

Leibniz

Lecture 3 | 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

Principle of Predicate-in-Notion (PIN)

“Always in every true affirmative proposition, whether necessary or contingent, universal or particular, the notion of the predicate in some way included in that of the subject. *Predicatum inest subjecto*; otherwise I do not know what truth is.” (*Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. L.E. Loemker, p. 337)

“In other words, the account of truth claims that a categorical, affirmative proposition, whether singular or universal, is true just in case the concept of its predicate is contained in the concept of its subject.” (Mercer 2002, p. 473; this work contains a useful Appendix with Leibniz’s principles)

Puzzle:

Leibniz’s theory of truth (Predicate-in-Notion) makes every truth analytic (i.e. it can at least in principle be represented as the result of a conceptual analysis). But it seems that every analytic truth is a necessary truth. Therefore, it seems that Leibniz needs to accept that every truth is necessary. But surely there are contingent truths, right?

Leibniz’s solution:

“The Truths of Reasoning are necessary, and their opposite is impossible. Those of Fact, however, are contingent, and their opposite is possible. When a truth is necessary, the reason can be found by analysis in resolving it into simpler ideas and into simpler truths until we reach those which are primary.” (Monadology §33)

Truths of reason express an absolute necessity: ‘The triangle has three sides’ is analytically true *simpliciter*. Truths of fact express a hypothetical necessity: ‘Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon’ is analytically true, *given that Julius Caesar exists* (i.e. conditional on the actual world)

The Debate About Innate Knowledge and Ideas

Scholastic epistemology: transmission of species. In perception our mind receives the forms of the objects of perception. The ‘ideas’ we have depend on this process of transmission both causally and explanatorily.

Aristotle: The soul becomes like the object by taking on its form without taking on its matter (*De Anima*)

Descartes: No transmission of forms (“flying little images”); all ideas are ‘innate’, i.e. originate in the mind itself:

1. Principal attributes
2. ‘Secondary qualities’ (colours, smells, tastes)
3. God

Locke: All our ideas depend on experience, either directly (simple) or indirectly (complex). This dependence is both causal and explanatory (i.e. resemblance + combination)

Leibniz: *New Essays*. At least *necessary* truths (e.g. the ones we find in mathematics and metaphysics) must have some basis other than the senses. Distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge.

THEOPHILUS. You know, Philalethes, that I have long held a different view: that I always did and still do accept the innate idea of God, which M. Descartes upheld, and thus accept other innate ideas which could not come to us from the senses. (*New Essays*, Book 1, 74)

1. At best, experience makes us aware only of particular instances
2. No number of individual instances suffices to establish a necessary truth
3. We have knowledge of necessary truths

THEOP. The fundamental proof of necessary truth comes from the understanding alone, and other truths come from experience or from observations of the senses. Our mind is capable of knowing truths of both sorts, but it is the source of the former; and however often one experienced instances of a universal truth, one could never know inductively that it would always hold unless one knew through reason that it was necessary. (*New Essays*, Book 1, 80)

Unconscious Perception

Descartes: The mind is always thinking. Argument from metaphysics: Thinking is the mind’s principal attribute so it cannot exist without it.

Locke: The mind is not always thinking (having ideas). Argument from introspection: Not everyone always perceives themselves to have ideas, and so the having of ideas (i.e. active thinking) is not necessary for the mind to exist.

“I confess myself to have one of those dull souls, that doth not perceive itself always to contemplate ideas; nor can conceive it any more necessary for the soul always to think, than for the body always to move: the perception of ideas being (as I conceive) to the soul, what motion is to the body; not its essence, but one of its operations. And therefore, though thinking be supposed never so much the proper action of the soul, yet it is not necessary to suppose that it should be always thinking, always in action.” (*Essay*, Book II, Ch1)

Leibniz: The mind is always thinking (having perceptions), either consciously or unconsciously. Against the argument from introspection: It is true that not everyone always perceives themselves to have ideas, but this kind of awareness is not necessary for having ideas. We can have ideas unconsciously.

“I like to use the example of the roaring noise of the sea which impresses itself on us when we are standing on the shore. To hear this noise as we do, we must hear the parts which make up this whole, that is the noise of each wave, although each of these little noises makes itself known only when combined confusedly with all the others, and would not be noticed if the wave which made it were by itself.” (*New Essays*, Book 1, 54)

“Where could tablets be found which were completely uniform? Will a perfectly homogenous surface ever be seen? So why could we not also provide ourselves with objects of thought from our own depths, if we take the trouble to dig there?” (*New Essays*, Preface, 53)

Passages from:

Monadology (31-39)

New Essays on Human Understanding (Preface 52-53, Book 1 76-81)