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THEODICY: ABRIDGEMENT OF THE ARGUMENT  
by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz  
Trans, G. M. Duncan. New Haven, 1890. Adapted and emended by A.C. Kibel

I. It is often said that God did not chose the best in creating this world, because there is evil in it, and whoever does not chose the best is weak or ignorant or bad. Now, I grant that there is evil in this world which God has made, and that it was possible to make a world without evil, or even not to create a world at all, for its creation has depended on the free will of God; but I would point out that the best plan is not always that which seeks to avoid evil, since it may happen that the evil is accompanied by a greater good. I have proved this more fully in my book "Theodicy" by making it clear, by instances taken from mathematics and elsewhere, that an imperfection in the part may be required for a greater perfection in the whole. In this I have followed the opinion of St. Augustine, who has said a hundred times, that God has permitted evil in order to bring about good, that is, a greater good; and that of Thomas Aquinas who said that the permitting of evil tends to the good of the universe. I have shown that the ancients called Adam's fall *felix culpa*, a happy sin, because it had been retrieved with immense advantage by the incarnation of the Son of God, who has given to the universe something nobler than anything that ever would have been among creatures except for it. For the sake of a clearer understanding, I have added, following many good authors, that it was in accordance with order and the general good that God allowed certain creatures to exercise their liberty, even when he foresaw that they would turn to evil and that he could prevent them; because it was not fitting that, in order to hinder sin, God should act in an irregular manner (and interfere with His own intentions). To overthrow this objection, therefore, it is sufficient to show that a world with evil might be better than a world without evil; but I have gone even farther in my book. I have proved that this universe must be in reality better than every other possible universe.

II. It is often said that there is more evil than good in the whole work of God, since there is more evil than good in intelligent creatures. To this I answer, this deduction from a part to the whole, from intelligent creatures to all creatures, supposes without proof that creatures destitute of reason cannot count for much in comparison with those which possess it. But why may it not be that the surplus of good in the nonintelligent creatures which fill the world, compensates for, and even incomparably surpasses, the surplus of evil in the rational creatures? It is true that the value of rational creatures is greater; but, in compensation, the non-rational are beyond comparison the more numerous, and it may be that the proportion of number and quantity surpasses that of value and of quality.

Further, there is no need to grant that there is more evil than good in the human race, because it is possible, and in fact very probable, that the glory and the perfection of the blessed are incomparably greater than the misery and the imperfection of the damned, and that here the excellence of the total good in the smaller number exceeds the total evil in the greater number. God is infinite, and the devil is limited; the good may and does go to infinity, while evil has its bounds. It is therefore possible and credible that in the comparison of the blessed and the damned, the contrary of that which I have said might happen in the comparison of intelligent and nonintelligent creatures, takes place; namely, it is possible that in the comparison of the happy and the unhappy, the proportion of degree exceeds that of number, and that in the comparison of intelligent and nonintelligent creatures, the proportion of number is greater than that of value. I have the right to suppose that a thing is possible so long as its impossibility is not proved; and indeed that which I have here advanced is more than a supposition.

Finally, there is an inconceivable number of spiritual beings and perhaps of other rational creatures; and no one can prove that in all the City of God, composed as well of spiritual beings as of rational animals without number and of an infinity of kinds, evil exceeds good. And although in order to answer an objection, there is no need of proving that a thing is, when its mere possibility suffices; yet, in my book, I

have also shown that it is a consequence of the supreme perfection of the Sovereign of the universe, that the kingdom of God is the most perfect of all possible states or governments, and that consequently the finite evil there is, is required for the consummation of the immense good which is found there.

III. It is argued that anything foreknown is predetermined and God foresees everything; therefore it is impossible not to sin and God is unjust to punish the sinner. I answer by denying that every thing predetermined is necessary; understanding by the necessity of sinning, for example, or by the impossibility of not sinning, or of not performing any action, the necessity with which we are here concerned, that is, that which is essential and absolute, and which destroys the morality of an action and the justice of punishments. That necessity which is contrary to morality and which ought to be rejected, and which would render punishment unjust, is an insurmountable necessity which would make all opposition useless, even if we should wish with all our heart to avoid the necessary action, and should make all possible efforts to that end. Now, it is manifest that this is not applicable to voluntary actions, because we would not perform them if we did not choose to. Also their prevision and predetermination are not absolute, but presuppose the will: if it is certain that we shall perform them, it is not less certain that we shall choose to perform them. These voluntary actions and their consequences will not take place no matter what we do or whether we wish them or not, but rather through what we do and through what we wish to do, which leads to them. And this is involved in prevision and in predetermination, and even constitutes the reason why they can be foreseen and predetermined. their ground. And the necessity of such an event is called conditional or hypothetical, or the necessity of consequence, because it supposes the will, and the other requisites; whereas the necessity which destroys morality and renders punishment unjust and reward useless, exists in things which will be whatever we may do or whatever we may wish to do, and, in a word, is in that which is essential; and this is what is called an absolute necessity.

Thus it is to no purpose, as regards what is absolutely necessary, to make prohibitions or commands, to propose penalties or prizes, to praise or to blame; it will be none the less. On the other hand, in voluntary actions and in that which depends upon them, precepts armed with power to punish and to recompense are very often of use and are included in the order of causes which make an action exist. And it is for this reason that not only cares and labors but also prayers are useful; God having had these prayers in view before he regulated things and having had that consideration for them which was proper. This is why the precept which says *pray and work* holds altogether good; and not only those who (under the vain pretext of the necessity of events) pretend that the care which business demands may be neglected, but also those who reason against prayer, fall into error.

Thus the predetermination of events by causes is just what contributes to morality instead of destroying it, and causes incline the will, without compelling it. This is why the determination in question is not of necessity. It is certain (to him who knows all) that the effect will follow this inclination; but this effect does not follow by a necessary consequence, that is, one the contrary of which implies contradiction. It is also by an internal inclination such as this that the will is determined, without there being any necessity. Suppose that you had the greatest passion in the world (a great thirst, for example), still you will admit that your soul can find some reason for resisting it, if it were only that of showing its power. Thus, although one is never in a perfect indifference of equilibrium and one always has a preponderance of inclination for the side taken, it, nevertheless, never renders the resolution taken absolutely necessary.

IV. It is argued that God is an accessory to sin because he can prevent intelligent creatures from sinning and has full knowledge of what they are about to do, but He does nothing about it. I answer that it is possible that one could prevent sin, but ought not, either because the action required was itself a sin or (when God is in question) an unreasonable action. It is possible that we contribute to evil and that sometimes we even open the road to it, in doing things which we are obliged to do; and, when we do our duty or (in speaking of God) when we do what reason demands, we are not responsible for the results, even when we foresee them. We do not desire these evils; but we are willing to permit them for the sake

of a greater good which we cannot reasonably help preferring to other considerations. And we have a right to say that the divine consequent or final or total will of God works toward the production of as many goods as may be put together, the combination of which becomes in this way determined, and includes also the permission of some evils and the exclusion of some goods, as the best possible plan for the universe demands.

V. It is argued that everything has in it something that makes it real whose source is God, and so whatever makes sin real has its source in God. I answer that there are two sorts of reality, the positive and the sort that comes from limitation, from falling short of a perfect nature. Now God is the cause of all perfections and consequently of all realities considered as purely positive. But limitations or privations result from the original imperfection of creatures, which limits their receptivity. And it is with them as with a loaded vessel, which the river causes to move more or less slowly according to the weight which it carries and which interferes with its getting maximal speed out of the current: thus its speed depends upon the river, but the retardation which limits this speed comes from the load. But if God had wished to do more, he would have had to make either other natures for creatures or other miracles to change their natures, things which the best plan could not admit. It is as if the current of the river must be made more rapid than its fall admitted or that the boats should be relieved of their loads, if it were necessary to make them move more quickly. And the original limitation or imperfection of creatures requires that even the best plan of the universe could not receive more good, and could not be exempt from certain evils, which, however, are to result in a greater good. There are certain disorders in the parts which marvelously enhance the beauty of the whole; just as certain dissonances, when properly used, render harmony more beautiful. But this depends on what has already been said in answer to the first objection, in I, above.

VI. It is said that whoever punishes those who have done as well as it was in their power to do is unjust, but God punishes such failure. My answer here is simply to deny that God does this. I believe that God always gives sufficient aid and grace to those who have a good will, that is, to those who do not reject this grace by new sin. Thus I do not admit the damnation of infants who have died without baptism or outside of the church; nor the damnation of adults who have acted according to the light which God has given them. And I believe that if any one has followed the light which has been given him, he will undoubtedly receive greater light when he has need of it, and if such a man has failed to receive it during his lifetime he will at least receive it when at the point of death.

VII. It is said that God gives only to some, and not to all, the means which produces in them effectively a good will and final faith, and therefore He has less goodness than he would have if he gave to all. In answering, I must admit that God could overcome the greatest resistance of the human heart; and does it, too, sometimes, either by internal grace, or by external circumstances which have a great effect on souls; but he does not always do this. Whence comes this distinction? it may be asked, and why does his goodness seem limited? It is because, as I have already said in answering the first objection, it would not have been in order always to act in an irregular manner and to reverse the connection of things. The reasons of this connection, by means of which one is placed in more favorable circumstances than another, are hidden in the depths of the wisdom of God: they depend upon the universal harmony. The best plan of the universe, which God could not fail to choose, made it so. We judge from the event itself; since God has made it, it was not possible to do better. Far from being true that this conduct is contrary to goodness, it is supreme goodness which led him to it. This objection with its solution might have been drawn from what was said in regard to the first objection; but it seemed useful to touch upon it separately.

VIII. Whoever cannot fail to choose the best, is not free, and since God cannot fail to choose the best, he is not free. To this I say that it is not captivity but true liberty to be able to use one's free will for the best, and to always exercise this power, without ever being turned aside either by external force or by internal passions, the first of which causes slavery of the body, the second, slavery of the soul. There is nothing less servile, and nothing more in accordance with the highest degree of freedom, than to be always led

toward the good, and always by one's own inclination, without any constraint and without any displeasure. And to object therefore that God had need of external things, is only a sophism. He created them freely; but having proposed to himself an end, which is to exercise his goodness, wisdom has determined him to choose the means best fitted to attain this end. To call this a need, is to take that term in an unusual sense which frees it from all imperfection, just as when we speak of the wrath of God.

Seneca has somewhere said that God commanded but once but that he obeys always, because he obeys laws which he willed to prescribe to himself. But he might better have said that God always commands and that he is always obeyed; for in willing, he always follows the inclination of his own nature, and all other things always follow his will. And as this will is always the same, it cannot be said that he obeys only that will which he formerly had. Nevertheless, although his will is always infallible and always tends toward the best, the evil, or the lesser good, which he rejects, does not cease to be possible in itself; otherwise the necessity of the good would be geometrical (so to speak), or metaphysical, and altogether absolute; the contingency of things would be destroyed, and there would be no choice. But this sort of necessity, which does not contradict the possibility of contingency (as the laws of mathematics makes it impossible that two plus two might equal five one day) has this name only by analogy; it becomes effective, not by the pure essence of things (which is the case with mathematical necessity), but by that which is outside of them, above them, namely, by the will of God. This necessity is called moral, because, to the wise, necessity and what ought to be are equivalent things; and when it always has its effect, as it really has in the perfect wisdom, that is, in God, it may be said that it is a happy necessity. The nearer creatures approach to it, the nearer they approach to perfect happiness. Also this kind of necessity is not that which we try to avoid and which destroys morality, rewards and praise. For that which it brings, does not happen whatever we may do or will, but because we will it so. And a will to which it is natural to choose well, merits praise so much the more; also it carries its reward with it, which is sovereign happiness. And as this constitution of the divine nature gives entire satisfaction to him who possesses it, it is also the best and the most desirable for the creatures who are all dependent on God. If the will of God did not have for a rule the principle of the best, it would either tend toward evil, which would be the worst; or it would be in some way indifferent to good and to evil, and would be guided by chance: but a will which would allow itself always to act by chance, would not be worth more for the government of the universe than the fortuitous concourse of atoms, without there being any divinity therein. And even if God should abandon himself to chance only in some cases and in a certain way (as he would do, if he did not always work entirely for the best and if he were capable of preferring a lesser work to a greater, that is, an evil to a good, since that which prevents a greater good is an evil), he would be imperfect, as well as the object of his choice; he would not merit entire confidence; he would act without reason in such a case, and the government of the universe would be like certain games, equally divided between reason and chance. All this proves that this objection which is made against the choice of the best, perverts the notions of the free and of the necessary, and represents to us the best as something evil: which is either malicious or absurd.