

Interests

Leibniz was interested in both ancient and modern concerns:

- renaissance philosophy: mainly Plato on knowledge, the Aristotelian causes, orthodox Christianity and scholastics
- modern research: Huygens corpuscular--mechanical natural philosophy, and Malebrance's occasionalism

He is most often compared/applied to Descartes and Spinoza

The "Why?"

The "why" are questions such as:

- why is there something and nothing?
- why does God allow for evil?
- why do I do things?

everything that is can answer to the question of "why?"

Leibniz held onto **principle of sufficient reason** which states that everything must have a reason or cause

-> this cause are the Aristotelian causes

-> "nothing happens without reason"

the existence of something can be explained through the *Aristotelian causes*:

- material cause (wood)
- formal cause (design)
- efficient cause; a mechanism (carpentry)
- final cause; function (dining)

example: a table

the "why?" is the efficient cause: that which causes another thing to happen

final causes

teach us to search for efficient causes and these causes have to come together in the end.

Qualities of God

God is:

- perfection
- > what exists in the highest measure: knowledge, power, morality

Qualities of God (cont)

-> is not: number and extension (contradiction), nor is something perfect simply because it exists (Anselmus)

- beneficent
- all-powerful and good: he sustains everything that should be (Descartes) -> god has the highest sense
- omniscient: sees from every perspective
- creator of the best of all possible worlds, and the reason of all existence

He claims that God always has the option not to create the world; and, when God decides to go ahead with the project, he faces a choice among an infinite number of possible world

Empiricism

according to Leibniz:

- we gain as a *tabula rasa*: an individual born as a black slate (as did Aristotle, Avicenna, Aquinas, Locke)
- empirical natural philosophy is not wrong per se, but incomplete
- empiricism is all about mechanism and extension

Leibniz keeps asking "why does that happen if it could be different?"

Evil

why is there evil?

according to Leibniz, non-God substances have a limited perspective, and evil exists only from our perspective

It is this limitation that causes evil, as God chooses the best being to come to be, and only the highest beings have freedom.

-> this highest being is the most similar to God, both in perspective and reflection on perspective
basically, evil is our own fault

Nature

according to Leibniz, miracles and coincidences depart from the general will, and they only exist from our limited perspective. He states that we have a limited perspective on things, if we could see every perspective then we would come to see that there are no miracles and coincidences but due to the limited perspective we perceive them as such

-> which is why we believe in miracles and coincidences

But, everything is in order, everything has its reasons, God choose the most perfect order and so no miracles or coincidences exist

-> if there were miracles and things that do not fit in our world then our world would not be able to exist

Substance

= something that does not rely on something else for its understanding
-> contains everything that occurs to it is harmonious with but does not interact with other substances

"[W]hen several predicates are attributed to the same subject, and this subject is not attributed to any other, it is called an individual substance."

qualities:

- indivisible: they can only be created or destroyed (by God)
- are completely certain
- are unaffected by other substances
- they seem to relate
- occasionalism: substances are no efficient causes of each other (God determines substances to be in harmony)
- > when harmony substances are:
 - omniscient (everything is contained in them)
 - all-powerful (they help determine every limited substance)
 - similar to God



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Free will and Necessity

Necessity means that something is either a contradiction or a rational possibility

God determines the actuality of possibility by choosing the best option and thereby determines who will freely choose in the best way

-> so freewill as providence (guided by God)

God created you and knew what you were going to do, and you still did it, so it is still your responsibility, God did not make you do something, but just knew

-> we can still be blameworthy for our actions



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