God when He established in advance the harmony which was to subsist between them. Freedom consists in following reason, servitude in following the passions, and the passions proceed from confused perceptions.

"Our reason, illumined by the Spirit of God, reveals the law of Nature," and with it positive law must not conflict." The reason which has led to the existence of things through Him makes them also depend upon Him for their continued existence and working; they continually receive from Him that which makes them have any perfection; but any imperfection that remains in them comes from the essential and original limitations of the created thing."

### **Moral Evil**

Out of this second principle arises the problem of moral evil, and connected with it the punishment of sin. God is the source of the perfection of each monad, but every monad has some essential inalienable imperfection, otherwise it would be indistinguishable from God. Therefore, by metaphysical necessity, evil belongs to Creation itself. In its essence, evil is negation, defect. Only the good is the real. God could not impart His own fullness to another Being without making him straightway God. If God creates, the creature must be less than Deity; it is therefore finite and imperfect. The degree of perfection manifested depends upon the amount of positive Being imparted, but every Being must be imperfect. Evil, then, in its essence is privation and is necessary.

### **The Source of Evil**

Leibniz's Law of Contradiction makes it impossible to ascribe evil to God. To relieve the Divine Being of complicity with sin, it is necessary to distinguish between the formal and material elements which enter into a sinful act. The material cause is the POWER put forth. All power to act proceeds from God; energy is of God, though sinfully employed. The power put forth in a sinful act is from God. The formal cause of a sinful act is the wrong di-

(continued on Page 18)

The "Theodicee" of Leibniz (Continued from Page 15) rection of that power, and that constitutes the sinfulness of the act. While one might conclude from such a philosophy that the will of God is the material cause, it is in no wise the formal cause of sin. The sinfulness of the act should be ascribed solely to the Being who sins, by the wrong direction of the power. The defects belong wholly to the creatures themselves, and arise out of the necessary limitations to which created existence is subject.

#### Justification of Evil

Among his justifications for the existence of evil, Leibniz gives the following:

1. Evil is often the cause of a good which, without it, would never have existed.
2. It is often the admixture of a little evil which makes us sensible of the good.
3. Evil is a mere set-off of the good in the world, which it increases by contrast. Punishment of Sin If all human action were necessitated, it would not be just for God to punish men for their deeds. But due to this SPONTANIETY of the SOUL and its independence of physical influence, men are not necessitated in their actions, but are FREE. A Being which acts from itself must be free, and where freedom exists there is responsibility, and possibly guilt, which is amenable to pun-

ishment. God may thus justly punish transgressors. "God has established a connection between action and its penalty or reward, such, that in the natural course of things, vice is punished and virtue rewarded."

#### Exaltation of God

One might contend that the evils of life are great and outnumber the blessings, but such a viewpoint Leibniz felt was a mistake due to one's paying more attention to the adverse elements of his experience than to the fortunate. Taking the individual as a mirror of the universe, only as a member, Leibniz made the individual subservient to the good of the whole. Individuals should serve as examples of corrective justice, consequently he found nothing irrational in the theory of eternal punishment.

Irrespective of life as it goes here below, he held that there is another life beyond, and if we could imagine the Kingdom of God in its true greatness, this little world with all of its evils would sink into oblivion.

Leibniz believed that, notwithstanding all of the evils we see, and in spite of all the difficulties that can be brought forward, it is reasonable to believe that: "There is nothing so exalted as the wisdom of God, nothing so just as His judgment, nothing so pure as His holiness, and nothing so benign as His

GOODNESS."

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