

A few suggestions for improvements: p. 15 “how it is possible for perfectly rectilinear bodies to bend,” not “... for two perfectly rectilinear bodies to bend each other”; p. 17: “why they should bend in this direction rather than that” for “... toward this part rather than that”; and p. 19: “If something is moved with a speed than which no greater is intelligible, it will be everywhere at the same time,” being a counter-possible, would be more happily rendered in the subjunctive: “If something were to move with a velocity than which no greater can be conceived, it would be everywhere at once.”

Errata : p. 14, btm: *se flectere*, not *si flectere* (A468); p. 31, l. 17: “in the **human ovum**”; p. 56, l. -7: *percipio*, not *peripio* (A508); p. 87, l. 7: “that an **inassignable quantity exists**”.

**ABSTRACT OF 1993 ESSAY COMPETITION WINNER:
"Leibniz's Conception of Metaphysical Evil"
by Michael Latzer, St. Anselm College**

A central doctrine of Leibniz's *Theodicy* is the classification of evils as metaphysical, physical and moral. Moral evil is sin; physical evil is suffering; and metaphysical evil, Leibniz says, is “simple imperfection”. It has been commonplace in Leibniz scholarship to understand metaphysical evil as identical with the Leibnizian notion of the “original imperfection of the creature,” or the limitation which inevitably characterizes any created substance. This is Russell's interpretation; and its pervasiveness is no doubt due to the powerful influence which Russell's Leibniz book has exercised in this century. In my paper I challenge this interpretation.

Contrary to what a reading of Russell or of Broad might indicate, Leibniz did not produce his natural theology or his theodicy in a vacuum. Leibniz's theodicy is in fact steeped in the Augustinian-Thomistic theodicy, which includes such familiar elements as the centrality of the Fall, the instrumentality of evil, and, most significantly here, the analysis of evil as *privatio boni*, the absence of goods which in some specifiable sense should be present. Both Augustine and Aquinas deny that creaturely limitation is in and of itself an evil, although they agree that it is a necessary condition for evil.

Do we find Leibniz affirming this point in the *Theodicy*? We do, copiously. And there should be no surprise in this; with his interest in confessional reunion, Leibniz would surely not want to devise an account of evil no mainstream

theologian of the day would accept. I maintain that Leibniz nowhere speaks of mere limitation as an evil but always and only as a precondition for the possibility of evil. He very explicitly aligns himself with what Augustine and Aquinas have to say on these themes.

What then is “metaphysical evil?” Leibniz’s remarks on this form of evil are somewhat offhand and sketchy, suggesting perhaps that he took for granted that his readers would know what he is talking about. In my paper I piece together his doctrine as follows. In one way, *any* instance of evil is a “metaphysical evil”, i.e., a privation of being; Leibniz does occasionally use metaphysical evil in such a generic sense. But he also offers significant clues that metaphysical evil has for him a more particular signification, as when he mentions “monsters and other apparent irregularities of the universe” as examples of it (*Theodicy* § 241, GP VI, 261). In this more restrictive sense metaphysical evil stands for what nowadays is called “natural” evil. Leibniz seems to have two basic types of condition in mind here. First, there are specific defects (e.g. blindness; monstrous births). The correspondence with Bourguet contains a decisive affirmation of this. Second, there are defects relative to an ideal of “law-governedness” (e.g. sunspots; the orbits of comets). I draw on the correspondence with Wolff to illustrate the link Leibniz draws between order or rules and perfection.

In the final part of my paper I consider the significance of my interpretation of metaphysical evil for the understanding of Leibniz’s project of theodicy. If mere limitation were an evil, it would follow that there is no possible world without evil. This is something Leibniz explicitly denies (*Theodicy*, appendix 1, objection 1, GP VI, 376). And Leibniz’s conspicuous use of the *felix culpa* theme (i.e., the presence of evil is justified by the Incarnation) would make no sense if there were evil in every possible world. The whole point of Leibniz’s theodicy is to show that God has morally sufficient reasons for permitting evil, not that God could not help but make a world with evil, supposing he makes a world at all. (This paper is forthcoming in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*.)