

## Leibniz's Theory of the Striving Possibles

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Although Leibniz seems to have taken his *Daseinstreben* theory to be intuitively evident, it more frequently strikes readers as bizarre. The reasons for this reaction will probably be clear from the following quotations which express some of the essential elements of the view:

we ought first to recognize that from the very fact that something exists rather than nothing, there is in possible things . . . a certain exigent need of existence, and, so to speak, some claim to existence; in a word, that essence tends of itself towards existence. Whence it further follows that all possible things . . . tend by equal right towards existence, according to their quantity of essence or reality, or according to the degree of perfection which they contain . . . Hence it is most clearly understood that among the infinite combinations of possibles and possible series, that one actually exists by which the most of essence or of possibility is brought into existence<sup>1</sup>.

*Everything possible demands that it should exist*, and hence will exist unless something else prevents it, which also demands that it should exist and is incompatible with the former; and hence it follows that that combination of things always exists by which the greatest possible number of things exists . . . And hence it is obvious that things exist in the most perfect way<sup>2</sup>.

And as possibility is the principle of essence, so perfection or degree of essence (through which the greatest number is at the same time possible) is the principle of existence<sup>3</sup>.

The theory expressed above appears to consist of six closely related theses: (1) that every possible thing has an internal impetus to exist (2) that this impetus is exactly proportionate to its degree of perfection (3) that the possibles vie with one another for existence by combining forces with as many other essences as they are mutually compatible with (4) that there is a unique series of compossible essences which has the greatest overall perfection and hence the

<sup>1</sup> *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. by C. I. GERHARDT, 7 vols. (Berlin, 1875–90) Vol. VII, p. 303. Hereafter this will be referred to as GP. Translation: LEIBNIZ, *Selections*, ed. PHILIP P. WIENER, (New York 1951), p. 347. Hereafter this will be referred to as W.

<sup>2</sup> GP VII p. 194. Translation from BERTRAND RUSSELL, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, (Cambridge: 1900), second edition, (London: 1937), appendix p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> GP VII, p. 305. Trans. W, p. 349.

greatest total thrust (5) that the inevitable result of the struggle is that the maximally perfect series (i. e., best possible world) realizes itself (6) that unless possible things contained such an impetus and behaved as described, no actual world would exist at all.

Several aspects of this theory call for further clarification. Leibniz wants to say that the most perfect possible world will exist because its total thrust toward reality is greater than that of any other. And, he indicates (above) that the total thrust of a world is a function of two factors — the internal perfection of its constituent entities and the number of possible things contained in it<sup>4</sup>. This may seem to conflict with his repeated assertion that the most perfect world is the one which contains the richest variety of phenomena consistent with the greatest simplicity of its laws<sup>5</sup>. A partial resolution of this problem can be achieved by taking „greatest number of things” to mean “greatest number of types of things”; and, indeed, the context often makes it clear that this is his intention<sup>6</sup>. As far as simplicity is concerned, Leibniz tells us that this is the necessary *means* by which the greatest perfection is realized. In a letter to Malebranche he says that God used the simplest laws, “to find room for as many things as it is possible to place together. If God had made use of other laws, it would be as if one should construct a building of round stones, which leave more space unoccupied than that which they fill”<sup>7</sup>. But if richness of phenomena is Leibniz’s principle criterion of perfection in a world, we must still

<sup>4</sup> LEIBNIZ speaks of possible things, or possible individuals, and he sometimes creates the impression that he recognizes the subsistence of such individuals over and above the attributes and concepts he elsewhere discusses. On the whole, however, I agree with Mates that we should “interpret the term ‘possible world’ as referring for Leibniz to a set of individual concepts, and not to a set of individuals”. As Mates says, “In that way he [Leibniz] can avoid introducing a shadowy realm of ‘possible individuals’ in addition to the abstract entities (i. e., the attributes and concepts) already involved in his metaphysics”. See BENSON MATES, *Leibniz on Possible Worlds*, in: *Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science III* (Amsterdam, 1968). Reprinted in *Leibniz: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. HARRY G. FRANKFURT (Garden City, New York 1972) pp. 337–340. Hereafter this will be referred to as L. In addition to the considerations raised by Mates, it is difficult to see what it would be for possible *individuals* — as opposed to individual concepts — to subsist in the mind of God.

<sup>5</sup> For example, GP IV, p. 431, GP VI, p. 603, GP VI, p. 241.

<sup>6</sup> For example, GP VII, p. 303.

<sup>7</sup> GP VII, pp. 290–91, Quoted in A. D. LOVEJOY, *The Great Chain of Being*, (Cambridge, Mass.: 1936) Chapter V, p. 179. Chapter V is reprinted in L, see p. 330. LEIBNIZ says the same in *The Monadology* paragraph 58 (GP VI, p. 616).

account for the role played by the internal perfection of the constituent members of the world. On this subject, however, Leibniz's view is somewhat unclear. But a reasonable conjecture is that he thought that possible worlds might be equally rich in types of phenomena. More than one, for example, might contain an infinite variety of types of beings and, in this case, greatest overall perfection would be determined by the internal perfection of the constituents<sup>8</sup>. Thesis (4), then, which refers to overall perfection in a *world*, probably should be understood as being qualified in the manner described here.

An objection to his theory which worried Leibniz was the contention that the possibles are not real, but mere figments. If this were so, they could hardly be the metaphysical basis of the origination of things. Leibniz replied that the possibles have a certain kind of reality, since they exist from eternity in the mind of God. They exist, *qua* possible, in so far as God conceives them. The struggle for actual existence, then, takes place in the divine mind. Since Leibniz thought this premise was necessary for the theory to have any plausibility, it should be added to our list of theses and

<sup>8</sup> This is a conjecture and no more. Other widely divergent accounts have been given. LOVEJOY, for example, holds (L 328–330) that Leibniz's actual working theory is that all essences have equal claim to existence and that a possible world's impetus to exist is a function only of the number of types of compossible things contained in it. He acknowledges the passages in which Leibniz says that differences in the internal perfection of the component members of a possible world affect its total thrust, but thinks that such a view is not logically open to Leibniz. In fairness to Lovejoy it should be said that Leibniz often emphasizes variety as the measure of a world's perfection, failing to mention the internal nature of the component members themselves. But at other places Leibniz makes clear that this factor is also to be taken into account. Lovejoy's argument that Leibniz is not entitled to countenance this factor seems to me to be weak. Lovejoy says that if internal perfection determined a world's impetus to exist, then "a world containing only men and no crocodiles would be better than one containing both. . ." For the essence of man contains far greater perfection than that of crocodile and "the crocodiles would certainly require matter and occupy space which might be devoted to the uses of human beings". As the author of a theodicy, however, Leibniz, is concerned to justify crocodiles as well as all the rest of the variety of the great chain of being. This consequence would only follow, however, if internal perfection were the *sole* determinant of impetus to exist. Lovejoy's argument shows that it cannot be the sole determinant, but it does not follow from this that it cannot be *one* of the determinants. The problem — which the conjecture is aimed at solving — is to find a place for all of the factors which Leibniz mentions. I concede that more discussion might be devoted to this issue, but since nothing in the main argument of the paper turns on it, I shall not press the matter farther.

treated as a background condition. It could be put simply: (B) God conceives the possibles which struggle among themselves for existence. Taken together with (A), the six theses are apparently thought to provide a complete account of the origination of finite existence. It is easy to understand, I think, why the metaphysical picture of an infinity of sheer possibilities existing in God's mind and battling to become actual has seemed a bit uninviting.

But mere considerations of appeal aside, it has frequently been thought that the *Daseinstreben* theory is strictly inconsistent with another account that Leibniz gives of the origination of the world. This is the more well known view that the world exists through the free will of God. Having freely chosen to subscribe to the Principle of Perfection, God selects the most perfect world from among the infinity of candidates and confers existence upon it. Now it has been pointed out that the two accounts have a great deal in common<sup>9</sup>. Both express Leibniz's view that for everything that exists there must be a sufficient reason why it exists; both give as the reason for the existence of the world the fact that it is more perfect than any other possible world; both seem to reflect an assumption that the question why anything exists is distinct from the question why things happen to be this way rather than some other way. But if the two views have been characterized correctly, it is difficult to see how Leibniz can maintain both consistently. One explains the transition from possibility to actuality solely in terms of the tendency of the possibles to come into being; the other appeals to an external force — the will of a God who chooses to create as much perfection as possible. One view makes God the active creator of the world, the other reduces him to the passive witness of a struggle that works itself out without his intervention. One stresses the contingency of the world, while the other seems to imply its necessity. Thus Lovejoy argued, with considerable plausibility, that since the possibles have an *intrinsic* drive to exist and since this logically results in a maximally perfect world, there cannot also be room for God's free selection of this world<sup>10</sup>. When we add to this the fact that Leibniz elsewhere says that the existent can be

<sup>9</sup> MARGARET D. WILSON, *Possibility, Propensity, and Chance: Some Doubts about the Hacking Thesis*, in: *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LXIII, Number 19, Oct. 7, 1971, p. 612.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit., LOVEJOY, p. 179 or L, p. 320.

*defined* as that which is compatible with the most things<sup>11</sup>, the case for the inconsistency of the two views becomes very impressive indeed.

Nevertheless, many commentators have hesitated to go this far, while still others have thought it possible to square the two views. Thus the able critic Margaret D. Wilson believes that it is not clear whether Leibniz regarded the *Daseinstreben* theory the metaphysically sounder of the two accounts or whether he thought they differed mainly as forms of expression<sup>12</sup>. Rescher, on the other hand, adopts the bolder thesis that the views are not incompatible. According to him the *Daseinstreben* theory is a secondary thesis which is not meant to be taken literally. He says that the literalist approach,

misconceives the issue badly, for it is only because God *has chosen* to subscribe to the standard of perfection in selecting a possible world for actualization that possible substances come to have (figurative) "claim" to existence. The relationship between "quantity of essence" or "perfection" on the one hand and claim or *conatus* to existence on the other is not a logical linkage at all — a thesis which would reduce Leibniz' system into a Spinozistic necessitarianism — but a connection mediated by a free act of will on the part of God<sup>13</sup>.

Now it seems to me that Rescher's suggestion that the theory should be taken figuratively is correct, although as I shall try to show later, the situation of his opponent is even worse than the one Rescher describes. In any case, we shall have to look for a fuller argument for the position. For Rescher's contention that a literal reading of the theory would involve Leibniz in inconsistency can hardly be sufficient to defeat Lovejoy and his followers; their charge just is that a close reading of relevant passages reveals a genuine conflict between the two accounts of the origination of things. Perhaps, it might be said, Leibniz was unaware of a real conflict between his two theses. Then again, it could be that he oscillated between the two views. Or, if one were impressed by Russell's general view he might argue that Leibniz probably was aware of the conflict but, from motives of expediency, buried his

<sup>11</sup> LOUIS COUTURAT, *Opuscules et fragments inédits de Leibniz*, (Paris: 1903) p. 360.

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit., WILSON, p. 612.

<sup>13</sup> NICHOLAS RESCHER, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: 1967), pp. 29–30. See also: G. H. R. PARKINSON, *Logic and Reality in Leibniz's Metaphysics*, (Oxford: 1965) p. 105.

real theory (the necessitarian one) in his so called esoteric writings<sup>14</sup>. Clearly, to settle these issues we must turn to the relevant passages themselves.

When we do so, however, it may appear that the job of defending Leibniz is quite difficult. For when we look at the passages mentioned so far, it seems that it is the nature of the possibles and nothing more that guarantees that the best world will exist. We have already seen that Leibniz says that essence tends *of itself* towards existence and that as a result anything possible will exist unless something else with which it is incompatible prevents it. This suggests that no external force such as the will of God would be required to actualize the possibles. But when these passages are set in their full context, a peculiar problem arises. For on numerous occasions, if not invariably, Leibniz combines the two theories as though there were not the slightest incompatibility between them. Instead, he treats them as though they complemented one another. Frequently, he asserts the views back to back within the space of a paragraph or so and on at least two occasions combines them in a single sentence. Thus, in *The Monadology*, speaking of the sufficient reason for God's choice among possible worlds he says, "And this reason can only be found in the fitness, or in the degrees of perfection, which these worlds contain, each possible world having a right to claim existence according to the measure of perfection which it possesses"<sup>15</sup>. Elsewhere he says, "Therefore, all beings, in so far as they are involved in the first Being, have, above and beyond bare possibility, a propensity toward existing in proportion to their goodness, and they exist by the will of God unless they are incompatible with more perfect [existence candidates]"<sup>16</sup>. A similar happy juxtaposition occurs in the *Principles of Nature and Grace*, paragraph 10. Here he begins by saying: "It follows from the supreme perfection of God, that in

<sup>14</sup> BERTRAND RUSSELL, *A History of Western Philosophy*, (New York: 1945) p. 581. It should be said, though, that RESCHER's book contains a sustained attack on Russell's thesis that Leibniz's system degenerates into Spinozism. It is perhaps also worth noting that in working out his view in his book, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, Russell does not emphasize the inconsistency of the free will theory with the *Daseinstreben* theory. But he does briefly call attention to the problem in his review of COUTURAT, *Recent Work on the Philosophy of Leibniz*, in: *Mind*, 12, 1903, pp. 185–86, Reprinted in L. See p. 378.

<sup>15</sup> GP VI, p. 616. Trans. W, p. 544.

<sup>16</sup> GP VII, pp. 309–10. Trans. RESCHER, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

creating the universe he has chosen the best possible plan...”, and declares a sentence later that “...since all possibles in the understanding of God laid claim to existence in proportion to their perfections, the result of all these claims must be the most perfect actual world that is possible”<sup>17</sup>. Finally, in the essay, *On the Ultimate Origin of Things* where the *Daseinstreben* theory is developed in detail, Leibniz concludes his exposition of the doctrine as though he had just put forth a view that made clear that the world exists contingently and that God created it of his own free will. He says, “And thus we now have [distinguished] physical necessity from metaphysical necessity; for although the world be not metaphysically necessary... it is nevertheless physically necessary, or determined in such a way that its contrary implies moral absurdity... Whence at the same time it is evident that the author of the world is free... for he acts according to a principle of wisdom or of perfection”<sup>18</sup>. The problem that these passages present is this: if the two theories are inconsistent how could Leibniz so frequently have asserted them together? If the *Daseinstreben* theory is taken literally, then its incompatibility with the free will account is so obvious that it is almost impossible to believe that Leibniz could have been oblivious to it. If he had generally kept the theories separate, it might be plausible to maintain that he was aware of the conflict but oscillated between the two accounts. Or, if he had held the *Daseinstreben* theory at one period of his life and the free will theory at another, we could believe that he simply abandoned one view in favor of the other. But in fact, as we have seen, he often brought them together as though they were a single doctrine. It is equally implausible to suggest that Leibniz was aware of the conflict, but reserved his preferred position (the unadulterated *Daseinstreben* theory) for his unpublished works, while he displayed the illogical combination of views to the public for the sake of approval. For if approval was the motive, the natural move would have been to suppress the heterodox necessitarian theory in all the published writings and publically enunciate only the free will doctrine. Even if the obvious contradiction escaped most of an ignorant public, it is doubtful that it could have escaped all. In any case, what profit could there have been in actually blending the views in his published works? Yet this is exactly what Leibniz

<sup>17</sup> GP VI, p. 603. Tans. W, p. 528.

<sup>18</sup> GP VII, pp. 304–5. Trans. W, pp. 348–49.

did. Finally, if the secret-doctrine thesis were correct we should at least expect to find the free will theory absent from the unpublished writings. But of course this is not so either. It is true that Leibniz occasionally emphasized God's role of conceiving the possibles at the expense of his creative activity, but this is relatively insignificant.

All of this tends to suggest that Leibniz did not regard the views as incompatible and that he would have taken exception to something in the characterization of the theory given in the first pages of this essay. The obvious alternative is to suppose that the theories are complementary. When Leibniz variously attributes to the possibles an "urge", "inclination", "need", "claim", or "right" to exist, in proportion to their perfection, these are merely figurative ways of expressing the degree of attractiveness that they have to a God who is disposed to create a world. The strongest textual support for this interpretation occurs in a passage whose importance has been emphasized by Parkinson<sup>19</sup>. In the *Theodicy* Leibniz tells us that the conflict of possibles is "only ideal" and he explicitly describes it as "a conflict of reasons in the most perfect understanding"<sup>20</sup>. So, it appears that a possible world has a thrust to exist commensurate with its total perfection only because God wants to create the best world he can. Since he freely chose to subscribe to the Principle of Perfection the existence of the best world is contingent. Thus, on this interpretation, theses (1) and (2) are to be understood in a figurative sense, or more precisely, tendency to exist is parasitic upon God's decision to realize as much perfection as possible. Similarly, in thesis (3), the struggle should be understood merely as a way of expressing the relative appeal which the possibles have to the creative will. Thesis (4) remains in tact, though subject to the qualification mentioned earlier. Thesis (5), which declares that the upshot of the struggle is the existence of the best possible world, is to be regarded as contingent. Thesis (6), which says that the striving of the possibles is a necessary condition for the existence of any world, is understood to mean that there must be an objective reason for God's choice and that this reason must be found in the intrinsic perfection of the possible worlds themselves. Finally, the background condition, (B), is to be taken literally, although it is to be thought of as expressing something

<sup>19</sup> Op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> GP VI, p. 236. Trans. PARKINSON, op. cit., p. 105.

that God does in addition to creating the world, rather than something he does instead of creating it.

Opponents of this interpretation will be very likely to charge that the case I have presented so far emphasizes certain elements of Leibniz's view at the expense of others. For example, no account has yet been given of the fact that in the fragments edited by Couturat Leibniz tells us that, "The existent may be defined as that which is compatible with more things than is anything incompatible with itself"<sup>21</sup>. This appears to reflect the suggestion of the *Dasein-streben* theory that the logical upshot of the conflict of the possibles is the maximally perfect world. But if we take this seriously as a *definition* of existence, the resulting theory of the origination of things is clearly necessitarian. As Russell puts it, "...the relations of essences are among eternal truths, and it is a problem in pure logic to construct that world which contains the greatest number of co-existing essences. This world, it would follow, exists by definition, without the need of any Divine Decree..."<sup>22</sup>. In light of this, it might be added, it is difficult not to hear Leibniz's repeated claim that the existence of the best world is an *immediate consequence* of the struggle of the possibles as "logical consequence", his claim that everything possible "...will exist unless something else prevents it..."<sup>23</sup> as "will necessarily exist". Passages like this can of course be multiplied. But if this is so, it seems doubtful that we can regard the interpretation given here as completely convincing, even if the considerations adduced in its favor render the literalist interpretation equally inconclusive. Perhaps there is just no available method for deciding the issue.

But I do not think things are this grim. As E. M. Curley has pointed out the context strongly suggests that Leibniz did not suppose that he was giving a definition in the strict sense<sup>24</sup>. In fact "the existent" occurs in a list of primitive simple terms which are either un-analyzable or thought to be so. Leibniz remarks that a cause of existence can be given and that existence *could* be defined in the manner suggested. But, as Curley notes, Leibniz goes on to say,

<sup>21</sup> Op. cit., COUTURAT, p. 360. At this point Leibniz mentions only the number of compossible things and makes no reference to the internal perfection of the component entities.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit., *Critical Exposition*, preface to second edition, p. vii.

<sup>23</sup> GP VII, p. 194. Trans. RUSSELL, *Critical Exposition*, appendix p. 296, italics added.

<sup>24</sup> E. M. CURLEY, *The Root of Contingency*, I, pp. 88–90.

“Still, we refrain from these things now as being too profound”<sup>25</sup>. At a different place he actually says that we cannot define the existent in such a way as to give us a clearer notion of it<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, having said that the existent is that which is compatible with the most things, Leibniz goes on to give four additional “definitions” which appear to differ radically from the one that preceded them. They are all variations on an effort to define the existent as something which would please the divine mind<sup>27</sup>. Nevertheless he claims that these four definitions and the earlier one come to the same thing. This is virtually incomprehensible unless we assume that he is presupposing his view that God chooses to produce the most perfect state of affairs. If he is, then we can see why he might have tried to identify the existent in either of these sorts of ways. Assuming that the greatest number of compossibles represents the maximally perfect world, it follows that God will choose to create it<sup>28</sup>. Likewise, since God wants to produce as much perfection as he can, the maximally perfect world will *please* him most and, as a result, it will be his will that it should exist. It seems more reasonable, then, with Curley, to describe Leibniz as assigning a cause for existence rather than giving a strict definition<sup>29</sup>. His principle that the existent is that which is compatible with the most things should be regarded instead as a corollary of the Principle of Perfection<sup>30</sup>. But in this case it provides no support for the literalist interpretation of the *Daseinstreben* theory.

Once we abandon the view that Leibniz gave a true definition of existence, various words and phrases that seemed to require a necessitarian interpretation now appear more or less neutral. The

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit., COUTURAT, p. 358. Translated and quoted by CURLEY, p. 88.

<sup>26</sup> GASTON GRUA, (ed.) G. W. LEIBNIZ: *Textes inédits*, 2 vols., (Paris: 1953), p. 325.

<sup>27</sup> Op. cit., COUTURAT, pp. 375–76. CURLEY (op. cit., pp. 88–89) translates these four definitions as follows: (i) The existent is that which pleases something intelligent and powerful. (ii) The existent is that which would please some mind and would not displease another more powerful mind, if any minds whatever are assumed to exist. (iii) The existent is what would not displease the most powerful mind, if the most powerful mind is assumed to exist. (iv) The existent is what pleases some mind and does not absolutely displease the most powerful mind. The fourth definition is preferred to the others.

<sup>28</sup> Strictly speaking, the argument also requires the assumption (which Leibniz makes e. g., GP VII, p. 304) that being is better than non-being.

<sup>29</sup> Op. cit., CURLEY, p. 89.

<sup>30</sup> RESCHER (op. cit., p. 65) also suggests that it should be so regarded.

fact that Leibniz says, for example, that the existence of the best world is an immediate consequence of the struggle of the possibles, gives no grounds for deciding between the rival interpretations. The real issue is whether or not the possibles compete for existence independently of God's subscribing to the Principle of Perfection. But the existence of the best world is the immediate consequence whichever view we take. Much the same can be said of Leibniz's statement that everything possible, "will exist unless something else prevents it . . .". This holds on both interpretations, although, to be sure, it is a necessary truth on one and only a contingent truth on the other. We will be forced to hear "will exist" as "will necessarily exist" only if we treat the fragment as a true definition and we have already considered the objections to doing this.

We come now to what must be regarded as the most serious difficulty for the literalist or necessitarian interpretation. As we have seen, the *Daseinstreben* theory is characterized by theses (1)–(6) plus (B), the most crucial question being whether or not thesis (5) should be understood to mean that the most perfect universe exists of necessity. The literalist, who maintains that it should be so understood, clearly wants to say that thesis (5) follows from thesis (4). But if thesis (5) asserts that the maximally perfect world exists necessarily, it is difficult to see how this can be so. To appreciate this consider that the total force (or impetus) of a possible world is always equivalent to that world's total degree of perfection. The question is whether the best conceivable world will have enough perfection (and hence enough impetus) to realize itself necessarily. But Leibniz tells repeatedly that no concept other than that of God guarantees the existence of its object, because no other essence (or combination of essences) represents something absolutely infinite i.e., something completely perfect or containing no limitations whatsoever. Necessary existence, he says, is an attribute of God alone. The reason for this — expressed in terms of the *Daseinstreben* theory — is that no essence or system of essences that falls short of absolute perfection will have an absolute impetus to exist. And, Leibniz frequently states that no possible world is *absolutely* perfect. He admits, for example, that the existing world contains limitations, but argues that this does not show that it is not the best possible world, since *any possible world would involve some degree of imperfection*<sup>31</sup>. Let us refer to this assumption as the Limitation

<sup>31</sup> GP VI, p. 613.

Principle (LP). If LP is true then thesis (4) cannot entail thesis (5) (as understood by the literalist), for even the maximally perfect world would not be absolutely perfect or free of all limitations. On the contrary, thesis (4) together with LP implies that no possible world exists necessarily. For if the maximally perfect world lacks the thrust to exist necessarily, so does every other. Thus, unless LP were denied, there would be no way of deriving thesis (5); whereas, if LP were presupposed, the literalist version of the theory would be internally inconsistent. Thus, when we recall Rescher's contention — that if perfection and impetus to exist were logically linked, Leibniz's system would be reduced to a Spinozistic necessitarianism — we find that the situation for the literalist is actually much worse than this. He would happily embrace the necessitarian consequence, but the basis he cites in the *Daseinstreben* theory does not appear to allow for it.

As far as I can see the only way the literalist could escape this problem would be to suppose that Leibniz meant to deny LP. This is an extremely unpromising suggestion, for it means disregarding his explicit statements that any possible world must be limited. But this is not the worst of it. LP is so deeply entrenched in the Leibnizian metaphysics that, if it is denied, the result is a virtual landslide. For example, if the maximally perfect world is absolutely perfect, then either that world is strictly identical with God — since he too is absolutely perfect — or there are two numerically distinct but qualitatively identical beings. That is, if we deny LP, we must also either dismiss the view that God and the world are distinct or *both* (a) deny the identity of indiscernibles and (b) affirm that there is more than one God. Neither course is at all palatable, but the second is perhaps the more obviously hopeless. I know of nowhere where Leibniz allows that there are two beings differing solely in number<sup>32</sup> or that there is more than one absolutely perfect

<sup>32</sup> LEIBNIZ almost always treats the identity of indiscernibles as a necessary truth. In his fifth letter to CLARKE, however, he seems to allow that it would be possible to conceive of indiscernible but distinct entities, though he insists that there are no such entities in nature. But the passages (GP VII, pp. 394–95) are somewhat ambiguous and can probably be discounted. For one discussion see RUSSELL, *Critical Exposition*, pp. 55 ff. If it were possible to conceive of distinct but indiscernible entities numerous difficulties would follow for Leibniz's system. For example, it would then seem to be possible to conceive of distinct but indiscernible universes, including a duplicate of the most perfect universe. In this case God would be rendered incapable of creating any universe at all.

being. Presumably, then, the literalist would prefer the first alternative, treating it perhaps as further confirmation of Leibniz's secret (or incipient) Spinozism. But he can hardly afford to make this move either. For it completely destroys the picture given by both interpretations of the role of God in the theory of the possibles. God's role is passively to *conceive* the essences, while they struggle for existence among themselves. But this picture presupposes the official Leibnizian view that God and the world are distinct. If the literalist is to swallow the pantheistic consequences of his interpretation, then he must also renounce the view of God as passive observer of the war of the (possible) worlds. For on the clarified picture, God is no mere observer; he is a participant in the struggle and in fact identical with the victor. This, means dropping thesis (B) which has God conceiving the essences, but *not* engaged in the battle. It would apparently have to be replaced by one which has God *both* conceiving the essences *and* struggling along with them. It is doubtful whether this is even intelligible.

Now if there were no plausible alternative to the literalist interpretation, we should perhaps have to settle for one of these unattractive consequences. But if we return to the major source of difficulty, I think we will find that the free will interpretation can handle the problem very nicely. This problem, we will recall, was that thesis (4) was inadequate for deriving the necessitarian version of thesis (5). The rest of the difficulties arose when we examined the assumptions that would be required to make it possible to do this. But the impossibility of deriving (5) is just what we should expect on the free will interpretation. For that view differs from the literalist account in two critical ways: first, it treats thesis (5) as a contingent truth and second, it holds that theses (1)–(6) plus (B) express an *incomplete* theory, one which is only coherent when supplemented by and understood in terms of the contention that God chooses to create the best possible world. On this view, the striving of the possibles is a figurative way of expressing the degree of attractiveness that each possible world has for the divine will. Thesis (4) entails the (contingent) existence of the best possible world only when we add the premise that God freely subscribes to the Principle of Perfection<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> I recognize, of course, that it is often held that this account is itself implicitly necessitarian. But the issue for now is not whether the free will theory breaks down, but only how the *Daseinstreben* theory is to be taken.

An incidental question that still remains for the free will interpretation is this: why should Leibniz have wanted a second, figurative version of the theory of creation, particularly if it differed from the primary view only in expression and ultimately needed to be understood in terms of it? I suspect that the explanation is to be found in Leibniz's commitment to the objectivity of goodness. In his day he saw this doctrine threatened in equally dangerous ways by Cartesians and Spinozists. The former held that things were made good by the will of God and the latter that "...the goodness which we attribute to the works of God are chimeras of human beings who think of God in human terms"<sup>34</sup>. He objected that,

In saying, therefore, that things are not good according to any standard of goodness, but simply by the will of God, it seems to me that one destroys, without realizing it, all the love of God and all his glory; for why praise him for what he has done, if he would be equally praiseworthy in doing the contrary?<sup>35</sup>

In his own account of creation he wanted to emphasize that there had to be some objective reason that determined God's choice among worlds. Given that God is good and subscribes to the Principle of Perfection, this reason can only be found in the relative degrees of objective perfection in the possible worlds. "In my opinion", Leibniz writes to Des Bosses, "if there were no best possible series, God would have certainly created nothing, since he cannot act without a reason, or prefer the less perfect to the more perfect..."<sup>36</sup>. Leibniz wanted to make as clear as possible that the question which world came into being was as much a matter of its objective nature as it was a function of God's choice; the two are completely correlative and one would certainly wish to emphasize the former as well as the latter. I suggest that in the *Dasein-streben* theory Leibniz is pushing the role of the intrinsic perfection of the possibles as hard as he can. Thus, in some passages he emphasizes God's choice as determining that the world exists; in others he emphasizes the nature of the world as determining God's choice. But in the end there is only one theory of creation, not two. The conflict of the possibles is "only ideal". If we accept this overall view, I think we can handle virtually all of the passages

<sup>34</sup> GP IV, p. 428. Trans. W, p. 292.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>36</sup> GP II, pp. 424—25. Trans. W, p. 95.

that express the theory of the striving possibles. Furthermore we can easily understand the otherwise rather wild intuitive basis of the theory. The suggestion that the possibles literally strive to exist and that if they did not there would be no world is exceedingly strange. On the free will interpretation this can be read as the highly intuitive suggestion that worlds differ in degrees of perfection and that if there were no best world God would have had no sufficient reason for creating anything at all.

### Zum Übergang von der teleologischen zur kausalmechanischen Betrachtung der geographisch-kosmologischen Fakten

Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Geographie von Wolff bis Kant<sup>1</sup>

Von

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#### A. Einleitung

Der Geographiehistoriker hat eine doppelte Aufgabe zu erfüllen<sup>2</sup>. Er muß zunächst einmal untersuchen, *wie* man früher Geographie<sup>3</sup> betrieben hat. Das bedeutet auf Kant und seine Zeit

<sup>1</sup> Bei den folgenden Ausführungen handelt es sich um die für den Druck überarbeitete und mit Anmerkungen versehene Fassung meiner Antrittsvorlesung. Der Titel lautete: *Kant und die Geschichte der Geographie*. (Gehalten am 8.7.1970 in Bochum.)

<sup>2</sup> Über die Aufgabe des Geographiehistorikers habe ich mich in meiner Habil.-Arbeit näher geäußert. Sie trägt den Titel: *Die Geographia generalis vor Varenius. Providentialehre und geogr. Weltbild*. Wiesbaden 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Was unter Geographie zu verstehen ist, muß von Fall zu Fall geklärt werden. Wir dürfen jedenfalls nicht unseren heutigen Geographiebegriff zu Grunde legen und dann erklären: Alles das, was wir heute nicht zur Geographie rechnen, geht auch den Geographiehistoriker nichts an.

Auszugehen ist davon, was man früher unter Geographie verstand. Da man noch bis ins 18. Jahrhundert hinein oft Geographie mit Kosmologie gleichsetzte (die geographischen Werke MÜNSTERS [S. MÜNSTER: *Cosmographia. Beschreibung aller Länder...* Basel 1544.], MERCATORS [G. MERCATOR: *Atlas sive Cosmographicae Meditationes*. Duisburg 1595.] usw. tragen den Titel *Cosmographia*), ja sogar mit Schöpfungsexegese oder Providentia-Erläuterung identifizierte, hat der Geographiehistoriker außer den Werken, die das Wort „Geographie“ irgendwie im Titel führen, auch jeweils die in Frage kommenden kosmologischen, theologischen, philosophischen Werke usw. der Autoren zu berücksichtigen.

bezogen: Es ist darzustellen, nach welchen Prinzipien man das damals bekannte geographische Material ordnete und vor allem, von welcher Denk-Mitte her man ansetzte<sup>4</sup>.

Doch dann kommt das Zweite, ungleich Wichtigere hinzu, nämlich die Beantwortung der *Warum*-Frage. Warum ging man im 18. Jahrhundert gerade so und nicht anders vor? Warum versuchte man z. B. bis in die Mitte dieses Jahrhunderts hinein, die gesamte Naturwissenschaft (einschließlich der Geographie) in den Dienst der Theologie zu stellen, woraus sich weitgehende Konsequenzen für den inneren Aufbau dieser Disziplin ergaben?<sup>5</sup> Und warum führt dann Kant, obwohl er in der Tradition eines Christian Wolff stand, nicht dessen physikotheologische Richtung<sup>6</sup> in der Geographie weiter, sondern beschreitet einen neuen Weg, womit er unserem Fach die entscheidende Ausrichtung für die Folgezeit gibt, so daß man heute schlechthin von den zwei großen Epochen in der Geographie sprechend kann, nämlich von der Zeit *vor* und der Zeit *nach* Kant? Welche hintergründigen geistigen Kräfte waren es, die gerade bei Kant — und zwar nur bei ihm und nur zu dieser Zeit —

Das bedeutet für den Fall KANT: Man darf nicht nur die unter dem Titel *Physische Geographie* greifbare Vorlesungsnachschrift (KANTS *gesammelte Schriften*, herausgegeben von der königlich preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1910 ff. [*Physische Geographie*: Bd. IX, 1923]) zu Grunde legen, wenn man über den Geographen Kant arbeitet, sondern es kommen auch die kosmologischen, physischen Schriften usw. in Frage.

Aber auch in seinen theologischen bzw. philosophischen Werken beschäftigt sich Kant z. T. ausgiebig mit geographischen Problemen. Seine Religionsgeographie hat GLASENAPP erst jüngst entdeckt und herausgegeben. (H. v. GLASENAPP: *Kant und die Religionen des Ostens*. Kitzingen 1954.).

In der Schrift *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseyns Gottes* (Königsberg 1783 [Erstdruck 1763]) versucht KANT die Geographie im Sinne seines Lehrers WOLFF theologisch in Dienst zu nehmen. Da dieses Werk ein bezeichnendes Licht darauf wirft, welchen Stellenwert der junge Kant dem Fach Geographie im System der Wissenschaften einräumt, ist es wichtig, besonders diese Abhandlung heranzuziehen.

<sup>4</sup> Wer sich früher mit Geographie befaßte, war meist von Hause aus Theologe oder Philosoph. Die Mitte seines Denkens lag also dort.

<sup>5</sup> Meines Wissens hat in neuerer Zeit erstmals KÜHN (ARTHUR KÜHN: *Die Neugestaltung der Deutschen Geographie im 18. Jahrhundert*. Leipzig 1939.) auf die theologische Ausrichtung der Geographie des 18. Jahrhunderts aufmerksam gemacht. Er betont, daß die Geographie der Pietisten nur von ihrer Theologie her verständlich wird. Angeregt von KÜHN habe ich mich diesen Dingen näher zugewandt.

<sup>6</sup> Zu Wolff vgl. meinen Aufsatz: *Zum Gegenüber von Naturwissenschaft (insbes. Geogr.) und Theologie im 18. Jh. Der Kampf um die Providentiallehre innerhalb des Wolffschen Streitens*. (In: *Philosophia naturalis* 1973).