

G.W. Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe: Allgemeiner Politischer und Historischer Briefwechsel*, Siebzehnter Band. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001.

Reviewed by Patrick Riley, Harvard University

The latest volume of Leibniz's "General Political and Historical Correspondence" in the great Berlin-Brandenburg Academy Edition, covering the period May to December 1699 (and cited hereafter as "Correspondence vol. 17"), contains a number of letters bearing on Leibniz's central practical idea—that "universal" justice, rightly conceived, is a positive, other-aiding *caritas sapientis seu benevolentia universalis* ("the charity of the wise, that is, universal benevolence");¹ that such justice "contains" or encloses *all* of the moral virtues;² and that it relates to "the common good" or "the perfection of the universe" or "the glory of God"—where these three distinct things are morally equivalent in Leibniz's usual sense (the sense that in working with wise charity for the common good of humanity one is following the "presumptive will" of God as just monarch of the best of all possible worlds).³

I

It is worthwhile to try to recover a tradition of thinking about justice which (since the eighteenth century) has largely disappeared from view: the tradition which defines justice as positive love and benevolence and "charity" and generosity, *not* as merely following authoritative sovereign law (as in Hobbes' "legal positivism")⁴ or negatively "refraining from harm" (the *neminem laedere* of Roman law). There is (or rather was) a tradition which one can (roughly) call "Christian-Platonic," which is to be found in Augustine, Shakespeare and Leibniz (*inter alia*)—and, in a proto-Leibnizian way, in Cicero's insistence on justice as *caritas naturalis* [natural charity] "between good men" (in *De Finibus* and *De Natura Deorum*)⁵—which claims that justice should not content itself with mere law-observance (since law can be unjust), should not content itself with avoiding injury, but that love and charity as the first of the social virtues should be "ascended" to and embraced (through the "sublimated Platonic eroticism" of *Euthyphro*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*)⁶ in a completely adequate theory of justice. This Platonic-Christian tradition comes out in its first full form in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* I, 27/28, with its notion that the "just" man will feel ordered or measured love which is proportional to the moral perfection of fellow men⁷—here St. Paul (I Corinthians xiii, "the greatest of these is charity") supplies the element of love, and Plato

The Leibniz Review, Vol. 12, 2002

supplies the geometrizing notions of order, measure and proportion (especially in the *Philebus*);⁸ it continues in Portia's great speech in *Merchant of Venice* Act IV ("though [legal] justice be thy plea, consider this, that in the course of justice none of us should see salvation; we do therefore plead for mercy"),⁹ and in Isabella's speeches in *Measure for Measure* privileging charity and mercy and generosity over sovereignty and the letter of the law;¹⁰ it culminates in Leibniz's great effort, at the dawn of the Enlightenment, to say that justice rightly understood is *caritas sapientis seu benevolentia universalis*, "the charity/love of the wise, that is universal benevolence." Though this Platonic-Christian tradition was greatly weakened by Hume,¹¹ Voltaire (*Candide*), and above all Kant—who invariably defined justice as "public legal justice" ("if public legal justice perishes it is no longer worthwhile for men to remain alive on this earth")¹²—vestiges of the tradition are to be found in Wagner's *libretti* (for example in Brünnhilde's giving primacy to "higher" love at the expense of Fricka's narrow legalism or Wotan's sovereign caprice in *Die Walküre*),¹³ and still more in Freud's demi-Platonic argument in *Civilization and its Discontents* that we can and must "sublimate" our attachment to "genital eros" into benevolent love of civilization, even if we must thereby pay an almost intolerable psychological price.¹⁴

The importance of this tradition is evident: justice has been understood as the first of the social virtues since Greek antiquity—seconded by Aquinas' agreeing with Aristotle that justice is "the morning and the evening star,"¹⁵ and (in our time) by John Rawls' privileging of justice in *A Theory of Justice* (1971);¹⁶ and love (charity) has always been ranked highest among human feelings and emotions. The ingeniousness of the Christian-Platonic tradition is that it makes justice and love *both* "first" – by saying, with Augustine, that justice is "measured" or "ordered" love (proportional to moral perfection), or by saying, with Leibniz, that justice is "the charity of the wise, that is universal benevolence." This tradition, largely eclipsed since the Enlightenment, is too important to let go: one can hope, indeed, that the intuitive moral attractiveness of the idea of "justice as love and benevolence" can receive (at least some) new lease of life through a sympathetic (not to say uncritical) re-examination of a view which was powerful enough to prevail (by and large) from Plato to Leibniz, and whose vestiges still glimmer in Wagner and Freud.

Leibniz's first published defense of justice as *caritas sapientis* appears in the *Codex Iuris Gentium* (1693):

a good man is one who loves everybody, so far as reason permits. Justice, then, which is the virtue which regulates that affection which the Greeks call

philanthropy, will be most conveniently defined... as the charity of the wise man, that is, charity which follows the dictates of wisdom... Charity is a universal benevolence, and benevolence the habit of loving or of willing the good. Love then signifies rejoicing in the happiness of another... the happiness of those whose happiness pleases us turns into our own happiness, since things which please us are desired for their own sakes.¹⁷

And then slightly later, in *La véritable piété* (1710), Leibniz indicated what this view of justice entails:

those who... reduce justice to [legal] rigor, and who fail altogether to understand that one cannot be just without being benevolent...in a word, not only those who look for their profit, pleasure, and glory in the misery of others, but also those who are not at all anxious to procure the common good and to lift out of misery those who are in their care, and generally those who show themselves to be without enlightenment and without charity, boast in vain of piety which they do not know at all, whatever appearance they create.¹⁸

In “Correspondence vol. 17,” Leibniz’s view of “justice as charity” comes out most eloquently in a never-published “new” letter to Theodor Heinson from July 1699, in which he insists that it is “high time” that the “education of youth” be brought to a higher level, and that “means he thought of better to implant Christian love, right and justice, and other virtues in men.”¹⁹ (It is wholly characteristic of Leibniz to *conflate* “love,” “right,” “justice” and the “other virtues”—given his insistence in the *Elementa iuris perpetui* [1695] that justice *contains* or *encloses* all the other virtues.)²⁰ The letter to Heinson goes on to urge that Christian “love” (*or right or justice or virtue*), through its “love-rich gentleness,” tends to bring about “a truly philadelphian [brother-loving] union” that excludes “contrariness,” “hatred,” and “contempt” – since *liebreicher Sanftmut* “seeks not evil but good in all things.” (And in an adjoining sentence “love/right/justice” also rules out “pride,” “partisanship,” and “love of novelty.”²¹) For love should have as its object “the general good” of humanity, not mere “newness”: “We must give testimony of the supreme love which we bear toward God, through the charity which we owe to our neighbor. And we must make all imaginable efforts to contribute something to the public good. For it is God who is the Lord, and to him belongs the public good as his own; and everything we do for the least of his subjects (whom he has the goodness to treat as brothers) will be done for him.”²²

It is worth pointing out that the July 1699 letter to Heinson—an old Leibniz protegé who now found himself serving as an ecclesiastical counselor at the

little court of Aurich in East Frisia—offers a moral utopia of “philadelphian union” and *liebreicher Sanftmut* precisely as *consolation* to Heinson, who was surrounded at Aurich by the fast-rising “pietist” sect which offended his orthodox Lutheran sensibilities. But if Leibniz could offer a rapt vision of a sect-free, brother-loving union in order to cheer the scandalized and demoralized Heinson, he could also (in his tougher realist vein) give his old protégé harder-edged advice about tolerantly getting along with sectarians who had to be countenanced. And so in a letter of May 1699, speaking on behalf of Electress Sophie of Hannover, Leibniz told Heinson that

. . . this Great Princess has ordered me to tell you that you should attach yourself sooner to the laws and customs established in East Frisia, and to the reasonable practices of your predecessors, than to what may be in use in Hannover. . . . Her Electoral Highness judges that the best course you can follow, in case there is some Pietist who shocks you, is to reveal your feelings to your Prince, in a manner full of respect and moderation; [you will thereby] have satisfied your conscience and the duty of your office . . . As for me, I find . . . that there is no Canon of the Church or decision of [an ecumenical] Council which is more infallible than the rule which she has given to you for your repose.

Leibniz goes on to say that some of the Pietist tracts which Heinson had sent him “do not seem to come from a fanatic” or from people given over to “the visions of enthusiasts”; and he adds that unless Pietists or other sectarians do something openly illegal, the best course is (in effect) to ignore them:

. . . Since there are evils which are more easily surmounted by silence than by [the application of] remedies, you see that it may be the case that prudence will ordain that the prince live with certain evils, for fear of making them more bitter, or of falling into even greater inconveniences. Sects (supposing that Pietism is one of them) are of this nature. They resemble a torch, which burns more brightly after being disturbed. You know this fine verse of Ovid: *Vidi ego jactatus mota face crescere flammam, Et vidi nullo concutiente mori* [I have seen flames grow when fanned by the movement of the torch, and I have seen them die down when no one waved it more]. Without the excommunication of Pope Leo X, Luther would not have gone so far . . .²³

An extraordinary thing for a (nominal) Lutheran to say to a more orthodox one! But Leibniz’s point is that one must endure not-too-dangerous sectarians, even while hoping for the advent of a sect-transcending *caritas* and *benevolentia*.

As ever, he treats both “ought” and “is” with consummate intelligence.

II

For Leibniz perhaps the highest (or widest) form of *caritas sapientis* or *benevolentia universalis* is to be found in religious reconciliation, unity, and concord, in three ever-outward-expanding spheres or circles: (1) reconciliation of Protestants (“Lutherans” and “Calvinists”) in Germany,²⁴ (2) reconciliation of Protestants and Roman Catholics in Europe,²⁵ (3) reconciliation of Christians with all other rational beings (for example the Chinese, as recommended in *Novissima Sinica* [1697]).²⁶ In “Correspondence vol. 17” it is the first (and narrowest) of these spheres which receives by far the greatest attention: for in the period May – December 1699 Leibniz was still at work on the great irenical treatise called “Unvorgreifliches Bedencken” (“Disinterested Thoughts”) on Lutheran-Calvinist *rapprochement* which he had begun early in 1698 with his friend and colleague the Lutheran Abbot of Loccum, Gerhard Wolter Molanus²⁷—an irenical work which the eminent Leibnizian Paul Schrecker rightly called “a true treasure of philosophy and theology” (*Lettres et fragments inédits*, Paris 1934), while lamenting that the “Disinterested Thoughts” remained mainly unpublished.²⁸ (Gaston Grua, to be sure, later published fragments of the “Unvorgreifliches Bedencken” in his magisterial *Textes inédits* [Paris 1948]; but the full text remains in manuscript.)²⁹

While collaborating on the “Disinterested Thoughts” Leibniz and Molanus exchanged a number of important letters; and the crowning glory of “Correspondence vol. 17” is Leibniz’s remarkable letter to Molanus of October 1699 urging that hyper-Calvinist notions of groundless, extra-reasonable “election” and “salvation” (regardless of merit and desert) can degenerate unto unjust, uncharitable “tyranny.”³⁰ (This October 1699 letter, nominally a favorable commentary on an irenical scheme by an obscure Swiss Calvinist pastor named Stercky, actually quietly annihilates the pastor’s theological fumbblings; Leibniz wrote this letter, which was obviously intended for wide circulation, in French—unlike the scholastic Latin of most of the Leibniz-Molanus correspondence).³¹ And it is worth remembering, of course, that it was for Molanus that Leibniz finally wrote the definitive statement of his Christian-Platonic “universal jurisprudence” of charity and benevolence, the “Opinion on the Principles of Pufendorf,” in 1706:

Neither the norm of conduct itself, nor the essence of the just, depends on [God’s] free decision, but rather on eternal truths, objects of the divine intellect... Justice follows certain rules of equality and of proportion which are no less founded in the immutable nature of things, and in the divine ideas,

than are the principles of arithmetic and of geometry... Divine justice and human justice have common rules which can be reduced to a system; and they must be taught in universal jurisprudence.³²

To conciliate the Evangelical and the Reformed churches—Leibniz refused to use the names “Lutheran” and “Calvinist,” which he considered too personal and partisan, too inimical to charitable transcending of “schism”³³—it would be sufficient to find *minimal* acceptable common ground between those churches. (Leibniz had insisted, after all, in a 1697 letter to James Cressett, the English ambassador to Hannover, that an “ecclesiastical tolerance” between Protestant sects is required “by the principle of Christian charity,” even if a full “*concorde de sentiments*” should be beyond reach).³⁴ Leibniz, however, pursues not the prudent minimum but the radical maximum in the “Disinterested Thoughts”: he bases his argument not on a narrow common ground acceptable just to (closely related) Protestant sects, but on the notion of that which is necessarily, universally true and/or right for all rational beings in the universe. And that is why he paraphrases Plato’s *Euthyphro* (without naming it) in the key paragraph of the “Disinterested Thoughts”—for the point of the *Euthyphro* is that even the gods themselves see and know and chastely love the “eternal verities” (mathematical and moral) which are valid for all “minds” in the cosmos, that the gods don’t cause or make eternal truth by decree or a so-called “absolute” will.³⁵ This Platonizing moral universalism, which Leibniz was to turn against both radical Cartesian voluntarism and Calvinist “absolute decrees” (as will be seen shortly), was the basis of his *jurisprudence universelle* of “wise charity” and “universal benevolence”—a universal jurisprudence well outlined in his letter of January 1698 to Huldreich von Eyben, which urges that “the whole of practical theology is indeed nothing other than a species of the highest jurisprudence, that is, the right of God [*de jure Dei*],” and that while each earthly *respublica* “has its own jurisprudence, so to speak,” these individual justice-systems are subordinate to “the jurisprudence of the greatest city of all minds under the monarchy of God,” which is the “*optima Respublica*.”³⁶ And in a letter to the Florentine scholar Antonio Magliabechi from June 1698, Leibniz makes it clear that this universal justice in the “best commonwealth” has everything to do with “the nature of true love” or finding one’s own pleasure “in the felicity of others”: universal *caritas* requires the wise love of God and of one’s neighbor.³⁷ (It is not surprising that a professional law-expert with a doctorate in jurisprudence should view practical theology as a “species” of “the highest jurisprudence,” and that the same legal expert should write a *theodicy* [theo-dike, “the justice of God”], saying “it is the cause of God I plead.”³⁸ Indeed Leibniz the

“universal” jurisconsult finds objectionable in a Calvinist “absolute” God the same things that a practicing lawyer would condemn in a court of law: “the damnation of an innocent, the taking back of divine promises, and the like, which would not be an *actus conformis justitiae*”—for it would be incongruent with “the goodness and the wisdom of God”).³⁹

One doesn’t really “need” Platonism just to bridge the (not too huge) differences between Calvinists and Lutherans; Leibniz uses Platonism, which goes well beyond his immediate, limited irenic needs, precisely because of his “global Platonism” (as René Sève has aptly called it).⁴⁰ It is revealing, indeed, that Leibniz should fall back on Plato’s *Euthyphro* when something more modest, less radical, would be sufficient. (“Reason not the need,” as King Lear says—or rather, go beyond what is narrowly, immediately *needed* to reason itself. For what reason dictates universally to all rational beings—even to the gods themselves in *Euthyphro*—will also be automatically valid for Lutherans and Calvinists. And a Christian-Platonist universalizing ecumenism will then later shape the *Theodicée*, viewed as a kind of proto-Kantian “religion within the limits of reason alone.”) The theological fine-points of the “Disinterested Thoughts” are of greater interest to the history of theology than to the history of philosophy; but it is *philosophically* interesting that Leibniz should use Platonic rationalism to draw together two modern, north-European Christian sects. Tertullian had famously asked, “If we have Jerusalem, what need have we of Athens?”;⁴¹ Leibniz uses “Athens” to bridge quarreling sides of a divided “Jerusalem.” He enlists Plato to mediate between Luther and Calvin—not surprisingly, given his view that “the doctrine of Plato concerning metaphysics and morality is holy and just ... and everything he says about truth and the eternal ideas is truly admirable.”⁴²

As the “new” 1699 letters to Molanus will soon make clear, what Leibniz found most worrying in Calvinism was the notion that by an “absolute decree” God willed the election of the saved and the reprobation of the damned—not from foreknowledge of good or bad use of faith and grace on the part of human beings, but simply as an exercise of unquestionable sovereign power. (*Euthyphro*, in “his” dialogue, had urged that *whatever* the gods love counts as right, but Socrates refutes him; small wonder that Leibniz should view Calvin as a kind of Euthyphro *après la lettre*). The idea of “tyrannical” divine *potestas*, undirected by any rational *causa impulsiva* or benevolent charity, Leibniz had eloquently denounced as morally intolerable near the beginning of the “Discourse on Metaphysics” (1686):

Why praise [God] for what he has done if he would be equally praiseworthy in doing exactly the opposite? Where will his justice and his wisdom be

found if nothing is left but a certain despotic power, if will takes the place of reason, and if, according to the definition of tyrants [Thrasymachus' definition of justice in Plato's *Republic*], that which is pleasing to the most powerful is by that very fact just?⁴³

Almost exactly the same kind of tyranny-rejecting language appears in Leibniz's letter of February 1698 to his collaborator Molanus: "every act of divine will has a determining reason [*causa impulsiva*], otherwise God would not be supremely wise." Condemning the notion of willful divine "tyranny" yet again, Leibniz makes Christ himself speak against it—and in Greek, the language of Plato. (Leibniz then actually compares divine tyranny to the Roman practice of decimation—something bloody, arbitrary, and not personally *deserved*—and urges that "jurisconsults" will view such tyranny with "aversion," as "one of the impossible things." In this same Romanizing vein, Leibniz then goes on to reflect on Tacitus' *Annales*, saying that while a mere *princeps* [prince] will suffer from "human imperfections" [imperfectiōni humanae], God by contrast will always act through a "supremely wise perfection" which rules out the arbitrary and the tyrannical.)⁴⁴ But it is in the October 1699 letter to Molanus which crowns "Correspondence vol. 17" that Leibniz expands his Christian-Platonist objections to Calvinist "absolutism" as something *unjust*:

God does not act through absolute power alone, without reason, as would a tyrant, and it is always his supreme wisdom which makes him choose the best—though the reasons for this depth of his counsel may be unknown to us. Thus the love of God and the respect which we owe him is not injured at all; his wisdom, his goodness, and his justice remain in their entirety, as well as his power and his supreme right... This sovereign master does not act without reason, or by some obscure movement of his power alone, which would be the act of a tyrant, but through reasons (however unknown to us) which his perfections furnish to him: in a word, sovereign wisdom has as much of a role as sovereign power.⁴⁵

Sections 175-178 of the *Theodicée*, a decade later, against the supralapsarians, merely amplify these complaints about "tyranny" and "injustice" in the letters to Molanus.⁴⁶ And that is why Mark Larrimore is so correct when he urges that the *Theodicée* is not simply a vindication of God but "a series of meditations on better and worse ways of conceptualizing the workings of perfect wisdom, power and goodness"—so that the book "makes a distinctive contribution to ethics."⁴⁷

The Platonic-rationalist anti-voluntarism outlined in these letters to his collaborator had been long-aimed by Leibniz not just against the more radical forms of

Calvinist theology, but against Descartes' even more thoroughgoing and extreme voluntarism in the *Reply to the Six Objections*. Descartes had insisted that:

It is self-contradictory that the will of God should not have been from eternity indifferent to all that has come to pass or that will ever occur, because we can form no conception of anything good or true... the idea of which existed in the divine understanding before God's will determined him to act.⁴⁸

One of the most consistent things in Leibniz's philosophical development was his hostility to such hyper-creationist notions, as an early (1677) letter of his shows: "I know that it is the opinion of Descartes that the truth of things depends on the divine will. This has always seemed absurd to me ... Who would say that A is not non-A because God has decreed it?"⁴⁹

In the history of philosophy the idea that the concept of justice, as an "eternal verity," is not a mere adjunct of power, that it is an idea whose necessary truth is at least analogous to the truths of mathematics and logic, is commonly associated with Plato. Now while it is not true that Leibniz was a Platonist in any doctrinaire sense—his clinging to Pauline "charity" and to Augustinian "good will" would have made that difficult—nonetheless he did agree with Plato on many points of fundamental importance. "I have always been quite content, since my youth," he wrote to Remond in 1715, "with the moral philosophy of Plato, and even in a way with his metaphysics; for those two sciences accompany each other, like mathematics and physics."⁵⁰

The Platonic work which Leibniz admired most—at least for use in moral and political philosophy—was the *Euthyphro*, which he paraphrased almost literally in his most important work on justice, the "Meditation on the Common Concept of Justice." In the *Euthyphro*, which deals with the question whether "the rules of goodness and of justice are anterior to the decrees of God" (in Leibniz's words), Plato "makes Socrates uphold the truth on that point."⁵¹ And that truth is, as Ernst Cassirer puts it, that the good and the just are "not the product but the objective aim and the motive of his will."⁵²

The opening lines of Leibniz's "Meditation" on justice merely convert Platonic dialogue into straightforward prose:

It is agreed that whatever God wills is good and just. But there remains the question whether it is good and just because God wills it or whether God wills it because it is good and just: in other words, whether justice and goodness are arbitrary, or whether they belong to the necessary and eternal truths about the nature of things, as do numbers and proportions.⁵³

Leibniz then goes on, in the "Meditation," to equate Hobbes with the

Thrasymachus who had viewed justice not as geometrically “eternal” but as the product of the will of the powerful. And this remarkable opening of the “Meditation,” with its Platonizing linkage between “eternal” justice and “proportion” (*à la Philebus*) reminds us that, in Philip Beeley’s words, “Leibniz was convinced that human minds are something like metaphysical images of the divine mind,” so that “the investigation of pure concepts” such as numbers or geometry (or justice) is “a part of gaining insight into God.”⁵⁴

Leibniz’s devotion to the doctrine of Plato’s *Euthyphro* is clear not just in the “Meditation on the Common Concept of Justice” (and then later in the *Theodicy*), but in the slightly earlier “Unvorgreifliches Bedencken” (c. 1698-1701), which (as we have seen) he wrote partly to counter the extreme Calvinist view that God creates everything *ex nihilo* through his “fullness of power” (*plenitudo potestatis*) and creative “will” alone. One must consider, Leibniz now says, “whether the will of God really makes right [*das Recht*], and whether something is good and right simply because God wills it, or whether God wills it because it is good and right in itself [*an sich gut und recht ist*].” The radical voluntarist view of justice as a divine “product” Leibniz ascribes to a number of now-obscure Calvinist theologians, but also to those Cartesians “who teach that two times two makes four and three times three makes nine, for no other reason [*Ursach*] than that God wills it.”⁵⁵

But such a radically voluntarist position, for Leibniz, is as calamitous morally and theologically as it is mathematically: for on such a view “the *aeternae veritates* would have no certainty in themselves, and even the *bonitas et justitia dei* would be only extrinsic denominations, and in fact would be groundless, if their truth derived from God’s will alone. *Si tantum staret pro ratione voluntas*.” Those who say, Leibniz adds, that “God wills the evil of punishment without regard to the evil of sin,” that he wills to “eternally damn” men even before “any of their sins come into play,” forget that such a view “in no way abides with God’s justice, goodness, and charity.”⁵⁶ (The last clause is a conscious re-working of I Corinthians 13, “Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three;” Leibniz replaces “faith” and “hope” with two additional *moral* virtues.) For if God’s decree were “quite absolute, and had no *causam impulsivam* whatsoever, then God would be an acceptor of persons, through election, and would deal with men as a tyrant with his underlings... for no other reason than *sic volo sic jubeo*.”⁵⁷ (This phrase from Juvenal’s *Satire* VI, line 223, continues with another phrase which had great weight with Leibniz: the whole sentence reads *Hoc volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas*, and was understood by Leibniz to say, “Thus I will do, thus I ordain, my will takes the

place of reason.”) Here, in his boldest stroke, Leibniz virtually equates hyper-Calvinists with the willful woman in Juvenal’s *Satire* who crucifies an innocent slave merely because she *wants* to. And since Christ (the *caritas*-lover) was also a crucified innocent, Leibniz links all unjust crucifiers to partisanship for extrarational “absolute” decrees: he deploys pagan Juvenal to make Christian Calvin more charitable.⁵⁸

Leibniz’s insistence on “God’s justice, goodness and charity” as an antidote to “absolutism” and “tyranny” is brought out in a crucial paragraph of the *Unvorgreifliches Bedencken* (and then echoed in his 1698-99 letters to Molanus). In the “Disinterested Thoughts” Leibniz urges that:

the divine attributes must necessarily be compatible, or as it is explained by our theologians, harmoniously united [*harmonica*]. God, though he is not only charitable [*barmherzig*] but charity itself, can nonetheless undertake no exercise of it which goes against his justice—and also no exercise of his justice through which his charity would be left behind.⁵⁹

Any exercise of divine omnipotence [*Allmacht*], Leibniz goes on to say, must be limited by God’s “goodness” and “wisdom”—leading finally to “justice” [*Gerechtigkeit*]. This same *Gerechtigkeit* is insisted on by Leibniz, over and over, in his long and important letter to Molanus of July 18, 1698—especially in the paragraph in which Leibniz treats Christ as “a just judge” for charitably saving “the woman taken in adultery” (*John VIII*, 15) from the legal penalty of death by stoning, for benevolently saying, “Go, and sin no more.”⁶⁰ (It is not surprising that Leibniz should give primacy to the Johannine Gospel—which in effect “foresees” Leibniz’s notion of anti-legalistic *caritas sapientis* and *benevolentia*.)

Leibniz goes on to say, in the “Unvorgreifliches Bedencken,” that “the eternal truths of goodness and justice, of ratio and proportion,” as well as all other “necessary truths,” have “their ground in the eternal being of God himself: not, however, in his free decree.” (“Now consist justice, goodness, beauty, no less than mathematical things, in equality and proportion, and are therefore no less *aeternae et necessariae veritatis*.”⁶¹) He adds that “true justice, as it is grasped by all understanding and honor-loving people, consists not in impunity, but means a universal good-willingness, in which wisdom is included.”⁶² (Given Leibniz’s standard moral equivalences, *allgemeine Gutwilligkeit* = *benevolentia universalis* = *caritas sapientis* = justice.) And finally he plays the “ontological proof” trump card: if *all* truths were divinely caused *ex nihilo*, then the truth about the necessary existence of God himself (as revealed by St. Anselm) would be “a product of the free will of God, which is absurd in the highest degree [*absurdissimum*].”⁶³ In

that passage, Plato triumphs over Euthyphro-Thrasymachus-Calvin-Descartes-Hobbes one last time.

III

If time and space remained one could go on to treat other fine letters in “Correspondence vol. 17” which have a bearing on Leibniz’s practical philosophy: one could comment on the letter of May 1699 to Bossuet’s crony Mme. de Brinon, urging (in opposition to Fénelon) that “it seems that pleasure enters essentially into the notion of love, such that he who loves truly, with a pure love, finds his pleasure in the good, happiness [or] perfection of another”;⁶⁴ one could take up the letter of the same month to Bossuet himself, insisting that a charitable overcoming of the Protestant-Catholic “schism” could obviate “the great evils which the schism has brought about, that is to say the loss of so many thousands of souls, and the spilling of so much Christian blood”;⁶⁵ one could consider the letter of September 1699 to Andreas Morell, pointing out that “one must attack vices without showing too much animosity to persons,” so that one “works for the propagation of truth and of piety with a gentleness worthy of true charity”—avoiding the “sectarian and schismatic spirit” of self-styled reformers such as William Penn, who “played the little tyrant in Pennsylvania,”⁶⁶ thereby falling into the same “tyranny” that Leibniz had lamented in hyper-Calvinist versions of God. (“I should wish that one approve everything which is good, without making war on those who mix in some evil—rather like the healthy who do not make war upon the sick.”)⁶⁷

But above all (if time and space remained), one could take up the remarkable letter to Electress Sophie of Hannover (July 1699) in which *all* of Leibniz’s practical concerns come out in an eloquent encomium of academies of science—academies of the very sort that Leibniz himself was about to establish in Berlin⁶⁸ within the next 18 months:

I doubt not at all, given the present disposition of minds, that the human race could soon go quite far, if several princes imitated the great king [Louis XIV], who lately restored the lustre of the famous Academy of Science which he had formed. For, the moderns having surpassed (for a century) everything that the ancients had done, I believe that we shall surpass ourselves in a short time, and [thereby] make the condition of the human race much better than it is—if we will only (but with sufficient urgency) take advantage of the grace of heaven, by making all possible efforts to make discoveries in nature and in the arts. I could even wish that this be done through a principle of piety, which would be the fruit of a more extensive knowledge (far from being

contrary to it), and that one consider the fine saying of a pagan who urged that one cannot sing a finer hymn to the divinity than by making known the surprising works of art in nature.⁶⁹

That is the authentic—and authentically charitable—voice of Leibniz.

Patrick Riley
Department of Government
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

Notes

¹ Leibniz, *Codex Iuris Gentium*, “Praefatio,” xi-xiii, in Dutens, *Leibnitii ... opera omnia* (Geneva 1768), IV, iii, 270 ff. (English version in *Political Writings*, trans. P. Riley (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 118 ff.

² Leibniz, *Elementa iuris perpetui*, in *Scritti politici*, ed. V. Mathieu (Torino 1965), 192 ff.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. M. Oakeshott (Oxford 1946), ch. 13: “Where there is no law there is no justice.”

⁵ Treated by Leibniz in his 1689 Rome notes on Cudworth, Gr. I, 327.

⁶ Plato, *Euthyphro* 9e-10e, *Phaedrus* 256 ff., *Symposium* 206c-209e.

⁷ Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* I, 27 (28a), c. 395 A.D.

⁸ Plato, *Philebus* 66 a-e.

⁹ Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* IV, I, 184 ff.

¹⁰ Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, II, ii, 108 ff.

¹¹ Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, of Morals, ch. 1, “Moral distinctions not derived from reason.” (And yet Hume does say that if benevolence were universal—a psychological impossibility—mere legal justice would be superfluous.)

¹² Kant, *Rechtslehre*, in *Werke*, ed. E. Cassirer (Berlin 1922), vol. 7, p. 135.

¹³ Wagner, libretto for *Die Walküre*, Act II, scene 6 (“Todesverkündigung”) and Act III, scene 3.

¹⁴ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* trans. J. Strachey (London 1961), pp. 60 ff.

¹⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II, II, sec. 57 (“Justice”).

¹⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass. 1971) pp. 15-18.

- ¹⁷ Leibniz, *Codex Iuris Gentium*, op cit., pp. 274-5.
- ¹⁸ Leibniz, “La véritable piété,” Gr. II, pp. 499 ff.
- ¹⁹ Leibniz, *Allgemeiner Politischer und Historischer Briefwechsel*, (Berlin 2001), Reihe I, Bd. 17 (“Correspondence vol. 17”), pp. 362 ff. esp. p. 364.
- ²⁰ Leibniz, *Elementa iuris perpetui*, in *Scritti politici*, op. cit., 192 ff.
- ²¹ “Correspondence vol. 17,” p. 362. For some incomprehensible reason, Leibniz suppressed this splendid letter to Heinson and sent instead a perfunctory, uninteresting one (ibid pp. 366-7).
- ²² Leibniz, “Dialogue,” A VI, 4, teil “C,” p. 2238.
- ²³ Leibniz, “Correspondence vol. 17,” A I, 17, op cit., pp. 201-03.
- ²⁴ See above all Paul Schrecker, *Leibniz: Lettres et fragments inédits* (Paris 1934), “Introduction,” pp. 34 ff. (a wonderful essay).
- ²⁵ See especially the Leibniz–Bossuet Correspondence in *Oeuvres*, ed. F. de Careil (Paris 1859-75), vol. II, passim.
- ²⁶ Leibniz, *Novissima Sinica*, trans. D. Cook and H. Rosemont (Chicago 1994), pp. 45 ff. See also P. Riley’s essay in *Novissima Sinica (Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa 33)* ed. H. Poser and W. Li (Stuttgart 1999), pp. 235 ff.
- ²⁷ On this point see the invaluable remarks of Schrecker in *Lettres* (1934), op. cit., pp. 47 ff.
- ²⁸ Ibid, pp. 50 ff.
- ²⁹ Grua, *Textes inédits* (Paris 1948), vol. I, pp. 428 ff.
- ³⁰ Leibniz, letter to Molanus (October 1699), A I, 17, pp. 428 ff.
- ³¹ See Schrecker, op. cit., pp. 34 ff, and the Introduction to A, I, 17.
- ³² Leibniz, *Monità*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Dutens, op. cit., IV, 3, 275 ff.
- ³³ P. Schrecker, Leibniz, *Lettres et fragments inédits* (Paris 1934), 96, and now also A, I, 17, 610.
- ³⁴ A, I, 14, 690-691.
- ³⁵ *Euthyphro* 9e-10e.
- ³⁶ A, I, 15, 137.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 645.
- ³⁸ T (Huggard), “Prelim. Diss.”
- ³⁹ Leibniz, “Unvorgreifliches Bedencken,” Gr. I, 432.
- ⁴⁰ René Sève, *Le droit de la raison* (Paris 1997), 18n.
- ⁴¹ Tertullian, *De praescriptiones hereticorum*, VII.
- ⁴² Leibniz, letter to Huet (1679), Dutens V, 458 ff.
- ⁴³ DM, prop. 2.
- ⁴⁴ A, I, 15, no. 208.

- ⁴⁵ A, I, 17, 609.
- ⁴⁶ T (Huggard), II, 175-178.
- ⁴⁷ Mark Larrimore, "The Moral Import of Possible Worlds," in *Nihil sine Ratione* [Program of the VII Leibniz-Kongress], (Berlin 2001), p. 77.
- ⁴⁸ Cited in Riley, *Leibniz's Universal Jurisprudence* (1996), p. 23.
- ⁴⁹ Leibniz, to Eckhard (1677), L. 181.
- ⁵⁰ G, III, 637.
- ⁵¹ T (Huggard), II, 182, 240-241.
- ⁵² E. Cassirer, *Leibniz's System* (Marburg 1902), 428-498.
- ⁵³ Leibniz, "Meditation on... Justice," in *Political Writings*, ed. Riley, 45.
- ⁵⁴ Philip Beeley, review of Christia Mercer's *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2002 (06.06).
- ⁵⁵ Leibniz, "Unvorgreifliches Bedencken," Gr. I, 428 ff.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 441.
- ⁵⁸ Cf. Leibniz's comparable treatment of Pontius Pilate as an unjust crucifier of embodied *caritas* in *Novissima Sinica* (Cook-Rosemont ed.), pp. 50 ff.
- ⁵⁹ Leibniz, "Unvorgreifliches Bedencken," Gr. I, 430.
- ⁶⁰ A, I, 15, 702-703.
- ⁶¹ Leibniz, "Unvorgreifliches Bedencken, Gr. I, 434.
- ⁶² Ibid., 431.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 432.
- ⁶⁴ A, I, 17, 199 ("Correspondence vol. 17").
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 168.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 474.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ H.S. Brather, *Leibniz und seine Akademie* (Berlin 1993), passim.
- ⁶⁹ A, I, 17, 37.