

1 The Discourse on Metaphysics

Leibniz, like Spinoza, endorses the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR).

He also endorses the uncontroversial Principle of Contradiction (PC), which says that a proposition cannot be both true and false.

Discourse 2 is a direct reply to Spinoza:

“I confess that the contrary opinion seems to me extremely dangerous and very near to the opinion of the recent innovators who hold that the beauty of the universe and the goodness that we attribute to the works of God are but the chimeras of those who conceive of God in terms of themselves.”

The Principle of Perfection (PP): God always chooses the best.

- “Let us assume, for example, that God chooses between A and B and that he takes A without having any reason to prefer it to B. I say that this action of God is at the very least not praiseworthy; for all praise must be based on some reason, and by hypothesis there is none here. Instead I hold that God does nothing for which he does not deserve to be glorified.” (Discourse 3)
- “...God has chosen the most perfect world, that is, the one which is at the same time the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena, as might be a line in geometry whose construction is easy and whose properties and effects are extremely remarkable and widespread... But I do not claim to explain in this way the great mystery upon which the entire universe depends.” (Discourse 6)

The Predicate-in-Notion Principle (PN): In any true proposition, the notion of the predicate is included in the notion of the subject.

- “Thus the subject term must always contain the predicate term, so that one who understands perfectly the notion of the subject would also know that the predicate belongs to it.” (Discourse 8)
- So all true propositions are reducible to identities.
 - Compare with truths of mathematics.
- “Primary Truths”

The complete concept of an individual substance contains in it the entire history of the individual substance – that is, all that has and will happen to it.

- “...the nature of an individual substance or of a complete being is to have a notion so complete that it is sufficient to contain and to allow us to deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which this notion is attributed.” (Discourse 8)
- So the complete concept of each substance will mirror the entire universe from its own perspective.
- Discourse 9

Substantial forms

- In Aristotelian metaphysics, substances are composed of both form and matter.
 - Statue example
 - This view fell into disfavor after the Scholastics.

- Leibniz argues for a revival of substantial forms – body isn't all that there is.
 - "...I believe that anyone who will meditate about the nature of substance, as I have explained it above, will find that the nature of body does not consist merely in extension, that is, in size, shape, and motion, but that we must necessarily recognize in body something related to souls, something we commonly call substantial form, even though it makes no change in the phenomena, any more than do the souls of animals, if they have any." (Discourse 12)
 - Bodies alone (without substantial form) are imaginary.
 - We need forms for our persistence.
- How does this differ from Aristotle?
 - Aristotle says that substantial form should never be cited in the explanation of how the body operates, as its efficient cause.
 - Not so for Leibniz.

One problem emerging from this picture is the apparent loss of human freedom.

- Why is this?
- Leibniz's solution is to distinguish between what is certain and what is necessary.
 - This relates to classic problems with God's foreknowledge.
 - A proposition is absolutely necessary if its contrary implies a contradiction.
 - A proposition is merely hypothetically necessary if it's necessary given God's decrees, but its contrary does not imply a contradiction.
- "For it will be found that the demonstration of this predicate of Caesar is not as absolute as those of numbers or of geometry, but that it supposes the sequence of things that God has freely chosen ... But every truth based on these kinds of decrees is contingent, even though it is certain; for these decrees do not change the possibility of things, and, as I have already said, even though it is certain that God always chooses the best, this does not prevent something less perfect from being and remaining possible in itself, even though it will not happen, since it is not its impossibility but its imperfection which causes it to be rejected." (Discourse 13)

Each substance expresses the entire universe from its own unique perspective.

- What is expression?
 - Consider a blueprint of a building, or a model of the Parthenon.
- "...although they all express the same phenomena, it does not follow that their expressions are perfectly similar; it is sufficient that they are proportional." (Discourse 14)