

Paul Rateau (ed.), *Lectures et interprétations des Essais de Théodicée de G. W. Leibniz*, Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft 40, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2011, 316 p.

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This volume is a collection of sixteen articles mostly written in French (one being in German and three in English), first presented at a conference held in Paris in 2010. It is divided into five main sections preceded by the editor's introduction.

The first section bears on the presuppositions and theoretical implications of the central metaphysical tenet of the *Theodicy*, namely the divine choice to create the best of possible worlds. Hans Poser presents "the complex basis of the *Theodicy* argumentation" as organized around the notions of "Truth, Possibility [and] Compossibility". The four pillars supporting Leibniz's defence of God, which culminates in the contention that the permission of evil is the price to pay for a world of free agents (p. 18), are his modal theory, his metaphysics of monads, the principle of the best and the distinction between different kinds of evils. But this static structure, supporting the construct of the possible worlds, only allows for human freedom if one takes into account the dynamic aspect of possibility, contained in the concepts of *existiturire* and *creatio continua*. The former expresses the striving of the possibles towards existence. This view "alters the modal structure", in so far as it implies that some specific sort of atemporal dynamic is a work there (p. 29). Paul Rateau identifies the constitutive elements involved in Leibniz's notion of what a *world* is, and, by so doing, explains why and how Leibniz came to the consideration of other, possible, worlds. Constituted as the totality of times, of spaces and of the creatures filling them, the world is not properly a whole, but an actual infinite, though its order and harmony grant it a kind of unity that distinguishes it from ordinary aggregates (p. 41). Rateau then offers an illuminating summary of the recent debates around the notion of compossibility, discussing more particularly Rutherford and Messina's "cosmological interpretation". Because this interpretation is valid at the phenomenological level only, Rateau proposes to complement it with a "metaphysical" account of compossibility, reaching the "the substantial foundation of the order of things, expressed by time and space" (p. 49). Finally, Rateau considers the question of possible worlds and of the root of impossibility. Jean-Pascal Anfray studies Leibniz's conceptions of the divine "choice of the best" and of "moral necessity", with the aim of determining the relation between this necessity and the other Leibnizian modalities. He recalls the three solutions worked out by Leibniz in different contexts in order to counter the necessitarian consequences of his moral optimism. Among these solutions, the view that God chooses to create the

best through an infinite deductive process prevails in the *Theodicy*. God, therefore, in his creative act, is not determined but inclined by a moral necessity, which in Leibniz's work inherits the formal properties attributed to it by the late scholastic Jesuit tradition. This essay, illuminating from both a contextualist and a genetic point of view, concludes that the *Theodicy* actually gives a systematic form to a view formulated on an aporetic mode in the 1680: the contingency of the divine choice. Francesco Piro deals with Leibniz's view of the relation between "the actions of creatures and divine concurrence". Here again, Leibniz appears as the heir of the Jesuit tradition, whose conceptual apparatus he puts into play in order to establish a metaphysics of action compatible with God's "causal asymmetry": namely, His concurrence in every action of the creatures is so far as they are good, which nonetheless leaves them the entire responsibility of evil they commit. This contextualist reading succeeds in making Leibniz's views a lot clearer, and shows that "he was able to meet a complex challenge by means of a particularly rich and sophisticated metaphysics of action" (p. 81).

The second section of the volume gathers three essays on a subject which had hitherto received less attention from readers of the *Theodicy*: the body. In a chapter entitled "Autonomy of the Souls and Mutation of Bodies", François Duchesneau considers some implications of the theory of pre-established harmony, used as a key argument in the *Theodicy*, where "Leibniz attributes parallel developing sequences to souls and bodies". He identifies two fundamental difficulties facing Leibniz in this context: one relating to "the foundation, both transcendent and immanent, of the correspondence between psychic and corporeal series", the other to "the necessary conciliation between determining laws and the spontaneity of the subjects of actions" (p. 114). He analyses the way in which Leibniz seeks to overcome these difficulties by suggesting that "pre-established harmony is accompanied with an analogous harmony between preformation (...) and its effects developing over time" (*ib.*). Arnaud Pelletier examines the relation between substance, body and phenomena in the *Theodicy*. Reconstructing the views on substance set forth in that text in relation to the problem of the organic body, to the question of the distinction between substance and accident, finally to the question of phenomenality, he shows that the absence, in the *Theodicy*, of an unambiguous doctrine of substance's modification and of the origin of rational souls should not be explained so much by the popular destination of that text, as by the fact that Leibniz had not yet reached definitive conclusions on these points. This analysis is complemented by the presentation of an unpublished note by Leibniz on Bayle. Anne-Lise Rey considers the "ambivalence of free action": Leibniz uses this concept not only in his dynamics, to account for the "formal action" of physical bodies in themselves, but also in his anthropological reflections on spontaneity in

the *Theodicy*. Rey takes full advantage of the heuristic fecundity of an approach bringing the two domains together, the concept of action being for her the key to understanding the relation between body and substance (p. 139). She successfully shows that the *Theodicy*, through its characteristic use of analogies, invites us to consider the system of bodies, situated in time and space, as the starting point for conceiving the freedom of action common to all substances (p. 151).

The third section of the volume deals more specifically with the questions of freedom and evil. Enrico Pasini analyses the doctrine of spontaneity in the *Theodicy*. Beginning with an overview of Leibniz's doctrine on the subject, he shows how Leibniz distinguishes *spontaneous* – understood by him as the metaphysical attribute of all *active* beings – from *voluntary*, as equivalent to *free*, which can only qualify the actions of intelligent subjects. This partly original view, supported by Leibniz's dynamics of substance (p. 165), is inserted within the doctrinal frame of preestablished harmony. As to the psychological dynamics through which the perceptions of a substance follow one another, it obeys a kind of formal causality. Yet Pasini stresses the fact that Leibniz's attribution of an active primitive force to each substance conforms to a textually attested extension of the concept of *exigentia* to continuous creation, that might even allow us to speak of an *efficient* causality of the substance with respect to its future. Gianfranco Mormino examines the status of contingency – that is, the possibility to “act differently” – as the third requisite for freedom in the *Theodicy*, the first two being the spontaneity and the intelligence of the subject. He convincingly points out the fact that contingency in itself is not usually a perfection for Leibniz, and defends the view that it rather contains the explanation for a salient character of the free actions of men, namely their fallibility: human beings are exposed, by their very contingency, to the illusion of a variety of possible alternatives (p. 188). Agustín Echavarría analyses “Leibniz's Concept of God's Permissive Will”, that is, the view defended in the *Theodicy* that God is not the author of evil, because he does not positively want it, but only “permits” it. A particular attraction of this paper is that it traces Leibniz's long doctrinal evolution on this issue, inherited from Augustinian scholastic, “from initial rejection to subsequent acceptance and progressive refinement” (p. 191). Echavarría shows how this evolution was brought about by Leibniz's “attempt to give some place within his system to a certain kind of free will defence in accounting for the permission of evil” (p. 208), without abandoning his originally holistic strategy. This strategy remains the ultimate justification for said permission, though both lines of argumentation seem barely compatible. Juan Antonio Nicolás studies the problem of “Evil as a Limit to the Principle of Reason”. He analyses “the foundations and nature” of Leibniz's “system of rationality”, built around the principle of sufficient reason. Many different versions of that principle can be found across Leibniz's

work, but he always claimed that it had a universal value. Leibniz's own concession that some events and truths cannot be proved constitutes therefore a problem in itself (p. 211). Concentrating on the relation between the principle of reason and the *Theodicy*, in which Leibniz deals with the alleged limits of rationality and with the balance between faith and reason, Nicolás shows that the *Theodicy* contains one of Leibniz's strongest explicit stands in favour of rationality.

The fourth section of the volume gathers three papers on the relation between faith and reason. Maria Rosa Antognazza presents Leibniz's argumentation in favour of "The Conformity of Faith with Reason" in the *Discours Préliminaire*. Her comprehensive knowledge of Leibniz's writings enables her to show that the solution brought forward in section 5 of the *Discours* – in which she identifies "the kernel of Leibniz's doctrine on the relationship between faith and reason" (p. 240) – has its origins in Leibniz's early reflections on the Mysteries, contained in texts from the Mainz period. She especially traces Leibniz's use of the crucial notion of presumption of truth back to these years (pp. 238-239). She convincingly concludes that "from his first writings to his last, the faith of which Leibniz speaks is a faith that has its reasons, without thereby being subjected to reason" (p. 245). Michel Fichant presents "a few remarks" on "Truth, Faith and Reason" in the same *Discours*, taken together with chapter 18 of Book IV of the *New Essays on Human Understanding* which deals with the same topics. Unlike his medieval predecessors, Leibniz views the conforming of faith to reason as the particular task of natural theology, identified with metaphysics (p. 247). If faith is distinguished by its object – namely "the truth revealed by God in an extraordinary manner" –, truth as such remains the self-consistent comprehensive system of true propositions over which reason has ultimate jurisdiction (p. 248). Two examples are analyzed: the conciliation of predestination with freedom, and the conciliation of God's goodness with the permission of evil. Frédéric de Buzon offers a very stimulating study contrasting Leibniz's "dogmatic" treatment of miracles – which philosophy can only uphold against objections, without ever understanding or proving them – and the "polemic" use he makes of them, when levelling against his opponents' doctrines (like Malebranche's account of the union of soul and body, or Newton's doctrine of attraction) the charge of alleging miraculous justifications that betray a lazy use of reason. The fascinating aspect of the *Theodicy* brought out by de Buzon is that, even in that work, Leibniz is keener to pursue the philosopher's task of freeing philosophy and theology from miraculous accounts than he is to positively present miracles as proper motives for faith.

The final section of the volume contains two chapters showing the interrelation of Leibniz's theological and metaphysical preoccupations with practical ones. Claire Rösler examines the influence exercised upon the genesis of the *Theodicy* by

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Leibniz's exchanges with the Reformed theologian Daniel Ernst Jablonski between 1697 and 1706. Their discussions aimed at removing the doctrinal differences between the Churches born of the Reformation. Among their central points was the question of God's absolute decree, and of its conciliation with divine perfections. Two texts are especially studied here, as important stages in the elaboration of the arguments defended on this topic in the *Theodicy: the Tentamen expositionis irenicae trium potissimarum inter protestantes controversiarum* and the *Unvorgreiffliches Bedencken über eine Schrift genandt Kurtze Vorstellung*. Catherine Wilson's concluding contribution, entitled "Nature, War And History: Some Remarks on Theodicy from the Eighteenth-Century Perspective" begins by developing the contrast between Leibniz's view of the objective goodness of the world and the opposite views maintained by Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza. She then proceeds "to discuss the rejection of the *Theodicy* doctrine by [Leibniz's] successors", a rejection prompted by their reflections on contemporary warfare: "[it] does not lend itself to theorizing and justification after the Cartesian or Malebranchian fashion. (...) War seems to fall outside the scope of apologetics altogether" (p. 310). Wilson's stimulating reflection invites us to grasp the transition between two *Gedankenwelten*: one in which war was an inevitable evil, constituting no objection to the theodicy project, the other where "war is pathologized as an early condition of humanity" whose future depends on the "inbuilt evolution-towards-a-better condition of the world that is postulated from Kant to Marx" (p. 316).

Lectures et interprétations des Essais de Théodicée de G. W. Leibniz is a remarkable collection, whose individual contributions maintain a very high standard of scholarship. They testify to the yet inexhausted conceptual richness of a work which, though conceived by Leibniz as an exoteric exposition of his views, was for him the opportunity to actively resume reflections pursued since his early years, tackle their internal dilemmas, and try out alternative solutions to still open problems.

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