Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Evil and Freedom

Discourse on Metaphysics
Gottfried Leibniz (1646 – 1716)

- Lived in Germany
- Learned new philosophy in Paris
- Developed calculus, despite feud with Newton
- Many works, no definitive statement
Descartes and Leibniz

Two philosophers, two styles of philosophy
Rejecting the Scholastics vs. seeking reconciliation

Descartes was more defiant. Leibniz was more conciliatory.
A well-founded building vs. a mutually-supporting web

Descartes sought foundations.

Leibniz sought mutual support.
Epistemology first vs. metaphysics first

Descartes’ Meditator

Leibniz’s harmonious monads
The Problem of Evil

Discourse on Metaphysics
The problem of evil

- God is supposed to be:
  - Omniscient
  - Omnipotent
  - Omnibenevolent

- But bad things happen to good people.
Problem of evil: response 1

- Whatever God chose is good for that reason. (#2)

- Leibniz: God created this world because it was good, not the other way around.

- *Euthyphro* connection?
Problem of evil: response 2

- Imperfect ≠ bad. (#3)

- Leibniz: If the world is imperfect, then God chose evil over good.
Problem of evil: response 3

For the greater good of free will, God allows bad choices to have normal effects.

Leibniz: But God knew which people would make the terrible choices, and he created them anyway. (#30)
Problem of evil: Leibniz’s response

- Optimism: This is as good as it can get.

- Leibniz’s formulation: This is the best of all possible worlds.
  - “Possible world”?

- Voltaire’s Pr. Pangloss in *Candide* is a satire of Leibniz.
The richness of the effects vs. the simplicity of the means (#5)

- Architecture analogy:
  - What are the effects?
  - What are the means?

- God’s goal:
  - happiness of minds

- God’s means:
  - laws of nature
Problems for Free Will

Discourse on Metaphysics
Free will and the ability to do otherwise

If you chose to come to Union, then you could have done otherwise.

could have done otherwise = was possible to do otherwise
Arguments against free will

God’s foreknowledge

1. If it was impossible for you to do otherwise, then you did not choose Union.

2. God knew beforehand that you would come to Union.

3. If God knew beforehand, then it was impossible for you to do otherwise.
   × Leibniz: Certainty = necessity

4. Therefore, you did not choose Union.
Free will and determinism

- Determinism: future events *causally determined* past events.
  - Coin tosses?

- Compatibilism: Free will and determinism are compatible.

- Incompatibilism: Free will and determinism are incompatible.

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<th>Determinism</th>
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Arguments against free will

Causal determinism

1. If it was impossible for you to do otherwise, then you did not choose Union.

2. The laws of nature are deterministic.

3. If the laws of nature are deterministic, then your coming to Union was necessitated by past events.

   ✗ Leibniz: Laws of nature describe patterns, don’t give commands

4. If your coming to Union was necessitated by past events, then it was impossible for you to do otherwise.

5. Therefore, you did not choose Union.
How to do the wave

(1) The normal method
(2) The Leibnizian method