

Leibniz

Lecture 4 | Michaelmas 2017

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These Lectures

1. **Metaphysics:** Theory of Substance and the Monadology
2. **Logic:** The Principles of Predicate Containment, Sufficient Reason, Identity of Indiscernibles
3. **Epistemology:** The Response to Locke
4. **Cosmology:** Pre-established Harmony, Theodicy, and the Mind-Body Problem

God as the Perfect Monad

“The conception of God which is the most common and the most full of meaning is expressed well enough in the words: God is an absolutely perfect being. The implications, however, of these words fail to receive sufficient consideration.” (*Discourse*, I)

What admits of perception? Greatness of number? No; Greatness of knowledge or power? Yes

What follows? God exists (existence is a perfection, *and* compossible with other perfections); The world God created is the best possible world (“The Principle of the Best”).

1. If the actual world is not the best of all possible worlds, either God is not omnipotent, or God is not omniscient, or God is not supremely good.
2. God is omnipotent, and omniscient, and supremely good.
3. The actual world is the best of all possible worlds.

Theodicy

“Whence it follows that God who possesses supreme and infinite wisdom acts in the most perfect manner not only metaphysically, but also from the moral standpoint.” (*Discourse*, I)

In *Candide* (1759) (and also in ‘Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne’, 1755) Voltaire attacks Leibniz’s conclusion that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds. He thinks only a fool can think this.

“Pangloss was professor of metaphysico-theologico-cosmology. He proved admirably that there is no effect without a cause, and that, in this best of all possible worlds, the Baron’s castle was the most magnificent of castles, and his lady the best of all possible Baronesses. [...] However... If this is the best of possible worlds, what then are the others?” (Voltaire, *Candide*)

Leibniz can respond to the problem in two related ways:

1. Given we are not omniscient, we should not suppose we can understand God’s intentions
2. Voltaire only evaluates *parts* of the universe; we lack a standard to measure the whole

Pre-Established Harmony

The perfection of God implies that there is a “universal harmony” among finite substances. A world in which there is such a harmony is more perfect than a world in which there isn’t.

“A created thing is said to act outwardly in so far as it has perfection, and to be acted upon by another in so far as it is imperfect.” (*Monad.* §49)

“It is thus that among created things action and passivity are reciprocal. For God, in comparing two simple substances, finds in each one reasons obliging him to adapt the other to it” (*Monad.* §52)

Mind-Body Problem

Leibniz’s conception of the relation between mind and body

“It is evident, then, that every living body has a dominating entelechy, which in animals is the soul.” (*Monad.* §70); “God alone is without body.” (*Monad.* §72)

The mind-body relation is a relation of aggregation (see *Monad.* §1ff). Matter is nothing but the phenomenon of resisting, passive force (inertia, solidity, firmness).

How do mind and body interact?

In the early modern period causation was a central topic of philosophical debate. A general problem: how is causation even possible. A specific puzzle: the apparent interaction between mind and body.

“I ask you to tell me how the human soul can determine the voluntary spirits, to make voluntary actions (it being only a thinking thing). For it seems that all determination of motion takes place by the moved object being pushed, by the way in which it is pushed by what moves it, or by the qualification and shape of the surface of the latter. Touch is required for the first two conditions, extension for the third. You entirely exclude the latter from your notion of the soul, and the former seems to be incompatible with an immaterial thing.” (Princess Elisabeth to Descartes, 1643)

A. **Interactionism:** There is direct causal interaction between the human soul and material bodies. (Descartes/Cartesians)

B. **Occasionalism:** No direct causal interaction between the human soul and material bodies. The immediate cause for every change is god. Hence, *a fortiori*, when a mental event seems to cause a bodily event, it is in fact God who, on the occasion, causes the bodily event. (Malebranche)

C. **Pre-Established Harmony:** No direct causal interaction between the human soul and material bodies. God is not the immediate cause for every change. Instead, all changes internal to a substance and all apparent interaction between substances proceed following a pre-established harmony.

“According to this system bodies act as if (to suppose the impossible) there were no souls at all, and souls act as if there were no bodies, and yet both body and soul act as if the one were influencing the other.” (*Monad.* §81)

1. No finite monad acts upon any other finite monad
2. Every non-miraculous state of a monad is a causal effect of its inherent activity
3. God has set up the mind and the body so that there is a correspondence between their states

There is nonetheless room for the appearance of interaction (active/passive mirroring)

“one particular substance has no physical influence on another ... nevertheless, one is quite right to say that my will is the cause of this movement of my arm ...; for the one expresses distinctly what the other expresses more confusedly, and one must ascribe the action to the substance whose expression is more distinct” (Letter to Arnauld, 1686; see also *Monad.* §52)

Passages from:

Discourse (I)

Monadology (52-58, 70-72, 80-81)