

11 Perfection and happiness in the best possible world

Since all possible things have a claim to existence in God's understanding in proportion to their perfections, the result of all these claims must be the most perfect actual world which is possible.

Leibniz, G VI 603:L 639)

Candide, stunned, stupefied, despairing, bleeding, trembling, said to himself: – If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others like?'

(Voltaire)

Few philosophical theses are so renowned as Leibniz's illustrious claim that this is the best of all possible worlds. Ironically, the doctrine's great fame is due more to the ridicule it received in *Candide* than to broad public familiarity with Leibniz's ideas. Even among philosophers well acquainted with Leibnizian texts, the subject of God's standards of perfection has only recently begun to receive detailed discussion.² Yet these standards are essential to the meaning of the best possible world doctrine, and the place of humanity in the divine scheme is at the heart of Leibniz's treatment of the problem of evil. Consequently, it behooves us to ask what canons God invokes when he compares possible worlds, and in what ways these standards affect the prospects for human well-being.

When we examine these questions, however, we find a number of different perspectives of varying degrees of clarity, which Leibniz often leaves to his reader to harmonize. In this paper, I attempt to elucidate and unify these perspectives. Where I am unable to do so, I point out the ambiguities, gaps, and shifts in Leibniz's point of view.

Since the route to our destination is neither smooth nor direct, it may help to chart the course in advance. In section I, I examine Leibniz's claim that perfection is determined by variety and simplic-

ity. After inquiring what this means and how it fits with the thesis that God creates the greatest number of things, I seek in section II to tie it to several other Leibnizian dicta (e.g., that perfection derives from quantity of essence, monadic clarity, etc.). In section III, I discuss the idea that the actual world is the best possible one judged from a moral perspective. In doing so, I document some dramatic changes in Leibniz's attitude toward the place of happiness in the divine scheme.

I. VARIETY AND SIMPLICITY

Before delineating the canons of divine choice, it is important to note that Leibniz thinks these canons are objective. Issues of good and evil rest on God's intellect rather than his will, and it is with reference to fixed and eternal standards that God makes his infallible choice of the best possible world. In Leibniz's opinion, the objectivity of goodness is essential to true religion and, in fact, is dictated by the principle of sufficient reason. "Every act of will," Leibniz says, "implies some reason for willing and . . . this reason naturally precedes the act of will itself" (G IV 428: L 304).

The criteria of perfection, then, are objective. But what are these criteria? Leibniz frequently answers by citing two factors: variety and simplicity. In a typical passage, for example, he says: "God has chosen that world which is the most perfect, that is to say, which is at the same time the simplest in its hypotheses [i.e., laws] and the richest in phenomena" (G IV 43: L 306; Cf G VI 238, 241: H 254–5, 257; G VI 603: L 639). Let us refer to this thesis as "the variety/simplicity criterion."

The variety/simplicity criterion generates a number of difficult problems. One would like to know (a) exactly how it is to be interpreted, (b) why it is the test of worldly excellence, and (c) how it coheres with other indices of value that Leibniz acknowledges. Question (c) is the subject of later sections and question (a) requires extended treatment. I therefore begin with (b).

Leibniz identifies perfection with harmony, which he defines in classical fashion as "unity within variety." There are many terminological variations on this theme: harmony is said to be "agreement in . . . variety," "similarity in variety or diversity balanced by identity," and order (regularity, uniformity, etc.) within plurality (Gr 12,

267; G W 171–72: AG 233–34; A VI.iii 116, G VI 616; L 648). But these variations are evidently intended to signify the same thing, namely, a certain order that unifies diversity. The specific kind of order that determines harmony, however, is the one expressed by the variety/simplicity criterion.

To see why, note first that Leibniz thinks that order, in its most general sense, applies to any conceivable series of things. In the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, for example, he tells us that it is not even possible to imagine events that are irregular or do not exhibit some uniformity, however complex or baroque it might be (G IV 431: L 306).³ Since any series is ordered, but not every one is equally harmonious, the degree of harmony must depend upon the extent to which the series embodies an ideal kind of order.

This order is the kind that best satisfies reason by unifying a manifold in the simplest and most beautiful way, i.e., the one that does the most with the least, or produces the maximum desired effect by the most efficient means (Gr 12, 267–68, 285–87; G IV 430: L 306). Harmony, so construed, delights the intellect and gives pleasure to a rational being. Indeed, in *The Philosopher's Confession* (1672–73), Leibniz tells us that to be delighted just is to feel harmony and that “in fact nothing is pleasing to the mind besides harmony” (A VI.iii 116). Elsewhere, he explains that the experience of harmony delights perception because it “makes it easier, and extricates it from confusion.”

Consonances please, since agreement is easily observable in them. . . . Agreement is sought in variety, and the more easily it is observed there, the more it pleases; and in this consists the feeling (*sensus*) of perfection. Moreover, the perfection a thing has is greater, to the extent that there is more agreement in greater variety, whether we observe it or not. Therefore, this is what order and regularity come to. (GW 171: AG 233)

Though every series has some sort of order, then, the most *harmonious* order involves the greatest variety of phenomena regulated by the simplest laws. It follows that God, who wishes to *maximize* harmony, will choose the world that fulfills the variety/simplicity criterion.

Turning to question (a), it may help to cite some analogies which Leibniz seeks to illuminate his criterion. In section 5 of the *Discourse*, he likens God to

an excellent geometrician who knows how to find the best constructions of a problem; or a good architect who makes the most advantageous use of the space and the capital intended for a building, leaving nothing which offends or which lacks the beauty of which it is capable; or a good family head who makes such use of his holdings that there is nothing uncultivated and barren; or a skilled machinist who produces his work by the easiest process that can be chosen; or a learned author who includes the greatest number of subjects in the smallest possible volume.

As for simplicity,

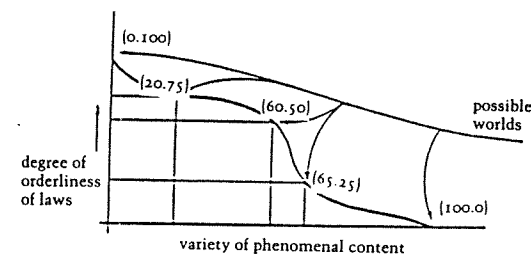
this is shown especially in the means which he uses, whereas the variety, opulence, and abundance appears in regard to the ends or results. The one thus ought to be in equilibrium with the other, just as the funds intended for a building should be proportional to the size and beauty one requires in it. It is true that nothing costs God anything, even less than it costs a philosopher to build the fabric of his imaginary world out of hypotheses, since God has only to make his decrees in order to create a real world. But where wisdom is concerned decrees or hypotheses are comparable to expenditures, in the degree to which they are independent of each other, for reason demands that we avoid multiplying hypotheses or principles, somewhat as the simplest system is always preferred in astronomy.

(G IV 430–31: L 305–7; Cf. G VII 303–4: L 487; G VI 603: L 639)

Leibniz goes on to say that his comparisons “portray an imperfect semblance of the divine wisdom” and he claims to use them only to “lift our spirit to some conception of what cannot well be expressed.”

Setting mystical apologies aside, we must ask: To what conception is our spirit being lifted? Nicholas Rescher has given a plausible answer. On his interpretation, the variety/simplicity criterion

can be illustrated in somewhat oversimplified form by minimax-problems in the differential calculus; for example, by considering the choice-situation depicted in a diagram of the following sort:



We suppose here that the merit function is of the simplest additive sort:

$$\text{merit index} = (\text{variety index}) + (\text{orderliness}).^4$$

Since orderliness represents simplicity, the criterion of a world's perfection is the sum of its variety and nomic simplicity.

Rescher also argues that the best possible world embodies the ideal trade-off of variety and simplicity, which he takes to be in conflict with each other.

The immediately striking feature of the [variety/simplicity] criterion is that the two factors are *opposed* to one another and pull in opposite directions. On the one hand, a world whose only metal is (say) copper, or whose only form of animal life is the amoeba, will obviously have a simpler structure of laws because of this impoverishment. On the other hand, a world whose laws are more complex than the rules of the astrologers demands a wider variety of occurrences for their exemplification. Clearly, the less variety a world contains – the more monotonous and homogeneous it is – the simpler its laws will be, and the more complex its laws, the greater the variety of its phenomena must be to realize them. Too simple laws produce monotony; too varied phenomena produce chaos.⁵

The actual world therefore embodies the maximally efficient trade-off of the two determinants of perfection. Rescher's graph nicely depicts this: the best world is higher on the variety index than some of its competitors, lower than others; and the same holds for the orderliness (or simplicity) index. Nevertheless, that world is best on the whole because the sum of its two values is higher than that of any of other world.⁶

Despite its initial plausibility, however, I believe that the trade-off idea is mistaken. For Leibniz says repeatedly that the actual world is the richest one and that it contains the greatest conceivable variety of phenomena. Throughout his career, but especially in his maturity, he insists on the unsurpassable richness of things: in the *Discourse*, for example, he says that the world is "the richest in phenomena"; in the *Principles of Nature and Grace* he declares that it has "the greatest variety together with the greatest order"; and in the *Monadology* he asserts flatly that it has "the greatest variety possible." All of this indicates that God is not required to trade-off variety in his selection of the best possible world [G IV 431: L 306;

G VI 603: L 639; G VI 616: L 648; Cf. Gr 285; G VII 290: P 146; G IV 524: L 496–97].⁷

Leibniz also believes that the world with the most variety has the largest number of individuals. He states this in numerous works and in 1686 he even goes so far as to define "the existent" as "that which is compatible with the most things" (C 360, 376: PLP 51, 65; Cf. G I 331: L 211; V E 6 1141, VE 8 2036; Gr 17; G VII 194: Russell, *Critical Exposition*, p. 296). We should observe that he sometimes suggests that the world has the maximum number of phenomenal entities, on other occasions, that it has the most monads. The explanation is simply that he holds both views and regards the former diversity as founded on the latter.⁸ At the phenomenal level, he says, there is a vast continuum of species – plants, animals, men, and endless others – which form a "single chain" whose links are so closely united that it is impossible for the senses and imagination to fix the precise point where any one begins or ends.⁹ Likewise, although he believes that many worlds have infinite members,¹⁰ he assures us that, at the phenomenal level, the actual world contains infinities of things within infinities of things *ad infinitum*. So great is the number and diversity of phenomenal things that "every small part of the universe contains a world with an infinite number of creatures" (C 522: L 270).¹¹ This incomparable variety, moreover, arises from the perceptual activity of the largest number of underlying monads.¹²

In order to reconcile the claim that this world has the greatest conceivable variety with the demand for simplicity, some may suggest the following interpretation: the actual world has the greatest variety of phenomena governed by the simplest laws that are compatible with maximum variety. Although more complex laws would accommodate as much diversity, by choosing the simplest ones that do so, God maximizes harmony without trading-off any variety at all.

The following text, moreover, supports this interpretation. Having said that all the actions of God conform to general rules, Leibniz adds:

Just as there is no line freely drawn by hand, however irregular it may seem, which cannot be reduced to a rule or definition, likewise the whole series of God's actions makes up a certain entirely regular disposition without any exception. And . . . it is the most perfect one possible or the simplest, just as

of all the lines that can pass through the same points, one is the simplest. (Robinet, *Malebranche et Leibniz*, p. 222)

This suggests that God could have maximized variety using more complex laws, but chose instead to do it in the simplest and most perfect way.¹³

Unfortunately, the passage conflicts with other important Leibnizian doctrines. Taken at face value, for example, it implies not only that more complex laws are compatible with phenomena as rich as ours, but that such laws are compatible with qualitatively the *same* phenomena. (For it speaks of different lines passing through the same points.) This violates the identity of indiscernibles by implying that there is at least one other possible world that differs from ours in its laws, but not in any purely qualitative respect.

Perhaps we shouldn't take the passage at face value. Maybe Leibniz means no more than what the present interpretation suggests, namely, that more complex laws are consistent with phenomena as rich, though not exactly the same, as ours. If so, however, at least one other possible world will have as much variety as ours, which contradicts the claim that ours is the richest of all.¹⁴

Some may reply that in claiming that our world is richest, Leibniz might mean only that no world is richer in phenomena.¹⁵ But there are just too many places where he says that this world is *the* richest to permit this way out (E.g. G IV 431: L 306; G VI 603, 616: L 639, 648; G III 573: L 662; Gr 285; G VII 290: P 146). Furthermore, as we have seen, he defines the existent as whatever is compatible with the most things, and he lets "the most things" refer to either monads or phenomenal entities. But letting it refer to the latter would be self-defeating if he thought there were more than one world with the most phenomena, since in that case his definition would not pick out a unique set of individuals. (We may note that his definition also creates a further difficulty for the trade-off view: if there were worlds with more phenomenal entities, as that view implies, then our world wouldn't qualify as existent.)

A final problem is that Leibniz indicates that simplicity is the *means* to variety and that achieving the most diversity therefore *requires* using the simplest laws of nature. In 1679, for example, he tells Malebranche that if God had not used simple laws, he would have been unable to create as many things as he did.

God makes the most things he can and what obliges him to seek simple laws is the need to find a place for as many things as can be put together; if he made use of other laws, it would be like trying to make a building with round stones, which make us lose more space than they occupy.

(G I 331: L 211)

In another early text, he says:

The necessary being acts in the simplest ways. For among the infinite possible ways there are certain simplest ones, but the simplest are the ones which offer the most.¹⁶

(Gr 267; Cf 285f.)

And essentially the same idea comes up in the *Theodicy* (1710), where he explains that "intricate processes take up too much ground, too much space, too much place, too much time that might have been better employed" (G VI 241: H 257).¹⁶

Leibniz's thesis in these places is that simplicity is productive: God's decision to maximize phenomena required him to use the simplest laws because they alone would produce it. This contradicts the idea that there are worlds that have as much variety as ours, but more complex laws. It also conflicts with the trade-off view, which has it that simplicity and variety "pull in opposite directions."

In light of all this, we must attribute to Leibniz a more radical position than the ones we have considered. Ultimately, he thinks the best world contains the most diverse phenomena *and* the simplest laws of nature;¹⁷ indeed, he believes that the greatest number and variety of things is unobtainable apart from such laws. I shall dub this doctrine "the harmony of variety and simplicity."

The harmony of variety and simplicity may seem to be an astonishing thesis, even from someone like Leibniz, whose philosophy is a profusion of unexpected harmonies. The paradox, however, is less dramatic than it seems; for, when Leibniz says that simplicity is the means to variety, he is not suggesting that *fewer* laws bring greater diversity, but only that *simpler* ones do so. In fact, as we shall see, he thinks the best world has "a multitude" of natural laws.

We can state Leibniz's view more perspicuously by drawing a few distinctions. Possible laws differ in degree of internal complexity: some are very complex and convoluted, others quite simple. Let us refer to a law as "maximally simple" just in case it governs the type of phenomena it covers in the simplest way possible. When discussing the number of such laws in a world, let us speak of the world's

"simplicity index": the greater the number of maximally simple laws, the higher the simplicity index. Now Leibniz thinks maximally simple laws are maximally productive. So his thesis, expressed in our terms, is that the highest simplicity index is the means to the greatest variety.

Our next task is to determine what Leibniz's criteria for simplicity are and why he thinks the highest simplicity index is the means to the greatest variety. One mark of simplicity is the extent to which a law approaches perfect universality, i.e., freedom from exceptions. Exceptions occur when two laws conflict and one restricts the other or both give way to a third (G VI 315; H 328; Cf. GW 163; AG 231). Since exceptions make a law more complex, a necessary condition for maximum simplicity, is that the law be strictly universal, or exception-free.

Leibniz accordingly treats exceptions to a law as imperfections, which a God who values simplicity will seek to avoid as far as reason permits.¹⁸ "The ways of God," we learn, "are the most simple and uniform: for he chooses rules that least restrict one another" (G VI 241; H 257). In fact, apart from the exceptions to natural law required by miracles, the best world involves a set of perfectly universal principles, rather than a system of conflicting laws in which higher-order ones govern "gaps" in lower-order ones.¹⁹

Leibniz also treats universality as a mark of regularity and claims that a multitude of regularities (i.e., universal laws) produces variety.

One can say that that which is more perfect is that which is more regular, that is, that which admits of more observations, namely, more general observations. And so my view is expressed more distinctly in this way, for the term "observation" is commonly used even for exceptions. However, a multitude of regularities brings forth variety. Thus are uniformity, that is, generality, and variety obtained [*conciliantur*].

(Letter dated 1715, GW 163; AG 231)

In this passage, Leibniz does not explain why a multitude of regularities brings forth variety. One suggestion might be that a large set of universal laws yields many phenomena because different universal laws cover different phenomena. But this can't be the whole story. That a large set of universal laws produces variety does not in itself show that any such set produces the greatest possible variety. And even if it did show this, it still wouldn't

establish that simplicity is required for the most variety. If a multitude of simple, universal laws can generate the maximum diversity, why couldn't a multitude of complex laws do so too?

The resolution of these issues lies in another criterion for simplicity, which Leibniz articulates elsewhere. A maximally simple law is not only universal: it is also "architectonic," or so structured that it makes the most efficient use of whatever aspect of being it covers. The most efficient way of achieving an end, moreover, is always the simplest one, because the simplest just *is* whatever does the most with the least (Gr 285f.).²⁰

On this account, architectonicness – or maximum efficiency – is both necessary and sufficient for a law to be maximally simple.²¹ Thus, although a multitude of complex and inefficient laws would produce variety, an equally great multitude of simple and efficient ones would produce even more variety. And only the largest system of maximally efficient laws could produce the greatest possible variety.

It is no surprise, then, that Leibniz should say that God uses architectonic laws of nature exclusively (G VII 273, 278, 302; L 479, 484, 487). Furthermore, because God wants to create as abundantly as possible, he selects as many architectonic laws as are needed to produce the greatest conceivable diversity. In *The Ultimate Origination of Things*, Leibniz asserts that God works by laws "through which the greatest amount of essence or possibility is brought into existence" and that each law dictates "that a maximum effect should be achieved with a minimum outlay." Where time and space are the outlay, and the number and variety of things is the end to be maximized, Leibniz compares the problem of creation to

certain games in which all the spaces on a board are to be filled according to definite rules, but unless we use a certain device, we find ourself at the end blocked from the difficult spaces and compelled to leave more spaces vacant than we needed or wished to. Yet there is a definite rule by which a maximum number of spaces can be filled in the easiest way.

(G VII 303; L 487).²²

Analogously, the most productive way of filling the universe with phenomena is through architectonic laws of nature.²³ Moreover, since God gives the actual world architectonic laws for every aspect of reality (space, time, motion, qualities, etc.), it will have the largest consistent set of such laws and the greatest conceivable variety.²⁴

We can conclude that the "multitude of regularities" which "brings forth variety" is the largest system of architectonic principles. Likewise, because architectonic rules are maximally simple, we can say that this system embodies the highest simplicity index. Most importantly, we can now see why this index is the means to the greatest variety.

Some will object that this conflicts with Leibniz's acceptance of the principle of parsimony. After all, he tells us specifically that God avoids multiplying hypotheses (G IV 430: L 306). So how can he also maintain that God chooses the *largest* number of simple laws?

The following passage gives the answer.

The general rule which the nominalists frequently use is that entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity. This rule is frequently opposed by others as violating the divine opulence, which is generous rather than parsimonious and takes pleasure in the variety and abundance of things. But those who raise this objection have not, I think, grasped the meaning of the nominalists, which, though more obscurely stated, reduces to this: the simpler a hypothesis is, the better it is. And in accounting for the causes of phenomena, that hypothesis is most successful which makes the fewest gratuitous assumptions. Whoever acts differently by this very fact accuses nature, or rather God, its author, of an unfitting superfluity. (G IV 158: L 128)

Leibniz thinks that God avoids multiplying *gratuitous* hypotheses, or ones that involve more than is necessary to achieve his ends. But since the highest simplicity index is *required* to maximize variety, choosing it satisfies the principle of parsimony.²⁵

Our analysis of harmony so far has focused on laws of phenomena. We should not forget, however, that phenomenal laws are the products of an underlying noumenal harmony: all natural laws, as well as the data they govern, result from infinitely coordinated principles of monadic development. These monadic laws, moreover, literally generate the entire phenomenal realm, since they are forces, or tendencies, which bring forth all monadic activity (e.g., G IV 391: L 409). Finally, like the phenomenal laws to which they give rise, noumenal laws are architectonic principles.

The state of the soul . . . is . . . a tendency . . . to change its thoughts . . . in the simplest and most uniform way which its state permits. . . . And the reason for the change of thoughts in the soul is the same as that of the change of things in the universe which it represents. The mechanical rea-

sons which are developed in the bodies are united . . . in the souls . . . indeed, they have their source there. . . . [Monads] are always images of the universe. They are . . . worlds in abridged form, fruitful simplicities, substantial unities, but virtually infinite by the multitude of their modifications, centers which express an infinite circumference.

(G IV 562: L 579. Cf. G IV 524, L 497)

The variety and simplicity of the phenomenal world therefore supervene on the greatest noumenal harmony, one which arises when the largest number of monads is driven by simplest developmental laws.²⁶

We have already established that the highest simplicity index is the means to the greatest variety. It is now clear, however, that at a deeper level the mechanism responsible for this index is a perfect accommodation between the noumenal laws of the largest system of monads. Therefore, in the *Monadology*, Leibniz is also able to state that the mutual accommodation of "the infinite multiplicity of simple substances" is "the means of obtaining the greatest variety possible, but with the greatest possible order" (G VI 616: L 648). The harmony above rests on the harmony below.

II. VARIANT ACCOUNTS OF PERFECTION

Leibniz does not always define perfection in terms of variety and simplicity. In fact, he says many things about the sources of value whose relation to our interpretation still needs clarification. He asserts, for example, that possible beings have different degrees of internal perfection, which God takes into account in assessing a possible world. He also holds that a monad's perfection is a function of the distinctness of its perceptions and of its degree of action rather than passion. How, one wishes to know, do these claims relate to one another and to the variety/simplicity criterion? Furthermore, Leibniz says that "perfection is nothing but quantity of essence," or, positive reality (e.g., G VII 303: L 487; G I 266: L 177; G VI 613: L 646-47). Yet he also identifies perfection with universal observability and with affirmative intelligibility, thus leading us to ask how these conceptions connect to all the others.

There are dozens of places at which Leibniz assembles assorted pieces of this puzzle, but nowhere, as far as I know, where he puts

them all together. We must therefore take the various pieces and construct from them the most complete picture we can. Let us begin with quantity of essence and join it to what we have already organized.

This piece fits in fairly neatly. Leibniz equates a world's perfection, or harmony, with its quantity of essence, and he thus understandably regards the best world as the one with the greatest quantity of essence. But he also thinks the world with the most harmony has the largest number of phenomenal things and the largest number of monads. It follows that the most harmonious world is at once the one with the most phenomenal entities, the most monads, and the greatest quantity of essence. This brings together in a simple way a variety of Leibnizian theses: the best possible world = the most harmonious one = the one that satisfies the variety/simplicity criterion = the one with the most phenomenal individuals and the most monads = the one with the most reality, or essence.²⁷

The next element is the degree of universal observability. This is determined by the number of universal laws in a world, because, obviously, the more such laws there are, the larger the number of universal observations that are possible. Leibniz claims, moreover, that the world with the most harmony must be the one with the most universal observability. But why? The answer, I believe, is that universal laws cover their phenomena in a perfectly regular way, and different universal laws cover *different* phenomena. So the world with the most universal laws will have the greatest variety of phenomena governed in the most regular fashion. Thus, he tells Wolff that "Nothing is more regular than the divine intellect, which is the source of all rules, and produces the most perfect system of the world, the system that is as harmonious as possible and thus contains the greatest number of universal observations" (GW 171: AG 233).

Leibniz also identifies perfection, or positive reality, with affirmative intelligibility and he claims that the latter is equivalent to universal observability. Since we have seen that the most universal observability involves the most harmony and regularity, an account of affirmative intelligibility should enable us to forge several more links in our chain of equivalences.

On inquiring in 1715 about Leibniz's definition of perfection, Christian Wolff received this reply:

The perfection about which you ask is the degree of positive reality, or what comes to the same thing, degree of affirmative intelligibility, so that something more perfect is something in which more things worthy of observation [*notatu digna*] are found. . . . When I say that something in which more is worthy of observation is more perfect, I understand general observations or rules. . . . The more there is worthy of observation in a thing, the more universal properties, the more harmony it contains. . . . [Likewise, the more regular] is that which provides more universal rules or universal observations.

[GW 161, 170–71: AG 230, 232–33]²⁸

Leibniz holds that the real, in its most general sense, is the intelligible;²⁹ hence, "positive reality" and "affirmative intelligibility" are but two names for the same thing. A world is intelligible, moreover, to the degree that it contains "things worthy of observation," by which he means things subject to universal laws, or ones that are regular and harmonious. All of which implies that the world with the most positive reality, or quantity of essence = the one with the most affirmative intelligibility = the one with the most universal observability = the one with the greatest regularity and the most harmony.

Finally, Leibniz thinks the simplest way of producing a desired effect is the most beautiful one, and he says that harmony is the very kind of order from which beauty arises (VE I 37; G VII 87: L 426). Consequently, the world with the greatest simplicity, harmony, and other traits we have discussed above will also have the greatest conceivable beauty.

Until now I have concentrated on the perfection of an entire world. Before turning to the determinants of an individual monad's perfection, however, I will consider a series of questions whose answers bring our picture into sharper focus.

The first question concerns the claim that perfection is nothing but quantity of essence. This may seem to conflict with things Leibniz says about simplicity, for he indicates that, in addition to being the means to variety, simplicity has *intrinsic* value.³⁰ If so, how can perfection be "nothing but" quantity of essence?

The question mistakenly assumes that quantity of essence is tallied independently of simplicity. A world's quantity of essence is the same thing as its degree of harmony, and the latter is determined by variety and simplicity. Thus, there is no problem in simplicity contributing *per se* to degree of essence.³¹

This may appear to damage the argument that the best world has the greatest variety of phenomena. If worldly perfection is not measured solely by variety, what assurance is there that the best world has the most variety?

The answer is that a world with less variety could be better than one with more only if the former had simpler laws. But simplicity is the means to variety, and this entails that the best world has both the greatest simplicity *and* the greatest variety.

One might now ask how Leibniz knows that there is only *one* world with the greatest simplicity and variety. Even if simplicity is the means to variety, how can he prove, for example, that there are not two worlds with maximally efficient laws and maximally varied phenomena?

His reply is that if there were two or more such worlds, they would be equally worthy of choice. God would then be without a sufficient reason for deciding between them, and, like Buridan's ass, he would choose nothing. But God has in fact chosen this world. So there is exactly one best possible world (G VI 107: H 128).³²

We can now consider Leibniz's remarks about the perfection of an individual monad. In this instance, he tells us that a monad's quantity of essence = its degree of perfection, that its degree of perfection = its degree of distinctness, and that its distinctness = its degree of action. Here, however, I am content to explicate the link between action and distinctness and merely raise questions about their connection to perfection, or harmony. As it turns out, Leibniz's account of the latter is far less developed, and therefore less certain, than his account of the former.

The first issue is how action can be attributed to created beings at all. Action involves causation, and, strictly speaking, finite substances are incapable of interaction (G VI 607: L 643; G II 57: MP 65). In what sense, therefore, can they act on one another?

Leibniz responds by distinguishing the strict sense of action from another one. Although created substances are metaphysically independent, it is possible for the state of monad *A* to express that of monad *B* more distinctly than *B*'s state expresses *A*'s. Under these conditions, *B*'s state is more easily inferable from *A*'s than conversely, and *A*'s state better represents the reason for the mutual relations between the two monads. This creates the appearance of interaction and provides a sense in which we say that *A* acts on *B*.

In a letter of 1686 to Arnauld, Leibniz explains that the independence of monads does not prevent "commerce" between substances:

For as all created substances are a continual production of the same sovereign being in accordance with the same plans, and are an expression of the same universe and the same phenomena, they harmonize exactly among themselves and that causes us to say that one acts upon the other, because one is a more distinct expression than the other of the cause of or reason for the changes, more or less as we attribute motion to the vessel rather than to the whole sea, and rightly so, although speaking abstractly one might uphold another hypothesis of motion, since motion in itself, disregarding the cause, is always relative. This is how, in my opinion, one must understand the commerce between created substances.

(G II 57–58: MP 64–65; Cf. G II 47, 69–70: MP 53, 84–85).

Likewise, in the *Monadology*, he states that we attribute action to a created being "insofar as it has distinct perceptions" and that one monad acts on another if we find in it "that which will supply a reason *a priori* for what happens in the other" (G VI 615: L 647–48; Cf. G IV 440–41: L 313; G VI 138–39: H 158–59).

Despite the absence of metaphysical interaction, then, we say that monad *A* acts on *B* if *A* supplies the reason for what happens in *B*. But the degree to which a monad provides such reasons is the same as the degree to which it has distinct perceptions. Hence, degree of action = degree of distinctness.

In the passage just quoted Leibniz also states that a monad acts outwardly "insofar as it has perfection," thus indicating that degree of action equals degree of perfection. Since all perfection is harmony, however, it follows that a monad's action and distinctness are each equal to its harmony.

But the basis of the connection is not obvious: What is the link between harmony on the one hand and action and distinctness on the other?³³ It won't do to reply that a monad's distinctness equals its quantity of essence, which is the same thing as its degree of harmony. That only prompts one to ask what justifies equating distinctness with quantity of essence. To answer these questions, Leibniz would need to explicate the fit between the notion of harmony (i.e., simplicity within variety) and that of monadic distinctness.

In fact, he makes some intriguing first steps along these lines. As we saw at the end of section II, Leibniz says that every monad under-

goes a series of changes which unfold in the simplest way its state permits. He also says that even the slightest thought contains variety and represents a multitude in unity (G VI 608–9: L 644). The former statement suggests that a monad's overall distinctness can be explained as a relation of variety and simplicity. The latter suggests that there is a degree of harmony in every perception which is equivalent to the perception's distinctness.

These ideas raise a host of important questions. Exactly how does the variety/simplicity criterion apply to the slightest thought? Does its application yield a harmony value which corresponds to the distinctness of each perception? If so, is the harmony of each monad definable in terms of the distinctness of its perceptions, and the harmony of the world in terms of the distinctness of its monads? In each case, what are the details of the analysis?

Unfortunately, I know of nowhere where he answers these questions. Although some possible answers come to mind, my present textual basis is too slim to support them adequately. Therefore, I shall not hazard a guess as to how the various harmonies should be played out, or attempt to complete a score which Leibniz apparently left unfinished.

III. MORAL PERFECTION AND HUMAN HAPPINESS

In addition to its other resplendent features, the actual world is "the most perfect morally" (G VII 306: L 489). Yet this thesis, which Leibniz regards as certain, has struck generations of his critics as incredible. For it seems to entail not only that the world contains as much happiness as possible, but that any difference in the total history of the universe, together with all of its consequences, would have yielded a morally inferior result.

In this section, I focus on what Leibniz's theory implies about happiness vis-à-vis other values that might be thought to compete with it. The principal issues are: (a) whether the morally best world must contain the greatest happiness (b) if so, whether the universe was made exclusively for that purpose and (c) how important the happiness of spirits is in comparison to that of lower beings, who are incapable of it.³⁴ As we shall see, Leibniz's views on some of these issues undergo important changes.

To understand Leibniz's position one must first ask what he takes

moral perfection to be. We may approach this issue by considering how he classifies types of imperfection, or evil. Basically, he adopts the old Scholastic view that evil is a limitation, i.e., a privation of being, or perfection. Furthermore,

Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. Metaphysical evil consists in mere imperfection, physical evil in suffering, and moral evil in sin. (G VI 115: H 136)

This account of metaphysical evil accords with his identification of perfection with quantity of essence, or positive reality. From the other definitions, one can infer that physical perfection is the opposite of suffering and moral perfection the opposite of sin. Moral perfection, however, requires justice, which Leibniz says entails a loving concern for the happiness of all those one can affect (G III 386–87: L 421; Gr 579; A VI.iii 116f.). Since he defines happiness as a state of lasting joy, it follows that God cares about the lasting joy of all spirits (G VII 43; Gr 579, 582; G VII 86: L 425; *New Essays*, II.xx, A VI.vi: RB 163).

The idea that God's moral nature implies his loving concern for our happiness is a persistent theme in Leibniz's writings. In the opening pages of *The Philosopher's Confession* (1673), he defines a just person as one who loves everyone, or who is delighted by the happiness of others (A VI.iii 117).³⁵ By arguing that all happiness is harmony, and that all awareness of harmony is delight, he is able to conclude that:

All happiness is pleasing to God. Therefore, (by the definition of love posited a little while ago) God loves everyone, and consequently (by the definition of justice already set out) God is just. (A VI.iii 117)

Although Leibniz here deduces God's justice from his love, it is clear that he could have argued in the opposite direction, as he does, for example, in the *Discourse* (G IV 460–61: L 326). The view that divine goodness entails love and respect for the happiness of spirits appears throughout the remainder of Leibniz's life.

Nevertheless, God has other important values, such as his abiding concern for variety and order. It is therefore of great concern to us to know how much he cares about our welfare and what weight he attaches to his other objects of interest.

The answer is also important for assessing Voltaire's claim that

the amount of unhappiness makes it ludicrous to believe that this is the best possible world. This assumes that Leibniz thinks the best world contains the greatest happiness. But the thesis that God cares about us does not entail this, since it leaves it open that he may care about other things more. If we learn, for example, that metaphysical values are more significant than moral ones and that God trades off our happiness to secure the most variety and order, this would deflect the attack. For then the idea that this is the best possible world would have far less auspicious implications for us than Voltaire imagines. Indeed, in that case, Leibniz would be an ontological, but not a full-blown moral, optimist.³⁶

The assumption that the actual world contains the most happiness has a firm textual basis, however. In an early paper, Leibniz asserts that God creates "the greatest possible happiness" and that "everything is made for the sake of the pleasure of souls" (VE 8 2042f. [Ca. 1678–82]).³⁷ Leibniz repeats these ideas in many other places in his early and middle years, but nowhere does he articulate them so fully as in the last three sections of the *Discourse*, where he claims that God enters into a republic with spirits and makes their happiness his principal aim. Leibniz leaves no doubt, moreover, about the degree of importance which the ruler of the divine republic places on its citizens. Intelligent substances, he says,

must be infinitely nearer to [God] than all other things, which can pass only for the instruments of spirits. So we see that all wise persons value man infinitely more highly than all other things, no matter how precious. . . . And just as we would praise a king who prefers to save the life of one man above that of his rarest and most precious animal, so we cannot doubt that the most enlightened and most just of all monarchs is of the same opinion.

(G IV 461: L 326; Cf. VE 8 2043 [1678–82])

Leibniz preaches of the intimacy of the relationship between God and his most cherished creatures. Spirits are "of [God's] lineage or like the children of his household. . . . One single spirit is worth a whole world." So dear to him are the members of his republic that "the greatest possible felicity of its inhabitants becomes his highest law." And in a passionate closing passage, Leibniz praises Jesus Christ, who has revealed the laws of heaven and made us see:

how much God loves us and with what exactness he has provided for all that concerns us; how God who cares for the sparrows will not neglect the

reasonable creatures who are infinitely more dear to him . . . how God has more concern for the least of these intelligent souls than for the whole world mechanism.

(G IV 461–63; L 327)

These passages not only involve moral optimism, they assign infinitely greater intrinsic value to happiness than to purely metaphysical good. But, despite the disproportionate weighting, Leibniz thinks that omnipotence can maximize *both* kinds of value, for he frequently states that the world contains the greatest metaphysical perfection as well as the most happiness. This makes him a moral *and* an ontological optimist. I shall refer to this double optimism as "the harmony of variety and happiness."

Leibniz subscribes to the harmony of variety and happiness in a large number of texts. In the *Discourse* (1686), however, he states it this way:

If the highest principle ruling the existence of the physical world is the decree which gives it the greatest perfection possible, the highest purpose in the moral world, or the City of God which is the noblest part of the universe, should be to spread in it the greatest possible happiness.

(G IV 462: L 327; Cf. GM VI 243; L 44)

In the period around 1686, then, Leibniz embraces the following three theses:

- (T1) Each spirit's happiness is of infinitely greater importance than any other kind of thing.
- (T2) The happiness of spirits is God's principal end.
- (T3) The world contains the greatest variety and order and also the greatest conceivable happiness. (The harmony of variety and happiness.)

In the *Discourse*, Leibniz supports T1 on the grounds that spirits express God "better beyond all comparison than anything else." They alone express him "with a knowledge of what they are doing" and with an awareness of "the great truths about God and the universe." Only a spirit can "enter into a conversation, so to speak, and even a society" with God, thereby coming to love and freely serve him. Consequently, God "derives infinitely more glory from them than from all other beings" (G IV 460–62: L 326–27).

Sometimes Leibniz deduces T2 from T1, arguing that if the happiness of spirits is infinitely more valuable than other things, God will

have no higher end (G IV 462: L 327). At other times, he infers T₂ from a different, and far weaker thesis, namely:

(T₁') Spirits have more value than any other kind of thing (G IV 430; L 306; cf. G VII 291: P 147).³⁸

So we might say that Leibniz has a stronger and a weaker approach to T₂.

What are Leibniz's grounds for T₃? This question deserves far more space than we have here, but perhaps the following sketch will suffice.³⁹ We know that perfection is harmony and that happiness is just a spirit's awareness of harmony. So the world with the most harmony offers the greatest potential for happiness, a potential, we may add, which will be realized provided that this world contains enough spirits who love God and are deserving of happiness. But spirits incorporate the most perfection in the smallest space and their existence least obstructs the existence of other things (G IV 430: L 306; cf. G VII 291: P 147; A VI.iii 472: L 157; C 530: L 169). Consequently, the world with the greatest perfection will contain the largest number of the best spirits which are compossible with one another (cf. GVI 407: H 412). Therefore, the world with the greatest harmony will also contain the greatest possible happiness.

Finally, Leibniz maintains:

(T₄) The universe is made only for spirits.

But he is ambivalent about it. On the one hand, he plainly asserts T₄ in a number of prominent texts, often suggesting that it follows from T₁. In the *Discourse* (1686), he says that rational souls "must be infinitely nearer to [God] than all other things, which can pass only for the instruments of spirits" (G IV 461: L 326). Likewise, in a letter of 1687 to Arnauld, after stating that God forms a community with spirits, and that his relation to them is "infinitely more exalted" than it is to anything else, he concludes that "the whole universe was created only so as to contribute to the embellishment and happiness of that city of God" (G II 125: MP 160). Later, in the *New System* (1695), he says that spirits have "incomparably more perfection" than other things, and again infers that "all the rest is made only for them" (G IV 480: L 455; cf. G IV 485: L 458). On the other hand, Leibniz also *denies* T₄, stating in the *Discourse* that it is self-deception to think God "had in view only one particular thing" and

that it is "a great abuse to believe that God made the world only for us" (G IV 445: L 316).

The theses we have been discussing involve some serious problems. Consider T₄, for example. If all other things are merely "instruments of spirits" and if the universe is made *only* for them, then it is difficult to see how anything else could have a value *per se*. This contradicts Leibniz's view that everything has an intrinsic value proportional to its quantity of essence. It may also conflict with T₂, which suggests that God has other ends, albeit subordinate ones. We have seen, moreover, that Leibniz infers T₄ from T₁, and if this inference holds, T₁ should be problematic as well. So the ideas of this period call for considerable straightening out.

The *Theodicy* tells a very different story about these matters. By the time of its publication in 1710, Leibniz had developed a single-minded attitude toward T₄ and reconciled the other conflicts noted above. The changes are evident in a long critique of Bayle's maxim that God's only aim in creation is to produce the happiness of intelligent creatures. Though Bayle is the announced adversary, the issue is plainly T₄ – and Leibniz now comes to final terms with it.

I grant that the happiness of intelligent creatures is the principal part of God's design, for they are most like him; but nevertheless I do not see how one can prove that to be his sole aim. (G VI 168: H 188)

Here Leibniz still accepts T₂, deducing it in effect from T₁'. But he unequivocally rejects T₄.⁴⁰ His reasons involve a repudiation of some notions that were important in the *Discourse*:

It is true that the realm of nature must serve the realm of grace; but . . . there is no reason to suppose that God, for the sake of some lessening of moral evil, would reverse the whole order of nature. Each perfection or imperfection in the creature has its value, but there is none that has infinite value. Thus the moral or physical good and evil of rational creatures does not infinitely exceed the good and evil which is simply metaphysical, namely that which lies in the perfection of other creatures; and yet one would be bound to say this if the present maxim were strictly true.

The passage continues:

No substance is absolutely contemptible or absolutely precious before God . . . God sets greater store by a man than a lion; nevertheless it can hardly be said with certainty that God prefers a single man in all respects to

the whole of lion-kind. Even should it be so, it would by no means follow that the interest of a certain number of men would prevail over the considerations of a general disorder diffused through an infinite number of creatures.

[G VI 168–69: H 188; cf. G VI 377–78: H 379]

Leibniz argues that T₄ presupposes T₁, which he now renounces on the grounds that it would entail an unacceptable degree of disorder. T₁ also elevates rational creatures too high: although other beings are much less precious than we, our value is not infinitely greater than theirs.

What is his attitude toward T₃? Certainly the *Theodicy* is far more sober and less anthropocentric than the *Discourse*.⁴¹ Pressed to explain the amount of unhappiness in the world, Leibniz forswears the infinite gap between created spirits and other beings, and stresses instead how the need for order and the good of other creatures can interfere with our desires.

This may suggest that he gives up the harmony of variety and happiness by compromising his moral optimism. But while his position in the *Theodicy* is complex and sometimes ambiguous, the claims that appear to cast doubt on T₃ usually turn out to be compatible with it.⁴² More significantly, his most definite pronouncements on the issue in his final years affirm T₃. In an appendix to the *Theodicy*, for example, he says that God

chooses not only to create men, but to create men as happy as it is possible to be in this system. . . . [Moreover] we can reason concerning the whole world just as we have reasoned concerning the human race. God resolved to create a world, but he was bound by his goodness at the same time to choose such a world as should contain the greatest possible order, regularity, virtue, happiness. (G VI 426: H 431; cf. G VI 182–83, 406: H 201–2, 411)

Leibniz says much the same in section 10 of *The Principles of Nature and Grace* (1714):

It follows from the supreme perfection of God that he has chosen the best possible plan in producing the universe, a plan which combines the greatest variety together with the greatest order; with situation, place, and time arranged in the best possible way; with the greatest effect produced by the simplest means; with the most power, the most knowledge, the greatest happiness and goodness in created things which the universe could allow.

Later, in section 15, he declares that the world contains

as much virtue and happiness as is possible. And this takes place, not by a dislocation of nature . . . but by the very order of natural things itself, by virtue of the harmony preestablished . . . between the realms of nature and grace . . . in such a way that nature leads to grace, and grace perfects nature by using it. (G VI 603, 605: L 639f.)

It is clear, then, that Leibniz altered his position on happiness considerably: he shifted from the unstable view of the *Discourse*, which included T₁ and T₄, to the more carefully conceived doctrine of the *Theodicy*, which dispensed with these ideas. In doing so, he resolved conflicts born of his earlier excessive claims about spirits. But he did not give up the harmony of variety and happiness or fundamentally denature his moral optimism. In fact, he remained both a moral and an ontological optimist right to the end.

NOTES

1 Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism*, p. 12.

I am grateful to Martha Gibson, Nicholas Jolley, Jeffrey Tlumak, and Robert Sleigh, Jr., for helpful comments on various parts of this paper. I am also especially indebted to Donald Rutherford for lengthy conversations on all of this material.

The notes contain a citation of an English translation (where I know of one) plus a reference to an edition of the original text. Translations in the paper are from the cited English edition, though sometimes with changes. Where no English edition is cited, the translation is my own.

2 Some recent discussions are: Gale, "Did Leibniz Have a Practical Philosophy of Science?," "On What God Chose: Perfection and God's Freedom"; Rescher, *Leibniz's Metaphysics of Nature*; Brown, "Compossibility, Harmony, and Perfection in Leibniz," "Leibniz and the Confluence of Worldly Goods."

3 Take any random distribution of points on a piece of paper, he says, and it will be possible to find an uninterrupted curve that passes through all the points in precisely the order in which they were drawn. If the rule generating the curve is complex, the line is commonly said to be irregular, but, strictly speaking, it is as regular as a curve whose rule is easy for the ordinary person to grasp. Cf. G VI 262: H 277; G VII 312, p. 78–79; Robinet, *Malebranche et Leibniz*, p. 222.

4 Rescher, "Logical Difficulties in Leibniz's Metaphysics," pp. 184–85.

5 Rescher, *Leibniz's Metaphysics of Nature*, p. 11.

6 Gale, ("Did Leibniz . . .?," "What God Chose . . .,") who also holds the trade-off view, represents perfection as the ratio of variety to simplicity

- rather than as their sum. Cf. Brown, "Compossibility," "Leibniz's Theodicy."
- 7 Some may object that in section 5 of the *Discourse* Leibniz says the simplicity of the means must be in balance with the richness of the effects, thus apparently suggesting a trade-off. Note, however, that two factors are "in balance" when they stand in the most felicitous relationship to one another – one which may, but does not necessarily, involve a compromise between them. As I subsequently verify, Leibniz thinks the most felicitous relationship between simplicity and variety is something quite different from a trade-off.
 - 8 This also explains, I think, why he is sometimes unclear about whether "the most things" refers to monads or phenomenal entities. Since he believes both propositions, he allows his definition of the existent to refer to either kind of entity and is not always careful about drawing a distinction.
 - 9 Langley, *New Essays*, pp. 712–13 [Guhrauer, *Leibniz: Eine Biographie: Notes to the second volume* 32]. Cf. *New Essays*, III.vi, A VI.vi: RB 307.
 - 10 In fact, he says there is an infinity of such worlds. See G VI 252: H 167–68.
 - 11 Cf. G VI 618: L 650. "Each part of matter can be thought of as a garden full of plants or as a pond full of fish. But each branch of the plant, each member of the animal, each drop of its humors, is also such a garden or such a pond."
 - 12 I must report that Leibniz's *proof* that the world has the most things appears to have a hole. If there is to be a reason for existence, he says, then every possible individual must have a "claim" ("demand," "right") to exist which is proportional to its degree of perfection. In that case, he maintains, the largest collection of compossible individuals will have the greatest claim to exist and therefore will be actualized by God. G VII 194: Russell, *Critical Exposition*, p. 296; VE 6 1141; G VII 303–4; L 487–88). Now if each possible substance had an equal amount of perfection, this inference would hold, for then the largest collection of them would certainly have the largest claim to exist. But, in fact, Leibniz denies that all possible individuals are equally perfect, thus apparently leaving it open for a smaller group of individuals to have more perfection than a larger one. In note 26, I pursue this problem a little farther.
 - 13 To avoid a possible confusion, I should point out that Leibniz distinguishes between natural laws, to which miracles are exceptions, and the exception-free, supernatural law referred to above. My focus here is on *natural* laws, not the supernatural principle that governs them. But note that the quoted passage still supports the interpretation at hand, since Leibniz takes it that a more complex supernatural law would generate more complex natural laws.

- 14 The interpretation given in the last paragraph also involves this problem.
- 15 I made this suggestion in Blumenfeld, "Leibniz's Theory of the Striving Possibles," and also mistakenly took Leibniz's claim that the best world has "the most things" to cover only types of phenomena.
- 16 We shall also encounter this attitude in other passages, which are discussed below.
- 17 G IV 430: L 306: "God has chosen that world which is . . . at the same time the simplest in its hypotheses and the richest in phenomena." G VI 603: L 639: "[God] has chosen . . . a plan which combines the greatest variety together with the greatest order." Cf. Gr 267, 285f.
- 18 GW 163: AG 231: "Imperfections are exceptions, which disturb the rules, that is, the *universal observations*. If there were many exceptions to a rule, there would be nothing worthy of observation, but only chaos."
- 19 Miracles, in the strict sense, always involve exceptions to natural law. G VI 241, 265: H 257, 280. But while these exceptions derive from a higher-order, supernatural basis, there is no similar hierarchy among natural laws themselves, which are otherwise universal. (This idea, for which I give further evidence later, is derived from Garber, "Mind, Body, and the Laws of Nature in Descartes and Leibniz," pp. 120–22).
In view of the premium on exception-free principles, one wonders how there can be miracles at all. Although the supernatural law that grounds them is beyond our ken, Leibniz proudly notes that the pre-established harmony banishes all *superfluous* miracles, thus keeping exceptions to the bare minimum required by faith. G VI 241: 257.
- 20 In some contexts, Leibniz describes the simplest laws as the "most determined" or "unique" ways that nature can follow. For helpful discussion of these terms, see Gale, "Did Leibniz . . . ?," pp. 156–60.
- 21 Since maximal simplicity entails universality, it follows that all architectonic laws are universal.
- 22 Cf. Gr 12: "[Nature acts so that there can be] more bodies in a given space, more motion in a given time, more forms in a given portion of matter, more qualities in a given subject."
- 23 Leibniz provides a number of examples of these laws, usually without much explanation of how they help to maximize variety. See G VII 303f., 270–79: L 487f., 477–84; G III 51–55: L 351–53. Often his point seems clear enough, however, as when he cites the principle that there are no discontinuities, or gaps, in nature or when he claims that if nothing more determines the route, a motion between two points will always follow the shortest path. Gaps (among forms, for instance) would thwart the greatest variety, whereas the shortest path maximizes the activities that can occur in a given time and space.

- 24 *The Ultimate Origination of Things* implies, but does not explicitly state, that the world has the largest number of architectonic laws. At GW 171: AG 233, however, Leibniz says that the world "contains the greatest number of universal observations [or, laws]" and, given his insistence that God uses only architectonic laws, this is a virtually direct statement of our thesis.
- 25 Note too that although the world has a multitude of laws, it has extremely few relative to the variety of its phenomena. In fact, because all of its laws are maximally productive, no possible world can have a smaller number of laws relative to the degree of its diversity. In this sense, it is consistent for Leibniz to say, as he occasionally does, that there are "few hypotheses to explain phenomena" or to refer approvingly to Malebranche's view that God uses "only a very small number of natural laws to produce a very great number of admirable works." E.g., G II 40: AG 71; Robinet, *Malebranche et Leibniz*, p. 96.
- 26 This raises a question which is a variation on a theme from note 12. Can Leibniz rule out the possibility of an equally numerous system of monads with *more complex* developmental laws and a *less perfect* phenomenal order? If not, then he can't describe the best world simply as the one with the most monads.
- There may be an answer. He argues that the world with the simplest natural laws is the one with the most phenomena on the grounds that phenomenal simplicity is the means to phenomenal diversity. But he also holds that the world with the simplest developmental laws is the one with the most monads. So perhaps he thinks, analogously, that developmental simplicity is the means to maximum compossibility. This would solve the problem stated above and also plug the hole (see note 12) in his proof that the best world has the most things. For if maximum compossibility requires developmental simplicity, then a world with more complex developmental laws cannot have as many monads as ours. Likewise, if the largest set of monads must have the simplest developmental laws, it follows that it will have the most phenomena, the most harmony, and the greatest claim to existence. Admittedly, though, I am conjecturing here, not explicating text.
- 27 Gregory Brown, "Compossibility," p. 201, and "Leibniz's Theodicy," p. 588f., claims that Leibniz eventually abandoned the view that the best world has the most individuals. His only direct textual evidence, however, is a letter of 1715 which states that one can regard perfection as degree of essence "if essence is calculated from harmonious properties." GW 172: AG 234. Brown takes this to mean that when God chose the world with the most essence, he picked the one with the most harmony, but not necessarily the one with the most individuals. Yet, prior to 1715,

- Leibniz had held that the world with the most harmony is the one with the most individuals. So I do not think this passage is evidence of a change of mind.
- 28 In the quotation, I have spliced together complementary material from two letters.
- 29 G I 272: "Reality is nothing other than thinkability." In fact, the idea of reality in Leibniz has several aspects, or senses, that tend to cluster around this one. For example, a real possibility, is simply one that is conceivable, or intelligible; one entity is said to be "more real" than another insofar as it contains more essence, or more of what is distinctly conceivable; and the real (i.e., actually existing) world is the one that contains the most of what is distinctly conceivable. For some other relevant discussion, see Mates, "Leibniz on Possible Worlds," pp. 47f., especially note 3.
- 30 G VI 241: H 257: "The wisest mind so acts, as far as it is possible, that the *means* are also in a sense *ends*, that is, they are desirable not only on account of what they do, but on account of what they are." Cf. *Malebranche et Leibniz*, p. 418. At H 257 Leibniz also remarks that if one assumed that there were a world with more complex laws and greater variety, our world might still be more perfect due to its greater simplicity. Note, however, that the assumption is counterfactual, not only because our world has the greatest possible variety, but also because simplicity is the means to variety.
- 31 Cf. Rescher, *Leibniz's Metaphysics of Nature*, p. 11 and Brown, "Compossibility," p. 203.
- 32 This strategy also rules out the worry that one possible universe may be better than another unto infinity. G VI 232, 364: H 249, 372.
- 33 Cf. Brown, "Compossibility," p. 201n.
- 34 Spirits (i.e., beings capable of reason and science) are the only ones with the capacity for happiness. Beasts have feelings but lack reflection, which true happiness requires. G VII 317: P 85; G VI 611-12: L 645-46; VE I 39: L 218; G VI 600: L 637-38.
- 35 Leibniz's standard definition of justice is the charity, or benevolence, of a wise person. See, e.g., G III 386: L 421; Gr 622.
- 36 As I use the terms, a full-blown moral optimist thinks the world contains the greatest possible happiness, a full-blown ontological optimist that it contains the greatest possible metaphysical value. (Obviously, one could also define less inflated forms of optimism, but these species serve the purposes at hand.)
- 37 Cf. the material from 1686 translated in Sleigh, *Leibniz and Arnauld*, p. 197, which states that the republic of spirits is "the most perfect and the most felicitous possible."

- 38 At G IV 461: L 326, Leibniz deduces T₂ from the claim that spirits are "the most perfectible of substances."
- 39 Fortunately, much of the work on this subject has already been done by Brown, "Leibniz's Theodicy." Although my sketch deviates from his account in important respects, I wish to acknowledge how much I have profited from his fine essay.
- 40 Cf. G VI 232: H 248: "We find in the universe some things that are not pleasing to us; but let us be aware that it is not made for us alone." Also see, Robinet, *Malebranche et Leibniz*, (Jan. 1712), p. 418.
- 41 To cite only a few examples: in the *Discourse* Leibniz describes God as a father who is infinitely solicitous of the needs of his children, but in the *Theodicy* he warns us not to view God as "a mother . . . whose almost only care concerns . . . the happiness of [her child]." G VI 176–77: H 196. In the *Discourse*, even the humblest spirit is worth more than the whole world mechanism, but in the *Theodicy* it is not clear that a spirit is worth the whole of lion-kind. Likewise, at G VI 243: H 259, we learn that to change the order of the universe is something of infinitely greater consequence than the prosperity of a good man.
- 42 Given the amount Leibniz wrote on this subject, it would be surprising if he managed to be entirely consistent about it. But it is worth noting that two texts that have been thought to conflict blatantly with T₃ are, in fact, compatible with it. I have been told, for example, that G VI 324: H 337, which says that "there is no reason why there should not be worlds happier than ours," conclusively rejects T₃. The context, however, suggests that Leibniz is talking about planets rather than possible worlds! C. Wilson, "Leibnizian Optimism," p. 776, on the other hand, claims that the following statement (G VI 244: H 260) contradicts T₃: "God can follow a simple, productive, regular plan; but I do not believe that the best and the most regular is always opportune for all creatures simultaneously." Yet this entails only that it is false that *every* spirit's happiness is maximized, not that there is a possible world with greater happiness. So it too is consistent with T₃.

12 Leibniz's moral philosophy

More than twenty years ago, Carl J. Friedrich offered this rather deflationary assessment of Leibniz's significance as a legal and political philosopher – that he was not "a thinker of the first rank on law and politics; no basically novel insight can be attributed to him."¹ Indeed, it must be admitted that Leibniz followed a traditional Christian reading of the divisions of natural law expounded in the *Institutes* of Justinian's Code (completed in 529 and revised in 534). It is also true that he resisted the trend toward independent sovereign states in favor of a return to a unified *respublica christiana*, to be achieved by revitalizing that practically defunct offspring of the medieval marriage of church and state, the Holy Roman Empire. But it must also be said that he developed a profound and inventive philosophical underpinning for the conventional legal wisdom. This is nowhere more apparent than in his attempt to reconcile the view of Grotius that human society was founded upon a faculty of sociability inherent in the nature of man, and the view of Hobbes that "all society . . . is either for gain, or for glory; that is, not so much for love of our fellows, as for the love of ourselves."² Leibniz's reconciliation was based upon his notion of "disinterested love," which in many ways anticipated Bishop Butler's later response to the egoist. His notion of disinterested love enabled Leibniz to reconcile egoism with the possibility of altruism and to develop a theory of obligation which did not make obligation dependent, as it seemed to be in Hobbes, Pufendorf, Locke, and others of the period, on threat of punishment or the command of a superior. Moreover, he developed a theory of virtue, happiness, and human good which had as practical consequences that it was a primary obligation of individuals and states alike to promote the education of *all* men in the arts and