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Reasoning of the Highest Leibniz and the Moral Quality of Reason

Ryan Quandt
University of South Florida, rpquandt@mail.usf.edu

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Reasoning of the Highest
Leibniz and the Moral Quality of Reason

by

Ryan Quandt

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Roger Ariew, Ph.D.
Douglas Jesseph, Ph.D.
Thomas Williams, Ph.D.
Michael Morris, Ph.D.
Lloyd Strickland, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Loving God is our highest perfection for Leibniz. It secures our belief and trust in the Creator, which is integral to the sciences as well as faith. Those who love God have justification for reasoning, that is, they can rationally expect to arrive at truth. This is because love is a receptivity to the perfection all of things; loving God, then, is a disposition and tendency toward the most perfect being, the *ens perfectissimum*. Individuals who perceive the divine nature “do not merely fear the power of the supreme and all-seeing monarch,” Leibniz writes, “but are assured of his beneficence, and lastly—and what brings everything together—burn with a love of God above all else.”¹ In my dissertation, I argue that Leibniz’s qualification should be taken seriously: love of God “brings everything together.”

The subject of my dissertation can be stated schematically. It consists of two pairs of claims, one pair philosophical, the other theological.

1. A moral quality is required to secure our reason.
2. From a most perfect unity, a moral quality follows.
3. Love of God is our highest perfection.
4. Love of God secures our reasoning.

Both concern the security of reason, by which I mean the rational motivation for reasoning itself. They are reasons we ought to expect reasoning to lead to truth. Yet they do not form a tight

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demonstration: while an inference is clearly at work in the first pair, there are no inferences in the second. Also, there is a distinction between a moral quality and love for God. Unless they are identified, Leibniz’s philosophy and theology secure reasoning apart from one another.

In 1686, Leibniz wrote his well-known “Discourse on Metaphysics.” A few months after, he composed a theological treatise, Examination of the Christian Religion. These texts, I argue, should be read side by side, and the first chapter compares how divine perfection secures our reasoning in both texts. Some Moderns’ notion of perfection—namely, Descartes’, Spinoza’s, and Malebranche’s—fail to secure our reasoning because their views entail arbitrariness in the world and the divine nature. But a proper sense of perfection, one that includes a moral quality, secures our reasoning by ensuring that everything is amenable to reason.

Descartes also sought to secure our reasoning, and for the second and third chapters I compare his account with Leibniz’s own, then draw out the latter’s criticisms. For Descartes, the deity’s moral quality is characterized by an indifferent will, which is eminently and formally revealed throughout creation. Although recognizing the infinite source of all things directs our attention appropriate in the Cartesian system, Leibniz criticizes Descartes’ detached and indifferent God. When our disposition toward God is not characterized by love, we are less rational than otherwise.

Leibniz finds intolerable moral implications in the Cartesian system, and I work out these implications in chapter three. Descartes’ criteria of true and false ideas does not settle dispute, but relies on “interior testimony.” Proper reasoning, then, does not tend toward unity among persons, and this is especially problematic in religious debate. Descartes’ method is Stoic, which also leads to trouble when it comes to church unity: one remains in the church by a sheer act of
will, which can violate reason. Leibniz views such a detachment of faith and reasoning as dangerous, besides impoverishing the concept of reason altogether.

Leibniz’s notions of God and perfection secure our reason by engendering love for God. “Discourse” and *Examen* begin with a moral disposition and tendency. In the last chapter, I argue that this is the case by considering two criteria Leibniz adopts—his test for perfection and the kinds of knowledge—as well as the foundation of his logic at the time. Leibniz can tolerate provisional beginnings, hypothetical truths, and original sin because of his robust conception of love. He distinguishes two ways we love God: *spes*, or hope, is a disposition or tendency to natural perfection, and *caritas*, or esteem, affection, or love, regards divine perfection. These states orient us according to the divine plan.

Miracles are within the world as an effect of the deity’s moral quality: they are a means God personally relates to rational beings. Miracles reveal the moral effects of our perception of phenomena generally, included the regularity observed and classified by science. So, to conclude, I compare Leibniz’s discussion of revelation in *Examen* with his discussion of miracles in “Discourse” to draw out the significance of miracles for him. Besides much debate on the implications of miracles for his conception of substance, I argue that there is a moral motivation for retaining miracles, even those of the second rank.
Introduction

Loving God is our highest perfection for Leibniz. It secures our belief and trust in the Creator, which is integral to the sciences as well as faith. Those who love God have justification for reasoning, that is, they can rationally expect to arrive at truth. This is because love is a receptivity to the perfection all of things; loving God, then, is a disposition and tendency toward the most perfect being, the *ens perfectissimum*. Individuals who perceive the divine nature “do not merely fear the power of the supreme and all-seeing monarch,” Leibniz writes, “but are assured of his beneficence, and lastly—and what brings everything together—burn with a love of God above all else.”¹ In my dissertation, I argue that Leibniz’s qualification should be taken seriously: love of God “brings everything together.”²

The divine nature and perfection are ontologically basic in Leibniz’s writings of 1686. With the texts I am focusing on, notions of God and perfection should fill three roles: (a) to secure our rational enterprises through the divine unity and (ii) to ground two universal rules and (iii) a principle consistent with all contingent truths by which to act rationally. On first readings, and maybe after, it is hard to see why someone would agree.³ Leibniz, too, seems to be aware of the difficulties for such an ambitious project.⁴ We find a key for why he is willing to tolerate difficulties while tirelessly seeking ways to overcome them in his notion of divine love.

¹ A VI 4, 2357; SLT 202.
³ Emily Grosholz provides an account for how the first paragraphs of “Discourse” contribute to the overall argument and she believes it has “much to recommend it” (5). See her “Theomorphic Expression in Leibniz’s Discourse on Metaphysics,” *Studia Leibnitiana* 33 (2001): 4-18.
⁴ For instance, the provisional nature of his first philosophy—the subject of chapter 4.
Reasoning with sincere and honest love for the most perfect being, and so preserving his glory, must turn out for the best. Love is constitutive of right reasoning, even, and Leibniz’s reliance on notions of God and perfection bear this out.

I will argue that perfection involves a disposition and tendency that situates persons in the world and toward the deity in a certain way. There are a few underlying tensions for my claim. First, God is an ideal whose attributes transcend creation, yet he includes a moral quality, or a relation with finite intellects, which makes his nature accessible within the world. Second, perfection is inherently tensive. God is one, yet infinite, complete but pure activity, unlimited while being the highest. The deity is ideal in the sense that we cannot reconcile these claims, yet we assume his seamless unity given the intelligibility of the world.\(^5\) Reasoning from his unique perfection secures our reasoning and happiness, but a reason for positing unique perfection is the security and happiness it brings. When it comes to perfection and God, then, Leibniz’s notions seem reciprocally defined and at risk of inconsistency. I believe these tensions are consonant with his larger vision.

**Background**

1686 was an important year for Leibniz. In professional life, his infamous project to divert the water that seasonally filled the Harz mines was failing. His intellectual work, on the other hand, was anything but failure. In January, he wrote the “Discourse on Metaphysics,” which, along with other coeval writings, often signals the maturing of his thought. A few months after, he wrote *Examination of the Christian Religion*, a theological essay that shares many

themes with “Discourse.” While composing *Examen* and as his correspondence with the French theologian, Antoine Arnauld, began, Leibniz also made extensive headway in logic with his lengthy, though unfinished, manuscript, “General Investigations concerning the Analysis of Concepts and Truths.” The aforementioned writings set 1686 apart, for Leibniz. However, I will focus on “Discourse” and *Examen*.

**Scientia generalis**

To academics, Leibniz’s work on the Harz mines seems regrettable: his time could have been better spent. In her biography and monograph, Maria Rosa Antognazza argues otherwise. Commenting on a memorandum of 1677 in which Leibniz defends extending the sovereignty of his employer, then-Duke Johann Friedrich, Antognazza remarks, “This federal idea was a central part of Leibniz’s comprehensive reform programme, grounded in his deepest principles, both theoretical and practical.” She argues that same for Leibniz’s other, seemingly extraneous tasks. The most practical and mundane as well as the most speculative were encompassed by one intent and program—achieving a compendium of all knowledge coupled to a *scientia generalis*.

Antognazza summarizes Leibniz’s intent as “an all-embracing encyclopaedic plan of reform and advancement of the sciences for the promotion of the common good—a plan which he considered a celebration of the glory of God as expressed in the universal harmony governing all creation.” Leibniz’s compendium would unify the church, Christian commonwealths, and perhaps mankind. Besides a method for organizing knowledge, the project included a logic for

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6 Robert Sleigh remarks, “I can only conjecture that the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and the *Systema theologicum Examination*…constituted Leibniz’s ‘one-two punch’ with respect to [church] reunion” (*Leibniz and Arnauld: A Commentary on their Correspondence* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press), 23).
discovering knowledge and a “universal character” that made truth values and meaning transparent. All of this was for the common good, or general happiness, the object of philosophy and science.

Two features of Leibniz’s program should be emphasized, given my purposes. Part of the *scientia* is logic “in its classical sense as the study and development of the tools of valid reasoning.” Logic is the foundation of the sciences, including thereby all knowledge and the highest good. With correct principles, Leibniz believed an exhaustive catalogue of the universe could be formed and the good life realized. So he set about formulating such rules, which consisted in two tasks. He first sought to explicate the principles already at work in scientific practice. Then he worked on new methods for discovering knowledge of the past and of the future. The ontology of Leibniz’s logic emerges from a currently partial and incomplete method and state of knowledge, one on one hand, and a vision of a perfect method and state of knowledge, on the other.

From correct principles, theological issues could also be settled through demonstrations of probability. Another part of Leibniz’s *scientia* was a program for church reform, which he called the “Demonstrationes catholicae.” These include natural and revealed theology, arguments for the existence of God, arguments for the immortality and incorporeality of the soul, a defense of the mysteries, and support for two sources of religious authority, church and scripture. But the “Demonstrationes” are the finale of an exhaustive reform. In an important letter to the duke in which Leibniz revives the project, Leibniz argues that metaphysics, logic, ethics, politics, and

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11 I will deal with this claim directly in chapter four, though it is also at work in Leibniz’s criticisms of Descartes.
12 See Antognazza, *Intellectual*, 234. A third that deserves mention is reason.
math need to be renovated in order to complete the “Demonstrationes.”\textsuperscript{13} There is a certain holism assumed by Leibniz’s scientia. Every intellectual discipline and every practical task related to every other such that a more perfect science led to better techniques for daily tasks, and vice versa. That is, both contribute to a more perfect knowledge. Human activity is thoroughly rational, and so is improved by “right reason.”

The results of Leibniz’s program should harmonize and express reality and the divine nature. It is within his scientia—namely, logic, ontology, and theology—that he tries to justify the coalesce between his program’s results and reality. More specifically, “right reasoning” harmonizes us with the world as it is disposed properly toward reality and the divine. Public good is served, justice dealt, and the neighbor loved when we reason rightly. But truth and the divine are not wholly grasped, nor must they be to reason rightly. Leibniz’s notion of right reason is an ontological disposition and tendency of persons—love of God above all else. So, on one hand, philosophy has a place within the scientia; on the other hand, the scientia is implied by a basic philosophical position on reasoning.

Antognazza’s erudition goes well beyond my scope: she interprets Leibniz’s positions and motivations throughout his life. I mention her broader framework as the backdrop for my own, narrower project. Leibniz’s “Discourse” and Examen—my foci—are products of his scientia and, especially, his “Demonstrationes.” But with his ambitious reform in mind, these writings are partial and inadequate. They are works in progress that we should not expect to embody a full system. Leibniz’s desire for consistency, completeness, and systematicity left him unsatisfied with both works as they stood in 1686. Something from them is preserved in later

\textsuperscript{13} See Ibid.
writings, no doubt. But my goal is detailing a slice of a stage in a project that Leibniz would not finish.

The Middle Years

My study is sensitive to the way in which Leibniz wrote and thought, which may be lost in rational reconstructions of his philosophy (though there are other gains from such an approach). The many pages Leibniz left us do not overcome an indeterminacy in the medium itself that needs to be compensated for. Inferring across texts, generalizing a broader narrative, and immersion in the surrounding milieu are a few means we have for practicing this art. Close readings of select manuscripts are another, which will be my chosen tact. These strategies are not exclusive, nor are the ones listed exhaustive. By restricting myself to one year, and focusing on two writings of that year, I intend to provide a close reading that reveals a provisional and partial ontology, or first philosophy. I hope to nuance and, thereby, challenge the convenient reading of Leibniz’s writings that pins 1686 as the maturation of his thought that held relatively stable from then on. While he unquestionably reached certain breakthroughs, how his position held together at a given time did not sit still for long.

Besides Maria Rosa Antognazza, there are two other scholars with whom the present study interacts: Robert Merrihew Adams and Daniel Garber. Two of Garber’s central theses will be assumed.

Adams has offered a robust interpretation of Leibniz—not only with respect to perfection, but of the thinker in his fullest and most compelling form, which spans Leibniz’s writings from 1686 (and before) through 1716.14 Acknowledging many fluctuations in Leibniz’s thought, he

discerns a relatively stable core or ideas that formed by 1686. But Adams also has an eye to current debate. For him, contemporary discussion and historical research are reciprocal. “Part of what we are doing in studying the history of philosophy…,” he writes, “is placing our own philosophizing in its largest context in a conversation that has been going on for many hundreds of years.”\(^{15}\) Today’s dialogues continue the work of many past thinkers so that accurate knowledge of the wider context is needed to contribute. Adams interprets Leibniz, then, with the goal of presenting what Leibniz actually thought, or what he should have thought to maintain consistency, as a way of approaching present discussion.

Adams’ method assumes a notion of thought itself. “The aim of rethinking,” he continues, “is to discover the inner rationale of the thoughts one studies.” “Eternal possibilities,” which transcend historicity, are covered up by accidental facts. And “the rationale is a structure that there is a permanent possibility of recreating in thought.”\(^{16}\) In sum, Adams is constructing a rationale spread throughout Leibniz’s writings.

Garber approaches Leibniz differently.\(^{17}\) Instead of constructing an eternal possibility, his object is the “flesh-and-blood Leibniz.” He writes,

I want to help set aside the doctrinaire philosopher who had a few hobby-horses—monads, Principle of Sufficient Reason, continuity, contingency, logic—and who rode them mercilessly, and replace him with a deep, subtle, and wide-ranging intellect, constantly thinking and rethinking his position, constantly engaged, who

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{16}\) Ibid.
develops and grows, even if, in the end, he never arrives at a position with which he is fully satisfied.\(^{18}\)

This is the Leibniz I will assume, and so, like Garber, I am not worried about the incomplete state of Leibniz’s philosophy in 1686 or the various gaps in his position. Rather, there is much to gain from chronicling Leibniz’s struggle. But there is a stronger interpretation I would like to defend: provisional beginnings, restarts, self-critique, and hypothetical truths are more in line with Leibniz’s way of thinking than articulating a rigid system. Of course, he holds to an ideal of perfect knowledge and a perfect science. That ideal reveals our ignorance and the deficiencies in our method, and guides our reasoning.

In a paper published in 1985, Garber theorized that Leibniz had a middle period, roughly the 1680’s up till 1700.\(^{19}\) During that time, Leibniz’s metaphysics was distinct from what would appear in the *Monadology*. I will assume Garber’s periodization and so will leave out that later metaphysical tract and his *Theodicy*. Arguments will be needed to show that the views of the *Examen* are those of his later treatise.\(^{20}\) As said, I will be analyzing “Discourse” and *Examen*, two definitive works of the middle period that, to my knowledge, have not been systematically treated together. There are close ties between these texts, which serve as a case study for the complex relation between Leibniz’s philosophy and theology. Though complementary, the positions of these writings maintain a gap between God’s moral quality and our love for God.


\(^{20}\) An issue I plan to work on soon.
Right Reason

The Akademie edition of Leibniz’s writings contain all of his work up to 1700, and some after then. The wealth of manuscripts now at scholars’ disposal sometimes exacerbates challenges in determining what Leibniz thought. As Daniel Garber remarks, constructing a picture of the whole, flesh-and-blood Leibniz is “more an art than a science.”21 This is because what Leibniz wrote at a given time is not a sure indication of what he believed. Some texts evince positions he briefly held, some longer commitments, while others are experiments—attempts to construct a successful argument that he does not agree with. Not to mention that Leibniz appended certain manuscripts at a later time. And so a practiced eye is needed to parse through his many writings.

The Examen is a case in point. When the long essay was published posthumously in the first half of the 19th century, philosophers and theologians alike were surprised by this famous Protestant’s Catholic tone and bias. And there was much debate on whether Leibniz was being transparent. As the translator of the first English edition, Charles William Russell, observed,

Scarcely, therefore, was the work announced for publication when a host of champions of every shade of religious belief—Lutherans, Calvinists, and even Rationalists—arose in one united effort to wrest from the hands of a common enemy [i.e., the Catholics] a weapon which might be wielded with so much effect against them all, especially in Germany.22

Leibniz made disingenuous concessions, they thought, for the sake of church unity. No doubt, his motivations were unclear.

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21 Garber, Leibniz, xviii.
Until recently, the general consensus was that the Examen displayed Leibniz's ecumenicalism. An essay by Robert Adams challenged this view. Instead, he argued that the discussions of the Catholic emissary, Cristobal de Rojas y Spinola, and the Lutheran theologian, Gerhard Wolter Molanus, show a major difference between the then-current platform for church reunion and the positions of the Examen. Since Leibniz was aware of these negotiations, he could not have expected the essay to reconcile the Catholic and Lutheran sects. His system must have been composed for another reason.

Examen was written a few months after “Discourse” and as Leibniz's correspondence with the French theologian, Antoine Arnauld, began. To determine how “Discourse” and Examen relate, the writings leading up to Examen should be considered. In what follows, I argue that a concept of right reasoning is central to Examen and complements the views presented in “Discourse.” Since the preparatory writings are dealt with throughout my study, the comments that follow will be brief, partial, and anticipatory.

Around 1685 and into 1686, Leibniz wrote a series of manuscripts that culminated in Examen. According to the editors of the Akademie edition, the goal of these texts was devising a metaphysical foundation for Catholicism. A few pieces of evidence support their dating. First, Leibniz cites a title used in a group of ecclesiastical pamphlets on church reunion for which we have a rough date, “Apologia fidei catholicae ex recta ratione.” Their themes also suggest that he

24 The editors of the Akademie edition believe it was composed between April and October.
25 Antognazza observes that the Examen is a collection of manuscripts intended to form his Demonstrationes, once the project was revived in 1678. See Antognazza, Trinity, 67.
wrote them after those short writings. Some of the writings' watermarks also confirm that they preceded *Examen.* These writings are the philosophical and theological counterparts to his plan for church reunion at the time.

The manuscripts start with a group of annotations, which clue us in to the role of right reasoning. As with his tract on church union, Leibniz heads up his notes with a quote from Augustine’s *De trinitate*: “No one sober will decide against reason, no Christian against scripture, no one peaceable against the Church.” Reason, scripture, and the church are the three authorities by which we should live. Though Leibniz is no doubt a rationalist in important respects, he does not believe in reason alone if that means ignoring the authority of scripture and the established church. Together, this triumvirate is the highest form of reasoning—a belief which motivates his apology for Catholicism.

In another preparatory piece, “On attempting an apology for Catholic truth,” Leibniz describes the common tone of religious debate, which again clues us in on right reasoning.

Whoever contends in religious matters for victory, not truth, and fights with insults and evil cunning, seem to me like gladiators of old so that among them even free persons are led on by zeal for the masses and the applause of an insane theater to shed life and to be killed by the most severe injuries.

And many learned men argue in such a way, and so miss the truth accessible through reason that is certain, though not demonstrable. As a result of their disputing, there is also damage to souls.

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27 LGR 70-71 & 103-104.
28 …contra rationem nemo sobrius, contra scripturam nemo christianus, contra Ecclesiam nemo pacificus senserit (the last line of chapter 6, section 10).
29 *Quicunque in religionis negotio non ad veritatem sed victoriam contendunt, conviciisque et malis artibus certant, mihi veterum gladiatoribus similes videntur, ut enim inter illos etiam liberi homines vulgi studio et insanientis theatri plausu ducebantur, ut vitam exponerent, et crudelissimis vulneribus conficerentur* (A VI 4, 2299). Where translations are my own, the Latin will be cited in the footnote. I am very grateful to Lloyd Strickland, Thomas Williams, and Douglas Jesseph for looking over my translations, correcting my mistakes or suggesting better renditions of the Latin.
Leibniz's conception of right reasoning is an alternative to religious contention that will bring harmony and a fuller expression of truth.

To exhibit and prompt right reasoning, Leibniz has three designs for an apology of Catholicism. His concerns, that is, are the moral effects of his approach. First, he will publish the work anonymously so that vain glory does not blind the reader. Leibniz will avoid accusations “even when true, for just as rough waters admit no light, so also a mind disordered by anger and hatred do not admit the light of truth.” And, lastly, he will put forward solid reasons and avoid those that are weak despite their persuasiveness. It should be noted that in this fragment and the manuscripts that follow—including Examen—Leibniz also crafts a style of writing oriented toward his ends of church union. All of this shows that he is sensitive to the presentation of his apology and, specifically, that the way he carries out his reasoning will have moral effects that either encourage or hinder agreement. These effects are elements of right reasoning.

My hypothesis is that, for Leibniz, faith, hope, and charity are elements of reasoning, and especially of concern to morality and religion. So love of God characterizes a rational disposition. Consequently, the main thrust of Examen complements and may motivate some of Leibniz’s philosophical views. Another aspect of right reasoning in religious matters is an analysis of faith, which shows that established doctrine is safe (not threatening damnation) and supported. Consequently, an analysis of faith must draw from philosophy. Providing the tenets for such an analysis is the motivation behind what has come to be called the “Discourse on Metaphysics.”

As Leibniz writes to Count Landgraf, the “Discourse” addresses “questions on grace, God’s concourse with creatures, the nature of miracles, the cause of sin and the origin of evil,”

30...etiam cum verae sunt, tamen nocetur ver<itati>, ut enim liquores agitati claritatem, ita mens ira atquae odio turbida lucem veritatis non admittit (A VI 4, 2300).
and so on.\textsuperscript{31} Leibniz seems to be poorly summarizing his short treatise. Although he does deal with these themes, most of its subject matter is philosophical, not theological: nature's regularity and order, substance and body, individuals, causality, kinds of knowledge, the nature of ideas, freedom, and the mind. And this raises questions about Leibniz motivations—why he would describe his treatise as theological when it has been taken as philosophical by so many later readers. Part of the answer, I will suggest in what follows, comes from the complex relation between philosophy and theology in Leibniz’s thought. Right reasoning encompasses and joins philosophical and theological reflection without conflating their respective domains.

**Summary**

The subject of my dissertation can be stated schematically. It consists of two pairs of claims, one pair philosophical, the other theological.

1. A moral quality is required to secure our reason.
2. From a most perfect unity, a moral quality follows.
3. Love of God is our highest perfection.
4. Love of God secures our reasoning.

Both concern the security of reason, by which I mean the rational motivation for reasoning itself. They are reasons we ought to expect reasoning to lead to truth. Yet they do not form a tight demonstration: while an inference is clearly at work in the first pair, there are no inferences in the second. Also, there is a distinction between a moral quality and love for God. Unless they are identified, Leibniz’s philosophy and theology secure reasoning apart from one another.

\textsuperscript{31} A II 2, 3-4; Leibniz, G.W., *The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1967), 3 (Hereafter ‘M’).
A story is told in the scriptures of a man favored by God. Many friends and a large family surround him. He is wealthy and powerful and, above all, good. Then one day, his wealth is lost, his land stolen, those in his family die but for his wife, and he is deserted. Boils cover his skin soon after, causing endless pain and depriving him of sleep. More time passes and some old friends return except they do not comfort him. Instead, they blame him for this suffering and accuse him of evil. Only a hidden sin, they believe, accounts for his ruin. And as if aware of his innocence, the man's wife encourages him to curse God and die.\textsuperscript{32}

Often, the story of Job is cited when discussing the problem of evil. The deity is good and powerful, and desires to remove evil and can. So why is there evil? In the narrative, there are gaps between what happens in the world, the apparent reasons for them (or the absence of reasons), and the perfections of God. A reader likely wonders why someone favored by God would suffer so severely and why the man remains devoted if these events are consistent with the divine nature. It makes sense to interpret the story along these lines, but there is another way to understand Job.

For Leibniz, our perfection closes the gap between what happens in the world, their reasons for occurring, and the divine nature. When the man declares, “Give me, O God, the pledge you demand. Who else will put up security for me?” seeking to defend himself, he appeals to his own perfection and God's.\textsuperscript{33} The man believed that natural events must be

\textsuperscript{32} See Job 2:9.
\textsuperscript{33} Job 17:3. This is how Leibniz may interpret the verse, at least.
consistent with the divine nature, and Leibniz shares his belief. When it comes to perfection in
Leibniz's philosophy, theology, and science, the subject widens beyond the problem of evil. The
gaps to worry about are natural imperfections, generally. Events must not only be consistent with
the deity, they must be exhaustively ordered and regular. But the problem of evil is not left
behind: natural events must express the full character of God, including his moral quality.

God is “an absolutely perfect being,” Leibniz writes, beginning the “Discourse.” The
notion of God exemplifies a kind of identity, a rational and most perfect one, that secures our
reasoning. That is, with a proper disposition and tendency toward the deity, we can expect
sincere reasoning to arrive at truth. Love of God characterizes that disposition and tendency
toward the ens perfectissimum. The height of perfection is the rational coherence of every
perfection in one, numerically identical being. Separate perfections must be of a sort that they
can unite with others in this way. Since our reasoning supposes a perfect harmony in nature and a
perfect unity in God, his unity secures our reasoning while a rational act testifies of God.

In paragraphs two and three of “Discourse,” Leibniz rejects arbitrariness as an
imperfection and amends the deities of Descartes, Spinoza, and Malebranche. Unlike them,
Leibniz affirms the moral quality of God, which he believes is required for securing our
reasoning. Here, I lay out and support my interpretation for what Leibniz is up to with his
concept of God. His concept involves three claims: a moral quality is required to secure our
reasoning; from a most perfect unity, a moral quality follows, and so our reasoning can be
secured; love for God secures our reasoning and, as a result, secures our happiness.

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34 A VI 4, 1531; AG 35.
Rejecting Arbitrariness

Though perfection is undefined in “Discourse” and Examen, Leibniz offers a succinct definition in a fragment entitled, “Generales Notationes,” which was written sometime between 1683 and 1685: “Perfection, moreover, is pure reality or what is positive and absolute in essences.” And imperfection, he adds, “consists of limitation.” While helpful, this definition does not suffice for appreciating the role of perfection in Leibniz's ontology. When “pure reality” and “limitation” are focused on, we can easily miss a crucial dynamic in Leibniz's concept of perfection as it stood in 1686. Pure reality is approximated in a certain way because divine perfection transcends our intellects, yet a definition may misleadingly present a concept as if it were fully grasped. As we will see, Leibniz's definition of perfection is open-ended.

Instead of a definition, the “Discourse” begins with criteria, or a test, for determining perfections.36 On one hand, perfections are complete; on the other, they are infinite. They are capable of a highest degree, yet are unlimited. To which we can add that perfections are individual—beauty, knowledge, power, and goodness are among them—though form a singular whole. And they are in God and in nature without conflating God and nature. But I will return to these criteria after setting them against Descartes.

Leibniz rejects two positions that are inconsistent with God’s perfection early on in “Discourse”: first, that goodness and beauty are arbitrary and, second, that the actual world could be better. A similar rejection occurs in the beginning of Examen. What Leibniz rejects in both texts is arbitrariness as an absence of reasons, but understood in a more specific sense (and with

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35 Perfectio autem est realitas pura seu quod in essentiiis est positivum atque absolutum. Contra imperfectio consistit in limitatione (A VI 4, 556). Similar definitions appear throughout Leibniz's writings with mild variations; see Adams, Leibniz, 114-123. For example, in the first version of Rationale fidei Catholicae, Leibniz defines perfection as “pure positivity” (A VI 4, 2307).
36 See A VI 4, 1531; AG 35.
slightly different motivations between texts). Number and shape, and similar geometric properties, are not perfections because they have no final degree. Likewise, the divine will cannot be the exclusive source of the world's perfection as a force that brings about what exists and occurs. There must be reasons for a divine act that are within its effects. Otherwise, God's action is arbitrary and there is arbitrariness within the world. If this is allowed, our reasoning and sciences are insecure, and our happiness is threatened.

Rules of Goodness

Arbitrariness concerns an imperfect relation between Creator and creatures where God is a cause and nothing more. Leibniz appeals to a resulting arbitrariness in some Moderns’ views to motivate his criteria of perfection as an alternative to their accounts. First, seemingly praiseworthy qualities that cannot be ascribed to the divine nature, though perceived in the world, are arbitrary. Such qualities lack a basis in God. In fact, those qualities are not truly praiseworthy even if God created them because, again, God does not have those qualities.37 If reality is defined as what expresses God, such qualities are not even real. Before situating Leibniz’s alternative with respect to Descartes, I will explain the threat of arbitrariness he is worried about.

1. Defining the first position. Leibniz writes, “Thus, I am far removed from the opinion of those who maintain that there are no rules of goodness and perfection in the nature of things or in the ideas that God has of them…”38 Shortly after, he tells us what the rules of goodness and

37 Leibniz uses terms like “praiseworthy” in a precise and technical way. For example, in a manuscript written between August of 1688 and October of 1690, he applauds Raymond Lull for using terms like ‘goodness’, ‘glory’, and ‘wisdom’ in a precise way (see A VI 4, 966). His discussion in the second and third paragraphs of “Discourse” (as well as throughout Examen) assumes that what violates the praiseworthiness of God can be rejected, and inferences can be drawn from what brings God praise.

38 A VI 4, 1532; AG 36.
perfection are that he has in mind.\textsuperscript{39} The position he is distancing himself from, however, is that there is nothing inherent to things—either in their existence or essence—that is good and perfect, whether that object exists in the world or only in the mind of God. He expects the world to have a real moral quality.\textsuperscript{40}

The Moderns, who Leibniz is speaking of, declare that the nature of things is perfect and good “for the formal reason that God made them.”\textsuperscript{41} Creation's inherent nature is not the reason they were created, but they are still good and perfect from the fact that their cause is God. Leibniz explains what he means by a “formal reason” a few lines down: an “empty external denomination which relates [creation] to their cause.” The concept signified by denomination exterieure is borrowed from the Scholastics.\textsuperscript{42} When an attribute is predicated of a subject on the basis of something outside the subject, the attribute is an extrinsic denomination. So goodness and perfection cannot be ascribed to a created thing from our consideration of them, but only when considering their relation to the Creator.

Qualifying the kind of external denomination the Moderns evoke, toute nue has been translated “empty” and “purely.”\textsuperscript{43} Both convey that an attribute is predicated to a subject on the basis of something outside the subject, exclusively, which seems to be what Leibniz means. Yet that is denoted by the Scholastic term alone. ‘Purely’ lacks the negative connotation that an extrinsic denomination is impoverished or bare. As Leibniz explicitly rejects that a subject can have an extrinsic denomination toute nue roughly three years after,\textsuperscript{44} the phrase likely has such

\textsuperscript{39} See A VI 4, 1536; AG 38-39.
\textsuperscript{40} The sense in which creation has, or contains, a moral quality also plays into whether or not Leibniz was an idealist at this time and, if so, what kind of idealism he espoused.
\textsuperscript{41} A VI 4, 1532; AG 36.
\textsuperscript{44} A VI 4, 1645; AG 32. Not to mention his surrounding comments in “Discourse” suggest as much.
connotations. An extrinsic denomination is also logical. With ‘A is B’, the predication is empty, or purely formal. Again, ‘empty’ captures an aspect that drops out with ‘purely’—namely, that nothing can be predicated on the basis of a logical relation that has no counterpart in the nature of things. But there is also a perceptual sense of the phrase here, or what is comprehended by this relation. ‘Empty’ and ‘purely’ convey this last sense in different ways. On one hand, ‘purely’ conveys that the relation is singular and full. There is a complete expression of the predicate’s relation to the subject. When Leibniz speaks of geometry and numbers as revealing truth *toute nue*, he evokes this sense. On the other hand, ‘empty’ underlines Leibniz’s criticisms. With an extrinsic denomination, nothing is perceived within the subject but a placeholder.

The position Leibniz rejects early on in *Examen* is similar. Again, the threat is arbitrariness in the divine will and creation. But there are also some slight differences. He writes,

And so we ought to shun those who conceive God as a certain supreme force by which all things indeed emanate, but indiscriminately by a kind of necessity of existence and without a choice of the beautiful or the good (as if these notions were either arbitrary or not established in nature but only by human imagination).

Here, arbitrariness results from divine emanation, which acts as a blind and necessary cause, and arbitrariness describes notions like beauty and goodness. Leibniz affirms that all things emanate

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46 See A VI 4, 949. On the previous page, Leibniz criticizes the modern attitude that treated the search for truth *toute nue* as increasing our misery, then crossed out his qualification.

47 A VI 4, 2357; SLT 201.
from the Creator, elsewhere, so his objection concerns emanation as a brute force.\textsuperscript{48} But in place of writing ‘formal reason’ or ‘exterior denomination,’ Leibniz uses ‘indiscriminate’. God is the cause of all things without distinction. Whereas “Discourse” focuses on predicating perfections to Creator and creation, \textit{Examen} highlights the absence of a specific will and select choices.

By holding “Discourse” and \textit{Examen} side by side, we can see the sort of reason why creation exists according to the first position. Continuing with the “Discourse”, Leibniz writes, “For if this were so, God, knowing that he is their author, would not have had to consider them [i.e., his creation] after and find them good, as the Holy Scripture attests.”\textsuperscript{49} Values like goodness and beauty would be concurrent with the deity’s creative act. Looking now at \textit{Examen}, creation results from “a kind of necessity of existence” as all that remains within things as the mark of a Creator. If taken trivially, creation exists from the necessary fact that it exists.\textsuperscript{50} More robustly, a necessity within the force of existing, or the deity’s sustaining, marks the divine act. In either case, there is no reason for God to stand back from this creation and see that it is good.

There is a question my comparison draws out. In \textit{Examen}, who does Leibniz have in mind and why? It is near certain in “Discourse” that he is writing about Descartes first, then Spinoza, as the “recent Innovator” to whom Descartes’ position dangerously veers.\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Examen} presents a sharp contrast between Leibniz’s rich conception of God and an imperfect one, quoted above. Rather than distinguishing targets, Leibniz opposes one conception of God. So either he has only one of them in mind (presumably, Spinoza), someone else entirely (maybe Socinus and


\textsuperscript{49} A VI 4, 1532; AG 36.

\textsuperscript{50} As we will see below, this understanding puts up a straw man instead of Descartes’ positions—if it is Leibniz’s interpretation of them.

\textsuperscript{51} See editors' note in both A VI 4, 1532 and AG 36. In earlier drafts, Leibniz wrote “Spinozists” instead of “recent Innovators” than crossed it out. At the end of the second paragraph, he wrote Descartes’ name, too, then replaced it with “some philosophers.”
the Antitrinitarians),\textsuperscript{52} or he regards Descartes' and Spinoza's views as overlapping in basic respects.

2. Consequences of the first position. “Thus, in saying that things are not good from a rule of goodness,” Leibniz concludes, “but only due to the will of God, it seems to me that we unknowingly destroy all God's love and his glory.”\textsuperscript{53} God has no moral quality, in other words, since love and glory drop out of his nature on the first position. But Leibniz is not only worried about God's holiness. Arbitrariness is a threat to divine perfection in the sense that there is nothing in the make-up of things that prompts us to call them good.\textsuperscript{54} This is less a concern with values nature exhibits than our expectations in reasoning. A necessary causal sequence is consistent with arbitrariness, as Leibniz has presented both so far, so a form of causality is not at risk. The problem is that according to the first position nature is a byproduct of raw force and a causal sequence emanating from raw force does not afford a reason for the creation of this universe or for some of its specific features. There is no reason to expect that our thorough study of all creation will be rewarded.

First, reflecting on the existing universe as a whole does not give us reason to praise the Creator. “For why praise him for what he has done if he would be equally praiseworthy in doing the exact opposite?” Leibniz asks.\textsuperscript{55} Our praise is motivated arbitrarily if any world that God created prompts equal praise. Again, there is more than worship at stake. Where any universe would do, there is no reason to expect objects and events within that universe to contribute to its

\textsuperscript{52} Antognazza notes that Socinus and his followers are preeminent targets throughout Examen; see Maria Rosa Antognazza, Leibniz on the Trinity and the Incarnation: Reason and Revelation in the 17\textsuperscript{th} Century, trans. G. Parks (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 76.

\textsuperscript{53} A VI 4, 1532; AG 36.

\textsuperscript{54} There is an intolerable theological implication: "There would be no obligation to believe if God had not lavishly provided by design signifying marks in us from which God's word is distinguished from the deceiver's word" (A VI 4, 2298; Appendix 1). Without a moral quality within the nature of things, we have no duty to believe in God apart from his unique revelations.

\textsuperscript{55} A VI 4, 1532-1533; AG 36.
overall praiseworthiness. There is no reason for things to come together in a certain way—except for the single, causal origin of creation—nor a reason for this distinct whole. And reflecting on entities does not compel us to praise their maker, so there are no grounds for hope changing into charity or pleasure.

Second, if goodness and beauty are derived from causal agency alone, God seems to be evil or imperfect. So on one hand, perfections of that kind are arbitrary within creation since they are notions of human imagination, at best; on the other hand, they lead to a condemnation of their source. "Where will his justice and wisdom reside," Leibniz asks, "if only a certain despotic power remains, if will holds the place of reason, and if, according to the definition of tyrants, what pleases the most powerful is in itself just?" Leibniz's phrasing here is telling. Justice and wisdom cannot be predicated of the divine nature—literally, they cannot "be" or "exist" (être)—if all that "remains" (rester) is the divine will. Put differently, if the sole constant of the divine nature is will, positive qualities like justice, wisdom, and goodness cannot be predicated of the godhead. Regularity and constancy are required, which are reflected in the "rules of goodness or perfection" in entities. And since perfection is real and positive, lack is imperfection.

But Leibniz's two questions are rhetorical: a will cannot exhaust a being's nature as some Moderns suppose. A reason for willing is assumed. "Besides, it seems that every will assumes some reason for willing [aliquam rationem volendi] or that the reason is naturally prior to the will." If a willed action bereft of reason is arbitrary and a will presupposes a reason, there is no such thing as an arbitrary will. Leibniz's criticism echoes the Scholastic critique of formal

56 As Leibniz writes in a preparatory manuscript for Examen (uncertainly dated 1685), the mechanists do not “take sufficiently into account that all of nature is a certain mechanism” (non considerant satis totam mechinam quidem esse) (A VI 4, 2303).
57 A change that Leibniz observes in Examen (A VI 4, 2375).
58 A VI 4, 1533; AG 36.
59 A VI 4, 1533; AG 36.
reason; his almost casual remark invalidates the notion altogether.\(^60\) The moral effects of accepting the notion are his concern, though.\(^61\) Arbitrariness enters our reasoning about the world as a consequence of assuming a doctrine of God and his perfection that contain an inherent contradiction. Such an assumption can be made in the name of piety, yet the results evince its falsity. Leibniz's argument against a formal reason aims at its moral effects, then.\(^62\)

There is also a question of how reason is prior to the will. Since this is crucial when relating Leibniz’s position to Descartes’, I will set it aside for the moment. The last sentence of the paragraph backs the view that arbitrariness puts the eternal truths at risk, threatening the link between God and man. Leibniz sums up his rejection of the first position,

That is why I also find completely strange the expression of some philosophers [i.e., Descartes] who say that the eternal truths of Metaphysics and Geometry (and, consequently, also the rules of goodness, of justice and perfection) are merely the effects of the divine will; instead, it seems to me that they are the results of his understanding, which certainly does not depend on his will any more than his essence does.\(^63\)

The doctrine that the divine will is the sole origin of eternal truths abstracts God’s will from his understanding or entails that his understanding results from the will. When describing the first position, Leibniz sets the divine nature and its attributes on one side and the nature of things on the other. There is an inevitable deficit in both, he tells us. Eternal truths encompass moral

\(^{60}\) But his rejection is not as strong as a demonstration to contradiction. In “Generales,” the notion of “God” is never subject to analysis.

\(^{61}\) In a group of dialogues written between 1678 and 1681, Leibniz is clearly responding to the moral effects of a Modern tendency, not Descartes’ and Spinoza's philosophical systems directly. There is a despairing attitude in avowed Moderns that Leibniz observes (see A VI 4, 2223, 2228-2229, and 2246-2248).

\(^{62}\) Another implication, which I will return to, is that setting a limit to how far we should reason about God, though he is infinite, limits the extent we can understand nature.

\(^{63}\) A VI 4, 1533; AG 36.
qualities; so to avoid the consequences Leibniz has worked out, he can amend the doctrine of eternal truths supporting the first position.

Leibniz observes the “expression of some philosophers,” noting the way in which the first position is described by its adherents. The doctrine that eternal truths are effects of the divine will is “completely strange” to him, but he does not reject it outright. The expression has little, if any, meaning, and so there is no need (though he cannot demonstrate this claim for other reasons). In other words, the doctrine lacks a corresponding idea. Again, Leibniz’s concern is a moral effect: he does not allege that the doctrine contains a contradiction, which would demonstrate his claim that there is no corresponding idea, but implies that the doctrine fails to express the perfection of God, and so dispose us properly toward him. This is because it is inconsistent with his criteria of perfection, which requires a perceptible reason for all things, even if a confused one. Otherwise, there is no commune between God and man. So the expression is strange, incomprehensible or singular, because it fails to express divine transcendence, which is what any doctrine of a personal God ought to do.64

If the divine will causes the eternal truths of metaphysics and geometry, it also causes rules of goodness and perfection. Leibniz sets the metaphysical and the moral side by side, but it is unclear whether the latter results from the former, the former from the latter, or whether they are equiprimordial. On one reading, par consequent indicates a transitive relation by which the immediate cause of eternal truth acts as a mediate cause for rules of goodness and perfection. On another, the phrase indicates that the cause of one must also cause the other. Or, the metaphysical

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64 More broadly, all knowledge ought to express such a God on Leibniz's views. “The divine creation of the world is analogous to the intensification of our own inner differentiation when we move from thinking to speaking, depicting, writing, building, and so forth, that is, when we become expressive” (Grosholz, Theomorphic, 17). In short, our expressions qua expressions are of the deity. (However, my interpretation of God's identity is distinct from Grosholz's.)
and the moral are joined in God through his perfection just as our metaphysical and moral
aspects are joined in our highest perfection. Leibniz does not explain the relation between eternal
truths and rules of perfection here. Their mutual origin is in the divine understanding and
essence, he argues, which is not caused by the will. If there is a parallelism, eternal truths are
contained within the understanding, rules of perfection and goodness are contained in the divine
essence, and so his perfection is more encompassing and basic.

Leibniz's strategy and worries are somewhat different in Examen. To the extent he wants
to preserve the moral quality of God, they are the same. As he writes, “Therefore, God is not
only the supremely great author of things,” a strictly metaphysical role, “he is also the supremely
good prince of minds, and indeed the Legislator.” But the consequences of excluding a moral
quality are not spelled out; in fact, he does the opposite. Continuing from the last quote,
…but he demands nothing else from his subjects than that their souls be sincerely
affected and endowed with right intention, persuaded of this very beneficent and
most just governance as well as the beauty and goodness of the most lovable
Lord.65

By recognizing God's moral quality, that is, we find all that is demanded of us. Our standing
before God is revealed so that we can think and act in the world with confidence. Leibniz does
not only have the fears of hell in mind as a source of doubt and anxiety, which obstruct reason.
Nor is he opening a way to pass over theological scruples. A rational disposition and tendency
must be well—founded for our reasoning to be secure.

The demand on us results from divine perfection. In a fragment dated 1684, Leibniz
proposes what Gregory Brown has called the conflict-of-motives problem.66 Since everything

65 A VI 4, 2357; SLT 201-202.
66 I deal with this problem at greater length in chapter four.
God created results from his thought and will, and what is created has been found good, there must be a reason the divine good is the same as ours. Otherwise, the criteria for perfection would not have reliable bearing on the world and ourselves. Leibniz answers,

I reply that he would not be perfect or competent if he did not make everything good for his works also. And I believe that without this, they would not have been good for him or sufficiently good, which is the same, because what would also be good for them would be best, speaking absolutely.  

What we have looked at so far in “Discourse” assumes that our good is the same as the deity’s, at least to the extent that including a moral quality in God entails a symmetry with our own moral quality. As we will see, Leibniz has already given a similar response in the first paragraph. But in Examen, we are obliged to believe that our good is the same as God’s: to be “persuaded of this beneficent and most just governance as well as the beauty and goodness of the most lovable lord.” Although the criteria of perfection entail a moral quality in God, there is a gap between divine perfection, our judgment of his perfection as the highest perfection, and our own perfection. Said differently, there is a limit to how much we perceive follows from the criteria of perfection. Maybe the criteria cannot be realized in one being. As a result, we are obliged to believe that our perfection and divine perfection align, though meditating on God prompts us to affirm their alignment.

Those who love God identify his perfection with their own, and so overcome arbitrariness. In Examen, this threat to reason is the absence of God's particular will in our lives or its excess in superstition. Since a moral quality includes commune with rational beings and

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67 Je répondis, qu’il ne seroit gueres parfait ny habile, s’il ne rendoit tout bon encor pour ses ouvrages. Et que je croyois que sans cela elles ne sçauroient estre bonnes pour luy, ou ce qui est la meme chose, ne le seroient pas assez. Car ce qui seroit encor bon pour eux, seroit mieux parlant absolument (A VI 4, 1514).

68 See A VI 4, 2361-2363. I return to this in chapter 4.
theology includes a personal relation, arbitrariness weakens reasoning within our relation to him, and so hinders reasoning altogether. There are no grounds for expecting the best to happen to those who love God.\textsuperscript{69} And that expectation is bound up with reasoning, more broadly. With the kind of perfection we accept as well as its degree, there is an expectation of thorough rationality: eternal happiness, part of which is an infinite object of reasoning.\textsuperscript{70} In the sense that there are limits to how much of creation and Creator are amenable to our rational analysis, arbitrariness is an imperfection within reasoning.

A Better world

Other Moderns held that whichever world God chose to create, another, better one could have been chosen. This is the second position Leibniz rejects.\textsuperscript{71} As before, the threat is arbitrariness: if there is no prevailing reason for one world to be chosen over another with respect to the chosen world's perfection, the reason motivating the divine will excludes a moral quality. The actual world must have been created because it was better than any other. On the other hand, arbitrariness follows when an act is incompletely, or indefinitely, perfect.

1. Defining the second position. Leibniz believes a perfect action has “a last degree,” or is complete. He rejects the contrary view, writing, “Nor can I approve the opinion of some moderns who boldly maintain that what God has made is not of the highest perfect and that he could have done much better.”\textsuperscript{72} Some moderns believe that if divine perfection is infinite, no single act (or finite series) can encompass all of the deity’s perfection. So however much perfection the actual

\textsuperscript{69} See A VI 4, 2358.
\textsuperscript{70} See A VI 4, 1537, 1587-1588, 2382; AG 38, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{71} While Leibniz references Malebranche, he wrote “some Scholastics” in one manuscript.
\textsuperscript{72} A VI 4, 1533; AG 36.
world contains, there is always another world that has more. For them, to claim that infinite perfection can be exhausted is contrary to God’s glory.

Leibniz states the consequences of the second position up front—that creation and Creator are imperfect and the glory of God lost—but I will set them aside for a moment. The second position is motivated by ignorance on two counts. It is also novel. Their opinion, Leibniz continues a few lines down, is “unknown to all antiquity and...is only based on the very little knowledge we have of the general harmony of the universe and the hidden reasons for God’s conduct.”\(^73\) The Moderns’ view, that is, cannot be traced to scripture or the ancients, and so lacks the authority of tradition.\(^74\) But the history of antiquity is vital for perceiving religious truths, which complement the sciences. In *Nouvelles ouvertures*, for example, he emphasizes the contribution of historical investigations.

The History of Antiquity is absolutely necessary for the proof of religion's truth and, putting aside the excellence of doctrine, it is by a wholly divine origin that our religion distinguishes itself from every other, which do not come close to ours in any way.\(^75\)

Leibniz notes further down that his stress on antiquity does not lessen science’s ability to perceive the divine plan. His reasons for rejecting the first position suggest the contrary, that a better understanding of religious truths (including specifics on the divine nature, or revelations) helps us perceive the perfection in all things. A true philosophy, then, should be at least partially founded on this “wholly divine origin.”

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\(^73\) A VI 4, 1534; AG 37.
\(^74\) Leibniz's conception of God appeals to scripture, and the ecclesiastic and philosophical traditions (see A VI 4, 2306-2307, for one example).
\(^75\) *L’Histoire de l’Antiquité est d’une nécessité absolue pour la preuve de la vérité de la religion et mettant à part l’excellence de la doctrine, c’est par son origine toute divine, que la nostre se distingue de toutes les autres, qui n’en approchent en aucune façon* (A VI 4, 688).
The Moderns establish their philosophies on our ignorance in place of tradition, neglecting tradition as one compensation for our ignorance. Leibniz is not accusing those who hold the second position of ignorance, but of failing to ground their philosophies (at least in part) on the transcendence of the universe’s harmony. There are a few ways to parse out his criticism. Whether we believe that God chose the best world or a better one, more or less, concerns our disposition toward God, and our conception of him and the world. Since we are largely ignorant of the universe’s harmony, the reasons God chose this world are confusedly expressed. If a way of thinking is based on our confused perception of the reasons governing God’s choice, rather than disposed towards a certain notion of God and his perfection, consequences follow that are inconsistent with the divine nature. So, first, Leibniz criticizes the Moderns for not incorporating love of God into their thinking.

Maybe he is also criticizing them for grounding their philosophies on arbitrariness, besides the claim that arbitrariness results from their positions. In other words, the problem with founding a philosophy on our ignorance of universal harmony is that its fundamental definitions, axioms, and principles lack justifying reasons. They are not set up according to a most perfect order and regularity even if the lineaments of the universe are not clearly and distinctly perceived. How (and whether) this can be done is a central obstacle for Leibniz’s thought. Where the Moderns begin is not simply provisional; it is insecure. There is no reason to expect the basis of our thinking to lead to truth and happiness. If Leibniz has this second criticism in mind, it is stronger than the first. Where the first concerns the disposition, or moral quality, of the Modern position, the second challenges the fundamentals of their systems. As I will argue, the charges go hand-in-hand: for Leibniz, a moral quality is fundamental to a system.

76 And an obstacle I return to throughout the remainder of this study.
Still, it seems odd to blame someone for not orienting their thought from “hidden reasons.” Along with tradition, revelations have a significant role in Leibniz's philosophy. They help us orient our thought and action toward a universal harmony that is only dimly expressed and little known. The Moderns, on the other hand, separate their philosophies from revelation or fail to incorporate what is mysterious into their thought. A revelation is included only to the extent it is intelligible within their systems, and so God's “hidden reasons” are left out.

From ignorance the Moderns “boldly judge that many things could have been done better.” Presumably, the conclusion that the world is imperfect, or could be better, follows from the premise that there are clear and distinct perceptions of things that could be better—a conclusion readers of Job may share. But the ideas of God and the universe assumed by this judgment are not clear and distinct. The Moderns’ verdict is “bold” or “audacious” because it lacks a reason, except for confused perceptions. And, what is more, their systems do not offer any access beyond those deficient perceptions. Criteria for separating true ideas from false ones are needed, which the Moderns lack. Leibniz will appeal to logical and mathematical conceptions of identity to support his notions of God and perfection by using those sciences to establish criteria for judging our ideas of the divine.

Despite our ignorance of the universe's harmony, we should believe in creation’s exhaustive and complete perfection. Leibniz affirms this belief in Examen when describing God’s moral quality. He writes, divine governance is such that “whoever came to understand the whole plan of the divine economy would discover an image of the most perfect republic

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77 Which I return to in conclusion.
78 A VI 4, 1534; AG 37.
79 This claim is an extrapolation of what has been said so far as well as Leibniz's criticism of Descartes' ontological argument in a letter to Foucher (see A II B, 92-93).
80 A II B, 66; M 72.
inasmuch as a wise person can want nothing or or look for anything to add to it.”

Leibniz makes a similar claim in “Discourse”: “the more we are enlightened and informed of God's works, the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and entirely satisfying to anything we could have desired.”

No one can perceive God’s plan in full, but his commune with us, or governance, leads us to believe in the complete perfection of the divine plan. Though similar, the writings frame the world’s complete perfection differently. Leibniz uses a hypothetical in Examen. If someone knew the whole, they would see its completeness. In “Discourse”, he speaks of a positive proportion between our knowledge of creation and our disposition toward complete perfection. Both texts preserve our ignorance of the whole and are oriented with respect to perfection of the last degree. Their contrast sets theology apart from philosophy.

Leibniz's theology in Examen centers on love of God; theological doctrines form according to what prompts divine love in persons and whose evidences are the increase or preservation of such love. Theology begins and ends with a moral ideal. And his commitment to the complete perfection of the universe accords with this ideal. Ignorant of God’s entire plan, the divine lover believes that nothing better can be desired. If God’s plan was known, the lover’s belief would be demonstrable. The hypothetical sets an end for the sciences—the expression of a perfectly orchestrated universe—and so determines an expectation.

Rather than speak from a moral ideal, Leibniz fixes a positive proportion in “Discourse”. It results from his criteria for discerning perfection and, what is more, defines our commune with the deity. Here are the lines preceding the earlier quote:

81 …qui totam divinae oeconomiae rationem intelligeret, perfectissimae reipublicae exemplar esset deprehensurus, in quo nihil desiderare sapiens aut voto supplere possit (A VI 4, 2357).
82 A VI 4, 1533; AG 35.
83 Antognazza seconds, underlining the wider implications, “As in the case of truths of fact the maximum degree of certainty obtainable is moral certainty, based on the choice of the wise, so too in the case of the mysteries the maximum degree of certainty obtainable is not absolute certainty based upon demonstration but moral certainty that rests on the words of the wise (in this case, on revelation)” (Antognazza, Trinity, 4).
From which it follows that God, possessing supreme and infinite wisdom, acts in the most perfect way, not only in a metaphysical sense, but also morally speaking, which with respect to ourselves can be expressed thus: the more we are enlightened and informed of God's works, the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and entirely satisfying to anything we could have desired.\textsuperscript{84}

Leibniz’s criteria for discerning perfection builds completeness in, though his moral ideal realizes the expectation of complete perfection. Philosophically, on the other hand, completeness has moral effects. The quality of the creative act is expressed within us in a certain way: namely, knowledge of the world effects us morally; to know the world is to realize its perfection. While an intellectual grasp of the whole outstrips our natural capacities, the complete perfection of the divine plan is required for our knowledge of the world to dispose us in a certain way. Theology forms around a realized disposition and philosophy approximates that disposition. I will set these claims aside for a moment to return to Leibniz’s criticisms.

So our thinking can be oriented toward and from a divine plan that cannot be grasped in its entirety. Leibniz appreciates our ignorance of absolute perfection in two ways: by characterizing a moral ideal and by detailing moral effects within persons. Accordingly, Leibniz brings transcendence into the beginning and end of thought. Some moderns establish their philosophies from an ignorance separated from transcendence, and so lose a moral ideal and its accompanying effects. Neglecting completeness as an element of perfection, they lose an expected good of reasoning.

Returning to the third paragraph of “Discourse”, “Besides, these moderns insist on certain dubious subtleties, for they imagine that nothing is so perfect that there is not something more

\textsuperscript{84} A VI 4, 1531; AG 35.
perfect—this is an error.”

Leibniz shifts from the perfection of the world and divine act (how he initially frames the second position) to the perfection of being. The subtleties he alerts us to threaten the completeness of God, and so cover over his reality with illusions.

The Moderns claim to preserve God’s freedom by denying any rule, character, or tendency by which God acts, “as if it were not the highest freedom to act perfectly according to sovereign reason.” For them, the divine will is unrestrained to the point that the eternal truths emerge from the will and could be otherwise; similarly, moral qualities are its effects. But Leibniz is not simply repeating the claim he made earlier. In the second paragraph, his concern was whether moral qualities can be ascribed to nature and to God. Now, he is arguing that a will is most free, and so perfect, when it acts in conformity with reason.

2. Consequences of the second position. When there is a reason for everything, arbitrariness is removed from the world. Leibniz’s argument in the first three paragraphs of “Discourse” is that the  

ens perfectissimum includes a moral quality, which secures our reasoning. We can expect our investigations and reflections to have a return. The Modern notions of God and perfection, on the other hand, permit arbitrariness, and so leave our reasoning insecure. If the Creator’s act is predicated of his handiwork from outside as an exterior denomination, his reasons for creating as he did are arbitrary: they are not expressed within creation and the reasons we find have no grounding in God. That is the first sense of arbitrariness with which Leibniz contends. The second is that if creation does not exhibit the most perfection, the degree of perfection the world expresses is arbitrary. The world could be better or worse, and there are no

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85 A VI 4, 1534; AG 37.
86 A VI 4, 1534; AG 37. Martin and Brown delete en perfection without manuscript support (to my knowledge) (MB 41).
87 As Leibniz titles a short manuscript composed between 1678 and 1681, “Deus nihil vult sine ratio” (A VI 4, 1388).
reasons for its current state. But “the consequences of this view are entirely contrary to the glory of God.”

Without a last degree, perfection is relative: a certain amount of perfection is imperfect insofar as it is incomplete. Or, “As less evil has a degree of good, so less good has a degree of evil.” An action or being measured by an indefinite continuum is always more or less perfect. There is room for more goodness, and so there is evil, and vice versa. Perfection is like a series of numbers, which lack a final or highest end.

The Moderns believe that nothing can embody all perfection just as nothing can span every number. God’s infinite perfection exceeds nature since one is infinite, the other finite. Leibniz generally agrees with how Creator and creation are distinguished, but he does not infer that creation could be better from their difference. To say as much violates divine perfection because “to act with less perfection than one could have is to act imperfectly.” With this, Leibniz appeals to the notion of the deity suggested in paragraph two of “Discourse.” Reason is presupposed by will, and an understanding, nature, or essence is at least as basic as a will and certainly not the effects of one. So the infinite nature of God, which includes omnipotence, can bring about a most perfect world. Otherwise, God is not omnipotent. As long as the Creator embodies every perfection most perfectly, the world should be most perfect, too.

In short, God is like an architect—an anthropomorphism whose meaning is warranted by scripture. Leibniz lists the similarities in paragraph 5: resources and setting are used in the most advantageous way, nothing is shocking, and there is no want of beauty. A Modern may object

88 A VI 4, 1533; AG 37.
89 *Uti minus malum habet rationem boni, ita minus bonum habet rationem mali* (A VI 4, 1533; AG 37). None of the manuscript editors locate a source for the Latin.
90 A VI 4, 2410 and 2432; A II B, 257; MP 159-160. However, Leibniz does not understand the infinity of God and the finitude of creation like the Moderns do.
91 A VI 4, 1533; AG 37.
92 See A VI 4, 1536; AG 38.
that these similarities restrain a will that creates *ex nihilo*, but, for Leibniz, such restraints are set by the divine nature and reason. God must act according to his own nature for his action and its effects to express him. A naked will expresses agency in the effects, but as a creative, sustaining, and indiscriminate power. There is no embodiment of that power as something, or someone, rational beings can relate to. In contrast, Leibniz thinks divine agency has a unique and rational self-relation, which metaphors approximate.\(^93\)

“To point out that an architect could have done better is to find fault in his work,” Leibniz explains.\(^94\) And whether an action is praiseworthy or not tells us if it agrees with the criteria for perfection. As we saw in Leibniz's first rejection, the moral quality within things prompts either praise or blame. God’s reasons for the particulars must be expressed within them. Now, the choice to create the actual world does the same: it is praiseworthy if it is the most perfect since to say otherwise is to find fault. There are two arguments, one negative and one positive, for why this world must be the most perfect.

First, Leibniz describes the Modern view and notes a consequence. There is a sense in which creation is perfect, he tells us,

For since the imperfections descend to infinity, in whichever way God could have made his work it would always be good in comparison with lesser perfection, if that was enough—but a thing is hardly praiseworthy if it can be praised only in this manner.\(^95\)

\(^93\) Grosholz has a similar point: “God is the supreme agent; his mode of acting is first of all thought, which requires differentiation; the moment of difference is constitutive of thought” (Grosholz, *Theomorphic*, 7). She is probably interpreting Leibniz's claim that “every will assumes *aliquam rationem volendi*.” At least in 1686, I do not think Leibniz goes as far as to claim that God's first action is a self-differentiating thought.

\(^94\) A VI 4, 1533-1534; AG 37.

\(^95\) A VI 4, 1534; AG 37.
The Creator’s act is perfect relative to an infinite series of lesser perfections. In that way, his action is infinitely perfect. But his choice to actualize a certain degree of perfection is “hardly” praiseworthy. It is praiseworthy as a show of force, but not in a way that elicits complete adoration from rational beings. The choice of this much perfection rather than more or less is arbitrary.

The divine action and being must be absolutely perfect for expressions of God to prompt worship. Leibniz’s notion of God, the divine nature, and the role of God in Leibniz’s philosophy depend on the meaning of absolute perfection. If divine perfection entails a moral quality, the entailment results from absoluteness. But there are a few ways the Modern view could be lacking given the above. On one hand, an endless continuum of perfection fails to realize absoluteness. Perfections are determined by their relation to other degrees of perfection so there is never something most perfect. Or, infinite perfection cannot realize itself in one being or action. That could be due to our inability to conceive a true infinite or from an infinite set of more or less perfect possibilities—however much perfection is embodied, more perfection remains possible for it. Lastly, absolute perfection transcends finite perfections in such a way that there is a radical break. Creation is perfect but finite, so its perfection is always less than an infinitely perfect being. Since absoluteness transcends finite perfection, we ascribe perfection to the world from our understanding of lesser perfections. These readings are not mutually exclusive and they will help us follow Leibniz's engagement with his contemporaries.

A fallen world seems less perfect than otherwise, yet Leibniz accepts the Genesis account while holding that God creates the most perfect world. There must be a reason for sin that does not violate the absolute perfection of God. This raises potential problems for Leibniz’s ontology.

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96 Adams notes where absoluteness turns up throughout Leibniz’s descriptions of perfection (Adams, *Leibniz*, 113-119).
Somehow the presence of sin contributes to the world’s perfection or it damages God’s praiseworthiness since “it would have been possible for God to create only minds that, even if able to fall, would not.”\footnote{…possibile fuerit Deo eas solum mentes create, quae etsi labi possent, tamen non essent lapsurae (A VI 4, 2359).} The effects of sin challenge a direct role for perfection in Leibniz’s thought; they are less crippling when it is interpreted according to a transcendent role.

At the end of the third paragraph, Leibniz gives a positive argument for why creation is “hardly” praiseworthy on the Modern view. He writes,

For example, let us assume that God chooses between $A$ and $B$, and that he takes $A$ without having a reason for preferring it to $B$. I say that this action of God would not be praiseworthy at the very least; for all praise should be grounded in some reason, which is not here \textit{ex hypothesi}.\footnote{A VI 4, 1534; AG 37.}

The assumption Leibniz begins with is that creation was a choice among possible worlds.\footnote{Not to be understood in the contemporary, logical sense: “it is quite misleading to think of [Leibniz] as a grandfather of possible worlds semantics” (Adams, \textit{Leibniz}, 50). Adams details the misalignment on pages 46-50.} To choose one world is not to choose another. This is not to say that God weighed the reasons for choosing one world over another, but that there are reasons for the creation of the world.\footnote{As Leibniz writes to Arnauld, God’s decision is not like a human’s (A II B, 24; MP 13-14).} Acknowledging that other worlds could have been created preserves God’s freedom,\footnote{…si on voulait rejeter absolument les purs possibles, on detruiroit la contingence (A II B, 51).} and so avoids fatalism.

Without a preference for one world over another, the choice of this world is arbitrary. Elsewhere, Leibniz remarks that the “great mystery” of the universe is why God did prefer this world,\footnote{See A VI 4, 1538; AG 39.} but perfection requires that this world was preferable for a reason. Something about God’s understanding and character prompted him to choose, or will, this world, and so his nature
is expressed throughout it. But the sense in which God could have chosen a different world or whether he could have chosen a less perfect one is a snag in Leibniz’s account: necessity and certainty conflate in God’s choice. The underlying question is how God’s metaphysical nature (as cause of the universe) joins with his moral character (as prince of minds).

We would not expect God to have a reason for creating the world he did if his choice was arbitrary. But praise is grounded in a reason. For there to be commune between the Creator and rational beings, the fact God had a reason must be presupposed by our own reasoning. Creation elicits worship when the mystery of creation—God’s perfect choice of this world—is expressed. The Modern view obscures that mystery since it does not presuppose a requirement for it: namely, God’s rational preference. So the Creator’s moral quality involves more than our goodness and obedience to the deity; it is also required for the sciences and reasoning more broadly.  

Arbitrariness threatens the relation between God and man, which imbues all of creation. Leibniz has rejected two positions some Moderns hold to avoid arbitrariness and to maintain divine perfection. These are his motivations, at least. It should be clear that Leibniz intends his criteria for discerning perfection to entail a moral quality: because his contemporaries exclude such a quality they have deficient notions of perfection. A second commitment is that, without a moral quality, our reasoning is insecure: we cannot expect our reasoning to conform to the divine plan, and so obtain truth, goodness, and happiness. While I have shown that these commitments are at stake, Leibniz’s rejections have been looked at apart from the Moderns whom he is

103 Though Adams entertains the possibility that Leibniz’s discussion of a moral quality goes beyond “pragmatism,” or what concerns our behavior, he restricts the concept to practice nonetheless; see (Adams, Leibniz, 198).
criticizing. Before fleshing out the moral quality of God and turning to Leibniz’s arguments, I will situate his views.

Some Moderns

In *Examen*, Leibniz sharply contrasts a moral notion of God and an imperfect one. “We ought to shun those who conceive God as a certain supreme power...”\(^{104}\) I quoted the passage in full earlier and asked who Leibniz is encouraging us to shun. Unlike “Discourse,” he does not separate targets in *Examen*, and this suggests that there is either one person or group in mind, or that a few overlaps in basic respects for him. Although Leibniz does not reference Descartes, Spinoza, or Malebranche explicitly, he rejects a theological counterpart of their views. Leibniz sees a connection between them and the Antitrinitarians, Socinians, and Remonstrants.\(^{105}\)

The second and third paragraphs of *Examen* have a parallel structure: first, Leibniz’s notion of God, then a contrast. I quoted from the third paragraph above in which a moral deity is set over and above one of causal efficacy. But who Leibniz has in mind becomes clear in the second paragraph. After defining God, he writes,

And so the doctrine of those who imagine that God is corporeal, finite and circumscribed by space, and ignorant of future contingents, absolute or conditional, should not be tolerated at all. And for this reason I greatly disapprove of certain Antitrinitarians and those like them who have not even left this head of faith intact and whose thoughts are unworthy of God.\(^{106}\)

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\(^{104}\) A VI 4, 2357; SLT 201.

\(^{105}\) For the importance of the trinity for Leibniz’s thought, as well as constant targets, the Antitrinitarians and Socinians, see (Antognazza, *Trinity*, 2nd part). I will argue for this connection in detail in chapters two and three with respect to Descartes.

\(^{106}\) A VI 4, 2357; SLT 201. Leibniz has a longer discussion of “those who imagine” God in the first and second versions of *Rationale fidei catholicae* (A VI 4, 2306-2323; SLT 70-79).
The “head of faith” Leibniz mentions is the transcendence of the divine nature—specifically, the trinity, but more generally a certain divine unity.\textsuperscript{107} There are four charges in the quote, two that lead to the others. First, God is conceived as a body, which means the deity is limited in a figure. Second, no room is left for freedom since there is no contingency. As a result, the mystery of the divine nature is lost as well as God's praiseworthiness.

God cannot be a body because a body has a “limited nature” and “circumscribed figure” and limits cannot be ascribed to God.\textsuperscript{108} Those who believe otherwise worship the sun and the stars instead of realizing divine intelligence, which also means his transcendence. Their error results “from ignorance of the true system of the World.”\textsuperscript{109} If they were aware of the universe’s rigorous order, they would not think God is one body among others—though the first—but rather outside the world, or ultramundanam. And for the same reason, the Moderns err in believing that God could have made a better world.

Ancient philosophers, Catholics, and Protestants rightly believe that God is the most perfect being, Leibniz tell us; only the Socinians and Remonstrants disagree. Besides naming the offenders,\textsuperscript{110} Leibniz condenses his argument against them in the second version of Rationale. Their notion of the deity violates God’s praiseworthiness and it does so for three reasons: “immersed in the consideration of finite things,” like the pagans who worship the sun and stars, a lack of “those sublime conceptions,” and so a lofty notion of God is replaced with

\textsuperscript{107} Though Antognazza suggests that the issue of the trinity was more important and difficult than the unity of divine perfection, the godhead encompasses both since it is thoroughly consistent (“Comments on Adams’ ‘The Priority of the Perfect’, in Rationalism, Platonism, and God, ed. M. Ayers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 129, ft. For Leibniz, the unity of divine perfection is realized through the trinity, and vice versa.

\textsuperscript{108} natura limitata and figura circumscripturn (A VI 4, 2307).

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{...ab ignorantia veri systematis Mundi} (A VI 4, 2307-2308).

\textsuperscript{110} Leibniz does name the Socinians and Remonstrants in the first version, but in the context of original sin (A VI 4, 2311).
“impossibilities.”

The Moderns, too, have an impossible notion that God is a will apart from a nature or understanding, and maybe for the same reasons.

To preserve freedom, the absolute contingent future and the conditional contingent future must be held apart. Such a need may be less directed at the new philosophers, whose notion of the divine will is unrestrained. But, to Leibniz, they still may fail to distinguish within contingent future possibilities and, as he makes clear in “Discourse” and, again, in Rationale, the Creator’s moral quality depends on his free choice of this world. Leibniz plays a delicate balance. From God’s goodness and wisdom, “divine Knowledge and providence removes a kind of uncertainty from things” without violating our freedom. The future is certain, not necessary. So the Moderns’ strategy for preserving freedom might result in blind necessity.

A science of God should keep “the origin of faith intact,” and so preserve the mysteries. Leibniz criticizes the Protestants for failing in this respect: their doctrine joined with practice reduces the mysteries “almost to nothing.” Divine sublimity no longer affects persons without being understood. The origin of faith Leibniz is speaking of in Examen is God's nature; in his annotations, he is concerned with God’s expression. Again, there is a delicate balance. The mystery of the divine nature must be intelligible enough to recognize as a mystery with certain affects—intelligible enough to ascribe certain properties to his nature—yet incomprehensible. If Leibniz’s critique goes beyond the theologians, the Moderns either believe in God’s transcendence without affects or believe in divine affects without transcendence.

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111...impressi rerum finitarum considerationi}; textit{sublimes illos conceptus (A VI 4, 2314).
112 See A VI 4, 2309, which I will return to.
113 Scientia et providentia divina tollunt quidem ex rebus incertitudinem (A VI 4, 2310).
114 A VI 4, 1546-1549; AG 44-46.
115 A VI 4, 2298.
Along with similar accusations being made against Socinians, Remonstrants, and Antitrinitarians, on one side, and the Moderns, on the other, Leibniz cites the Mechanists in “Rationale fidei catholicae contra omnis generis sectas.”\footnote{\textit{(A short manuscript preceding Rationale fidei catholicae.)} See A VI 4, 2302.} Clearly, the Moderns are not far from his thoughts during this time, even early on in the writings preceding \textit{Examen}.\footnote{Descartes’ views, specifically, are dealt with in \textit{Examen}, too (see A VI 4, 2420-2421, 2423-2424, 2429, 2451, 2454). It is not hard to see Malebranche in the background of Leibniz's treatment of the divine economy as well.} It seems that Leibniz develops his theology with an eye on Modern philosophy and his philosophy with an eye on Antitrinitarians and the like. And so the risk of heresy seems implied in his rejection of the Moderns’ views; that may be the “danger” Leibniz alludes to in “Discourse.”\footnote{Not to mention that Leibniz clearly alludes to Descartes after citing the Socinians and Remonstrants in the second, polished version of \textit{Rationale} (A VI 4, 2322-2323).}

As we have already seen, the views of some Moderns oppose the glory of God. The same accusation is now made against the Antitrinitarians and their kin. But the other charges can be leveled against the Moderns, too. Once situated among Leibniz's contemporaries, his opening criticisms in “Discourse” and \textit{Examen} reveal shared motivations.
Chapter 2: Descartes and ens morale

In his *Metaphysical Disputations*, Suarez distinguishes two senses of perfection. First, citing Aristotle, perfection is what has no lack and is complete. On the other hand, something is perfect when it has a perfection that is necessary and essential. Suarez points out that on the first sense, perfection is different than goodness. A boy is not perfect since he is not maturated, but can be good; a man may be perfect, yet not good if he lacks “qualities or dispositions that accord with his nature.” On the second conception, though, perfection and goodness are equivalent, or “convertible terms.” To be good is to “have the perfection that is owed,” and so to fulfill one’s being.

Leibniz and Descartes want to preserve both senses of perfection. For Leibniz, there is an obligation within beings, or a tendency or inclination within them, to exist. That is, they tend toward their perfection, in both senses of the word. On Descartes’ view, that obligation within beings is an effect of the divine will rather than a being’s own. Just as a man is the perfection of a boy because of his natural development instilled by God, a man is good when he conforms to the divine will. Goodness and perfection are conformity to the divine will, and nothing more.

Descartes’ views are dangerous, Leibniz tells us, because they threaten the moral quality of God, which means the same for creation. In spite of Descartes’ assurances, reason is insecure. There are a few issues involved in Leibniz’s response to Descartes, which were introduced last chapter: (a) defining God's moral quality, its source and effects, (b) what it means for God’s

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moral quality to be a formal reason *toute nue*, and (c) the theological aspects of Leibniz’s criticisms—namely, the intolerable theological implications Leibniz finds in Descartes’ system.

**Cartesian substance**

Creation is good because God “willed to make [it] so,” writes Descartes in *Reply to the Sixth Set of Objections*. The excellence of God's action carries over into the value of creation such that the divine will is the “rational basis for what is good and true.” Put differently, God creates the world in a rational manner, so goodness and truth are effects of reason. And creation is thoroughly rational due to an omnipotent and indifferent will. Before examining the nature of this lofty will, there is an inference Leibniz contests that I should elaborate: namely, the claim that moral qualities result from the divine will.

Continuing with Descartes’ reply: “For the divine cause can be called efficient,” as the origin of creation, “for the same reason a King puts a law into effect even though the law is not itself something that exists physically, but is *ens morale*, as they say,” or moral being. But the type of cause that creation exemplifies does not need to be investigated or decided; how the truths of geometry or metaphysics (not to mention those of creation) depend on God can be left a mystery. It is enough for Descartes that everything depends on God. Leibniz shares Descartes’ analogy of law, though their conceptions of the deity as legislator are not the same. This becomes clear in Descartes’ explanation of the divine cause.

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122 AT VII, 435; Ar 201.
123 AT VII, 436; Ar 201. The example is also used in an early letter to Mersenne (AT I, 145-146; Ar 28-29).
124 Leibniz seems to take Descartes example more seriously than Descartes, as we will see in chapter 4.
Because of God’s immensity everything depends on him; his indifference is the rational basis of creation. Descartes often appeals to immensity, indifference, and, elsewhere, omnipotence, when speaking of God. The deity’s moral quality, as an aspect of reason, is characterized by indifference. Descartes writes,

For otherwise...God would plainly not have been indifferent to creating the things he created. For if some rational basis for what is good were to have existed prior to God’s preordaining of things, this would have determined him to what was best to do. On the contrary, however, because God has determined himself toward those things that ought now to be made, they are for that reason, as Genesis has it, ‘very good.’

The goodness of creation resulted from God’s indifference toward what he created. If he were not indifferent, the value of things outside him would determine him to act. Then, the rational basis of goodness would not be in the deity’s reasoning, but outside as a measure placed on God. And our reasoning would not express the deity through and through.

Leibniz, too, cites the creation account in support of his position, yet his interpretation of Genesis 1:31 differs from Descartes’. “And God saw all that He had made,” the scribes wrote, “and found it very good.” For Descartes, the last half is most important: the Creator “determined himself toward those things that ought now to be made.” The moral ‘ought’ within things is grounded in the divine will as its object. Since Descartes is placing the exigency of creation within things, he is not ignoring the first half of the verse. But on his reading, God determined himself to act instead of being determined by nature’s goodness. So perfection expresses the divine will.

125 AT VII, 435-436; Ar 201.
Such a will is an empty, pure, and indiscriminate external denomination, to Leibniz.\textsuperscript{126} We are left with a formal reason for creation. Now, Leibniz may be criticizing such a reason or pointing out the need to supplement Descartes’ account, depending on our translation of \textit{toute nue} (among other matters). ‘Empty’ has negative connotations that ‘purely’ lacks. If ‘empty’ is a more precise translation, Leibniz’s criticism is that a divine will as the source of exigency leaves no content within things.\textsuperscript{127} God cannot be expressed throughout creation, except as a causal origin. And this is a problem. ‘Purely,’ on the other hand, suggests that Descartes has only accounted for a general and complete expression of a causal origin. Formally, Descartes is right. Leibniz offers less an alternative in “Discourse” than a supplement that shows how particulars express the divine nature. What is more, Descartes explains how we perceive by God’s whole creative act, but not how we access that whole through specific perfections within individual objects.\textsuperscript{128}

However we translate \textit{toute nue}, Descartes’ account proffers a formal reason for natural goodness, or that an attribute is predicated to a subject on the basis of something outside the subject. Leibniz criticizes such a stand-alone reason. As the origin of goodness, a formal reason evokes the definition of tyrants. That is, a tyrant’s will and power make an action good and just.\textsuperscript{129} While God is certainly the origin of goodness for Descartes, as he is for Leibniz, we

\textsuperscript{126} While Grosholz points out this objection, she does not nuance the sense of ‘purely’ at issue (Grosholz, “Theomorphic,” 4-5).
\textsuperscript{127} Leibniz’s later criticism of Descartes’ conception of bodily substance as extension may be anticipated by the latter’s concept of perfection. The reason uniting an infinitely complex individual is blocked from the start. As Guéroult writes, “…confrontant la nature de l’étendue avec sa propre conception de la substantialité, il découvre qu’au point de vue leibnizien non plus l’étendue n’est pas substance, parce qu’elle n’est pas une unité sui generis douée de spontanéité et rendant raison de l’infinité de ses prédicats, mais une abstraction vide” (Martial Guéroult, \textit{Etudes sur Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, et Leibniz} (Hildesheim & New York: Olms Verlag, 1970), 207.
\textsuperscript{128} That is, God's simple act of creating must be expressed throughout creation, even if we do not perceive it clearly and distinctly—at least, Leibniz thinks that is needed.
\textsuperscript{129} Leibniz criticizes Descartes similarly in \textit{Rationale fidei Catholicae} (see A VI 4, 2320).
cannot ascribe justice to the divine will as it is perceived throughout creation. Our perception of moral qualities is arbitrary since it fails to align with the divine nature. To us, God is a tyrant.

Descartes may disagree. Recalling the quote above, God’s reason for creating what he did cannot be outside himself as prior to his will. Everything, including order and law, depend on God as a result of his immensity. And his indifference toward creation for the sake of self-determination entails his moral quality, which is then expressed throughout creation. In short, Descartes avoids a formal reason for God’s creation of this world. Since the Creator’s action was its own point of reference, creation is good.

Both Descartes and Leibniz are concerned with how a moral quality is entailed by the divine nature. Descartes thinks a moral quality results from a pure will and Leibniz thinks it follows from divine perfection (specifically, divine unity). Descartes avoids a formal reason for God’s act by stressing his self-determination; Leibniz avoids a formal reason for natural goodness by stressing God's reason for acting. And Leibniz accuses Descartes of making God’s choice of this world arbitrary. This brings us to another point of dispute. Their underlying notions of the deity, and his role in our reasoning, are not the same.

### The Divine Will

As Jean-Luc Marion observes, the creation of eternal truths, and so the divine will, is “another foundation of knowledge” for Descartes.\(^\text{130}\) This role of the divine will is unique to him and opposed by Leibniz, who believes such a doctrine welcomes arbitrariness into the deity and creation. But as Marion argues, Descartes’ view of the divine will evinces a radical commitment

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to transcendence. If Marion is right, Descartes may have a response to the accusation that he builds his philosophy from ignorance instead of on divine transcendence.

For Descartes, we access the divine through ideas. In *Principles of Philosophy*, he writes, “[The mind] first finds in itself the ideas of many things, and while it contemplates them as such, and neither affirms nor denies that there is anything outside itself similar to these ideas, it cannot err.” And from ideas, we discover “common notions” that can be safely used for reasoning. Adding the three sides of a triangle, for example, equals the sum of two right angles. While attentive reflection can derive and relate ideas with certainty, reasoning cannot overcome the weaknesses of human nature. A mathematical proof can be misremembered, written incorrectly, or computed wrongly so that the conclusions of an otherwise sure method are dubious. Once judgments are made about ideas, there is a risk of error.

Besides geometrical properties and the like, we also find among our ideas one of God. The unique effects of this idea within us clarify the role of the divine will since the divine will causes our ideas. God’s indifference effects our ideas in a way that preserves and expresses the moral quality of God and creation on a rational basis. Of course, Leibniz will object, though he has a similar role for the notion of God—namely, securing our reasoning.

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131 AT VIII, 9; Ar 234. I favor the Latin edition over the French in what follows, though the differences nuance Descartes’ account beyond the scope of my current analysis. André Bridoux remarks, “Cette traduction est moins ferme et moins précise que la première; surtout, elle contient des modifications et des adjonctions importantes, sans doute apportées par Descartes lui-même, de sorte que le texte français ne saurait être considéré comme l’équivalent exact du texte latin” (René Descartes, *Oeuvres et lettres*, 2nd ed., Paris: Gallimard, 1953, 551). Daniel Garber seconds, “The translation published in 1647 shows a number of significant differences from the Latin of 1644, differences that could only have come from Descartes’ hand (Daniel Garber, *Descartes’ Metaphysical Physics* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 28). Leibniz may have read Latin and/or French editions. With the above quote, I followed the brevity of the Latin edition, though the French supports my interpretation of God’s role in Descartes’ system even more clearly: “…elle [the mind] est hors de danger de se meprêndre” (Descartes, *Oeuvres*, 576).

132 Although I will be elaborating on Descartes’ arguments in what follows as if from ‘my’ perspective or ‘our’ perspective, Descartes’ argument concerns the nature of rational beings generally—the natural light of reason. It is not restricted to a point of view. See AT VII, 8; Ar 100, as well as Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, “Descartes’ Substance Dualism and his Independence Conception of Substance,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46:1 (Jan., 2008): 72.
Descartes writes,

The mind afterwards considers the various ideas it has and discovers there the idea of a being who is omniscient, omnipotent, and absolutely perfect---by far the most important idea; it recognizes in it not merely possible and contingent existence, as in all the other ideas it has of things it clearly perceives, but absolutely necessary and eternal existence.\(^{133}\)

As an object of perception, our idea of God contains absolutely necessary and eternal existence along with complete perfection. After naming specific perfections found in this idea, Descartes remarks, “…quae omnium longe praecipua est,” which Ariew translates above as “by far the most important idea.”\(^{134}\) Among the ideas, that is, our idea of God is most perceived or perceptible as taken before the others. It is set apart in content, but also from how it relates to every other idea.

The priority of God’s idea results from the divine will. In his sixth “Reply,” cited earlier, Descartes explains that the priority concerned is not temporal, of order, nature, or reason. “It is because [God] willed to create the world in time that it is better than were he to have created it from all eternity,” Descartes writes, not because it is better to create the world in this way that God so willed.\(^{135}\) In other words, what should exist—the exigency of creation—comes entirely from the divine will’s self-determination. Nothing outside God’s will determines it. Only the idea we have of God presents a being in which the exigency to exist comes from itself. That is why the idea presents “absolutely necessary and eternal existence.”

\(^{133}\) A VIII, 10; Ar 234.  
\(^{134}\) In the French edition, Descartes writes, “…elle juge facilement” (Descartes, Oeuvres, 577).  
\(^{135}\) AT VII 432; Ar 199.
From the determinations within the idea itself, we can infer that the being presented by that idea exists, which is a unique privilege of our idea of God. Other ideas must be reflected on apart from what they present to avoid error (along with suspended judgment). In Descartes’ words, “…from the fact that [the mind] perceives that necessary and eternal existence is contained in the idea it has of an absolutely perfect being, it has clearly to conclude that this absolutely perfect being exists.” To Leibniz, famously, Descartes’ inference assumes that the idea of the *ens perfectissimum* is possible. While the assumption may be credible, it lacks the justification required for a proof of God’s existence. I will set aside that disagreement, though, and continue with the role of Descartes’ inference for our ideas instead.

The deity is unlike other beings because its existence and its essence are one; there is no distinction to be made except for the fact that our idea of God is not his existence, but an idea of a being that must exist. Said differently, our idea of God presents his existence rather than being itself divine. But the more we perceive the divine essence, the more we realize God must exist. To reflect on God is to reflect on existing being—or a being that determines its own existence—and so we move from self-reflection on our own existence to the existence of something outside ourselves. Descartes’ commitment to the origin of everything in the divine will stems from the identity of God’s existence and essence: the activity of willing is pure, simple, and singular because it determines itself thoroughly. We can only grasp it according to the difference between existence and essence, although that distinction does not properly apply to God. So there is an unbridgeable difference between the divine unity and our comprehension.

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136 AT VIII 10; Ar 234.
137 See A VI 4, 1566-1567; AG 56.
138 Leibniz’s criticism is important for his conception of God's identity and its role in reasoning, which is why I mention it in passing.
139 See the sixth meditation; AT VII, 71-90; Ar 132-141.
But there is no reason for God to stand back from his creation and see that it is good, Leibniz protests, when the divine will is the rational basis of goodness and truth. God should already know creation is good from the fact he willed it. With his objection, Leibniz is not disagreeing that God is simple, singular, and transcendent. Nor is he endorsing an anthropomorphism. The matter of dispute is what is represented of the divine nature throughout creation, and how. For Descartes, it is the self-determination of the divine will. Leibniz thinks this is inadequate for securing our reasoning. The identity of existence and essence in God implicates more to his expression. Included in his expression is an exigency of things.

A Perfect Archetype

The idea of God removes the possibility of error, and so secures our reasoning, even though we remain liable to error. Descartes argues for our access to the truth of things from the pervasiveness of the divine idea: to recall, God is the cause of all existing things as the immense being on which everything depends, so his idea is present within everything to the extent that an object is true and real. Creation is an effect of the deity, who created and sustains it. Because of all this, we can expect to arrive at truth by reasoning according to the divine idea—that is, according to perfection.

Descartes holds that the idea of God brings us from reflecting on ideas within us to examining beings. The divine perfections throughout creation ground our widened cognition. By developing this claim, we can see what it means to reason according to perfection for Descartes. He notes two effects of perfection. First, there is a positive proportion between the perfection

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140 As Descartes writes to Mersenne, “…for in God willing and knowing are but one, in such a way that from the very fact that he wills something, he therefore knows it, and it is only for that reason that such a thing is true” (AT I, 149; Ar 29; Descartes’ italics).
within things and the perfection of their cause. Second, there is the capacity to recognize and measure imperfection from our innate idea. He writes,

When we reflect on the various ideas that are in us, it is easy to perceive that there is not much difference between them when they are considered only as modes of thinking, but they are widely different in another way, since the one represents one thing, and the other another; and their cause must be more perfect as what they represent of their objects is more perfect [or has more perfection].

As ideas, or modes of thought, there is the idea of a necessary and eternal being, on one hand, and contingent ideas, on the other. But when those ideas are considered with respect to what they are ideas of, which also introduces the risk of error, we have many different ideas. The difference concerns the amount of their object's perfection more so than the different objects represented.

For example, an architect’s design of a large, complex, and beautiful building may result from a similar building the architect saw, her understanding of physics, or her own ingenuity. Perfection involves the object’s relation with its cause, or the building with the architect, in such a way that the object will be more or less perfect depending on its origin, the architect’s idea.

If the object represents her ingenuity, its cause is more perfect than if it results from the other sources. If from herself, the building is almost self-determined.

“For the whole of the ingenuity involved in the idea…” Descartes concludes, “must exist in its first and principal cause, whatever that may be, not only objectively or representatively, but also formally or eminently.” This phrase, “formally or eminently,” does not reappear in the

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141 AT VIIIa, 11; Ar 235. Ariew follows the French edition here. The Latin reads, “…quo plus perfectionis objectivae in se continent, eo perfectionem ipsarum causam esse debere.” In both, the cause or origin remains the basis of more or less perfection in the idea. The Latin sets the perfection of the object up front as the quality through which we perceive the perfection of the cause.

142 Descartes uses this example in his “Reply to the first set of Objections” (AT VII, 104; Ar 150-151).

143 Since it is not a sheer act of will, it cannot be purely self-determined.

144 AT VIII, 11; Ar 235.
Principles, though Descartes clarifies “objectively or representatively” by adding “as in a picture.” But in his “Reply to the Second Set of Objections,” he had explained.

1. Argument in geometrical fashion. In reply to a comment about the style of Meditations, Descartes crafts an argument for the existence of God in geometrical fashion, or with the use of definitions, axioms, and propositions. A selection from each type employed in his argument nuances the role of divine perfection in Principles. Beginning with his third definition:

By the 'objective reality of an idea' I understand the being of the thing represented by an idea, insofar as it exists in the idea...For whatever we perceive to exist in the objects of our ideas exists objectively in these very ideas. \(^{145}\)

Following this definition, objective perfection is the perfection of an object that we perceive within its idea. The perfection (or reality) perceived in an object exists in the idea, so our ideas are more or less perfect depending on the perfection of their object. \(^{146}\) Ideas not only represent perfection—specifically, the object's perfection—but are subjects of perfection.

Descartes then defines formally and eminently:

The same things are said to exist ‘formally’ in the objects of our ideas when they exist in these objects in just the way we perceive them, and to exist ‘eminently’ in the objects of our ideas when they indeed are not in these objects in the way we perceive them, but have such an amount of perfection that they could fill the role of things existing formally. \(^{147}\)

\(^{145}\) AT VII, 161; Ar 162.
\(^{146}\) As Leibniz glosses it in the margin of his copy, “For whatever we perceive as if it was in the idea of its object is in the ideas themselves objectively” (Nam quaecumque percipimus tanquam in idearum objectis ea sunt in ipsis ideis objective) (A VI 4, 1702).
\(^{147}\) AT VII, 161; Ar 162.
A formal relation concerns how our perception relates to an object perceived. For example, perfections exist formally in an object when how they are perceived exists in the object as we perceive them. The architect’s building presents a certain amount of perfection that exists formally when it is within the object, not only within our idea of it.

This relation does not hold when objects exist eminently. Because of how much perfection the object has, it could have the same effects as if it was existing formally. But we are not perceiving the object in the same way as we perceive our idea of it. If perfection is the perceived object as well as the criterion for eminence, the perfection perceived is not identical to the object’s perfection; they are not the same according to our perceptions. Still, depending on how much perfection the object has, its perfection could be substituted for the perceived perfection with no change in its effects.

To say God’s creation of the world is a formal reason for existence seems amenable to Leibniz’s thought, given the above definitions, or too strong even, but not empty. A more fitting accusation is that if God's reason is formal (Descartes does not think it is), it is perceivable as such in creation since there is an identity between how the object is perceived and the object itself. God’s reason should be eminent. From what has been said earlier, it is clear that that is not Leibniz’s charge. As a purely formal reason, he is more likely arguing that eminence is cut off on Descartes’ system, and so the formal reason for existence is vacated. Without transcendence, there cannot be a meaningful reason for all of existence. Or, Leibniz could be interpreting the words in another sense, more along Scholastic lines, in which case it becomes more difficult to pin his criticism to a select passage. A formal relation is not the same as an extrinsic denomination, however, for Descartes.
Leibniz is worried about the role of perfection in securing our reasoning. Although his identification of a formal reason with an extrinsic denomination is not intended by Descartes, it may have a basis in the role Descartes gives perfection. An unintended consequence of the Cartesian system, in other words, is that the formal reason for existence acts like an extrinsic denomination. So Leibniz may agree with Descartes’ intention, while disagreeing with how it is executed. Again, the geometrical reconstruction in Descartes’ second reply is helpful. His fourth axiom is “Whatever reality or perfection there is in a thing is formally or eminently in its first and adequate cause.”¹⁴⁸ Like Leibniz, the reality or perfection of creation is traced back to the godhead. Descartes has defined two ways this relation holds, formally and eminently.

The fifth axiom underlines the importance of perfection for reasoning. Our awareness of ideas assumes a cause beyond us, and we must reason according to the effects of this cause.

Whence it also follows that the objective reality of our ideas requires a cause which contains this very same reality, and not merely objectively, but either formally or eminently. And we should note that the acceptance of this axiom is so necessary that on it alone depends the knowledge of all things, sensible as well as insensible.¹⁴⁹

If the cause of our ideas objectively contained the same reality, and no more, the cause may or may not be the represented objects. At least nothing else would be presented by our ideas than the reality contained in their objects; the reason for our ideas would be the reality represented by ideas, but we would remain unsure that an object’s reality conforms to how we perceive them. All ‘objective reality’ entails is that what is perceived has a cause. Without a formal and eminent relation, Descartes warns, there is no knowledge of that cause. Such relations align our
perceptions with reality, and so ground our expectation that reasoning about our ideas obtains knowledge.

A formal relation ensures that the reality (or perfection) perceived belongs to the represented object; an eminent relation ensures that the cause effects an idea in such a way that the effects of its reality are the same as the effects of the representation. An eminently existing object could replace the represented one with no change in effects, though the representation is not the same as the cause. So a formal or eminent relation concern an identity between the reality (perfection) of the cause and of the effect. Descartes gives an example for how this works.

His fifth axiom continues,

For example, how is it we know that the sky exists? Because we see it? But this vision does not touch the mind except insofar as it is an idea: an idea, I say, inhering in the mind itself, not an image depicted in the corporeal imagination.

And we are able to judge on account of this idea that the sky exists only because every idea must have a really existing cause of its objective reality; and this cause we judge to be the sky itself. The same holds for the rest.\footnote{AT VII, 165; Ar 164.}

The objective reality of an idea must have a cause. That is, the reality or perfection of our ideas comes from “its first and adequate cause,” not the idea, perception, or sight of the object. So the sky exists because the reality of our idea originates either formally or eminently in the sky: formally, if the reality within the idea is the same as in the object or, eminently, if the reality within the object is enough to preserve the effects of its formally existing cause.

The first proposition is that God’s existence can be known from considering his nature. Reflecting on the concept of the deity is enough to prove his existence, Descartes tells us, “but
since it is not easy to arrive at such astuteness,” or the perception of necessary existence in the concept of God, “we will seek the same thing in another way.” Still, his proof by reflecting on the divine nature—and that such meditation helps remove prejudice and can be better realized without prejudice—flags the concept of the deity’s uniqueness. There is demonstrative force in perceiving the divine nature, which I want to emphasize before outlining Descartes’ alternative. Existence, reality, or a certain perfection are within our notion of God such that we can affirm his existence from his conceived nature. As we perceive his nature more, we perceive more perfection. Conceiving itself, as opposed to locating and inferring from requirements for an idea, ground our judgment of the object's existence. In sum, the identity of God includes his existence, but does not exist formally or eminently. Rather, perceiving this inclusion requires astuteness because it is immediate—the simplest unity.

Descartes’ alternative proof for God's existence is a posteriori. It centers on the idea of God within us and has the subsequent demonstration:

The objective reality of any of our ideas requires a cause that contains this same reality not merely objectively but either formally or eminently (Ax. V). However, we have an idea of God (Defs. II and VIII) [definitions of an idea and of God], the objective reality of which is contained in us neither formally nor eminently (Ax. VI) [because God is an infinite substance and we are finite], nor could it be contained in anything other than God (Def. VIII) [given his absolute perfection].

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151 AT VII, 167; Ar 165.
152 As I will argue later, Discourse begins with, and develops out of, considering the divine nature. This can be seen already from Leibniz's criticisms in paragraphs two and three.
153 As Descartes writes in the ‘Postules’ of the geometrical demonstration, “I ask the readers weigh diligently the self-evident propositions that they find within themselves...And thus readers may exercise the astuteness implanted in them by nature, pure and freed from the senses” (AT VII, 162-163; Ar 163).
Therefore this idea of God which is in us requires God as its cause, and thus God exists (Ax. III) [since something must be a cause].

Put differently, God must exist because the reality in our idea of him must have been placed by him. If its cause is neither formal nor eminent, a transcendent act is required, which, in turn, is accomplished by an absolutely perfect being. Only the act of a completely perfect being can explain our idea of complete and infinite perfection since nothing in our perceptions reveals it as such. Descartes’ second proposition hints at the role of God’s moral quality.

For reasons I will come to, we need to look at Descartes’ conception of substance to fully appreciate the role of God’s moral quality. For now, I can note that the idea of God is entailed by his moral quality. With objects, their reality or perfection are effects of an absolutely perfect cause—their reality is an effect of God's moral quality. Descartes’ claim is stronger when it comes to rational beings (and bound up with the weaker one): God’s moral quality is the revealed perfection of his idea. Descartes does not say as much in his geometrical proof; his concern is God’s existence. After working through his next proposition, I will return to his stronger claim. Leibniz’s criticisms are nuanced accordingly.

After appealing to the fact that an idea of God exists, Descartes appeals to the fact we exist as proof of God's existence. This is yet another alternative for proving the existence of God as Descartes only refers to definitions and axioms throughout his demonstration, not his second proposition. But his third proposition is related to the second: Descartes again uses the formal or eminent relation as support for a transcendent identity. Perfections are said to be within God either formally or eminently, though divine perfections are the result of his will.

154 AT VII 167; Ar 165.
155 This was seen in his reply to the sixth set of objections, quoted earlier.
156 A similar argument is given in Principles (AT VIII, 12; Ar 236).
The first step of the demonstration concerns the requirements for preserving my existence. Descartes writes,

Had I the power to preserve myself, so much the more would I also have the power to give myself the perfections I lack (Axs. VIII and IX) [the power to make something greater or difficult can make something less, and that it is greater to preserve a substance than to preserve an attribute or property]; for these are merely attributes of a substance, whereas I am a substance. But I do not have the power to give myself these perfections, otherwise I would already have them (Ax. VII) [the nature of the will is such that it immediately gives itself any perfections it lacks and has the power to obtain]. Therefore I do not have the power to preserve myself.\(^{157}\)

To be able to preserve oneself implies that every perfect attribute is obtainable; to preserve my own substance is harder than obtaining an attribute. By “harder” Descartes means what requires more power, which is of course a perfection: self-preservation, or fulfilling the requirements for one's own existence,\(^ {158}\) is a more powerful act than obtaining an attribute.\(^ {159}\) But there are attributes I lack that I would already have if they were available to me given the nature of the will. Our lack is a sign of our limits. Since we do not have every perfect attribute, we know that what requires even more perfection (i.e., preserving a substance) is out of reach.

\(^{157}\) AT VII, 168; Ar 165-166.  
\(^{158}\) Adams, Leibniz, 204.  
\(^{159}\) It is helpful to note that Spinoza does not criticize Descartes’ use of the term, ‘harder’, because it is vague or metaphoric, but because one thing can be both harder and easier. “What does he call easy, and what difficult? Nothing is said to be easy or difficult absolutely, but only in relation to a cause. So one and the same thing can at the same time be called both easy and difficult in relation to different causes” (Benedict Spinoza, A Spinoza Reader: The 'Ethics' and Other Works, ed. Edward Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 74). The properties are not exclusive.
But my existence is preserved by myself or something else, which is the next step of the proof. Descartes supports the claim with his first and second axioms. First, we can ask about the cause of every existing being, including God. Though the deity has no cause, the reason he has no cause is his immensity. By contrast, we must have a cause given our limits. And since “the present time does not depend on the time immediately preceding it,” the second axiom, we must be caused at every moment.\textsuperscript{160} According to the first step of the demonstration, I do not have the power of self-preservation; something else must preserve me.

The final two steps of the proof bring in formality and eminence. By identifying the source of my preservation as God, the most perfect being, the deity’s existence is proved.

Moreover, he who preserves me has within himself either formally or eminently all that is in me (Ax. IV) [that the reality or perfection in an effect is in its cause]. However, there is in me a perception of many of the perfections I lack, and at the same time there is in me the perception of the idea of God (Defs. II and VIII) [the definitions of an idea and of God]. Therefore, the perception of these same perfections is also in him who preserves me.

The reality or perfection within me is formally or eminently within what preserves me. The fourth axiom does not require formality or eminence, just one or the other, and Descartes leaves the disjunction open for the remainder of his proof.\textsuperscript{161} On one hand, the perfections I perceive

\textsuperscript{160} AT VII, 165; Ar 164.

\textsuperscript{161} Adams notes how problems arise when Descartes settles the disjunction: no properties can be ascribed univocally to God and us, yet some formally exist in God (Robert Adams, “The Priority of the Perfect in the Philosophical Theology of the Continental Rationalists,” in Rationalism, Platonism and God, ed. Michael Ayers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 98. As I will argue shortly, this was not a central problem for Leibniz, or perhaps for thinkers of the time. We find a similar use of an open disjunction in Suarez: “It is certain that an effect cannot exceed in perfection all its causes taken together. The proof of this is that there is nothing of perfection in the effect that it does not have from its causes; therefore, an effect can have nothing of perfection that did not previously exist in one of its causes, either formally or eminently” (Disputations 9, section 2, para. 4; Ariew & Cottingham, Background, 36).
can be attributed to my cause; on the other, the perfections I perceive could be effected by my cause if my cause was substituted for the object. The perfections or reality within my ideas are also within my sustaining cause, either way.

Then there are perceptions within me of what I lack as well as an idea of the most perfect being. The conjunction of two definitions seems misleading as his definition of an idea alone does not imply that I perceive perfections I lack. Though a definition of God does mean we have an idea of him, it tells us nothing about how I perceive imperfection within myself. But these two definitions come together in a certain way to entail the claim. They are joined by ‘at the same time,’ or simulque. Descartes does not say I perceive my lack and absolute perfection at the same, but that I have a perception of many perfections I lack and a perception of the idea of God at the same time. So they are not the same perception, but concurrent ones.

Descartes builds from his prior step. Couching the proposition in terms of his earlier ones explains the sense in which our relevant perceptions are concurrent. If I perceive perfections that I do not have—perfections that I lack the power to obtain—they must adhere to what causes me formally or eminently. And I have an idea of God, a being that contains every perfection.

“Therefore, the perception of these same perfections is also in him who preserves me.” So far, it is the perception of these perfections that is contained in my cause, not the perfections themselves. But that follows from the axiom that every perfection or reality within something is also within its cause. At the very least, these perceptions are concurrent in the sense that they

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162 Since the predicates are genitive (multarum perfectionum and ideae Dei), they modify the nominative, perceptio, which Ariew’s translation captures.
rely on an identical cause.¹⁶³ It may not be the case that this same cause is God, given what has been shown.

The last step returns to the immediate possession of perfections lacked but are within one’s power to obtain. And the conclusion is reached that God is the cause of perfections I lack. Finally, this same being cannot have a perception of any perfections he lacks or does not have in himself, either formally or eminently (Ax. VIII) [the will gives itself perfections it lacks but can obtain], for since he has the power to preserve me…so much the more would he have the power to give himself those perfections were he to lack them (Axs. VIII and IX) [that what can do something more difficult can do something less so and that preserving a substance is greater than preserving an attribute]. But he has the perception of all the perfections I lack and that I conceive to be capable of existing in God alone…Therefore he has these perfections within himself either formally or eminently, and thus he is God.¹⁶⁴

As the continual cause of my substance, God can obtain every attribute. Since he can obtain every attribute, the perfections I contain and perceive within myself must be contained or perceived in him. Earlier, Descartes used these axioms to show why we cannot be the cause of ourselves. But there is a similar limit here: God may not have every perfection, though we could not conceive a perfection he does not have.

Descartes’ argument concludes that I have a cause outside myself, one which contains every perfection I contain and perceive. That cause is God because he contains every conceivable perfection formally or eminently. But there is a gap between my conception of an

¹⁶³ A stronger claim may be at stake: the perceptions are caused at the same time or they are perceived at the same time. For my purposes, it is enough that there is an identical cause—that the perceptions originate from the same source.
¹⁶⁴ AT VII 168-169; Ar 166.
ulterior cause and the being of the eighth definition, “That substance which we understand to be supremely perfect and in which we conceive absolutely nothing that involves any defect or limitation upon its perfection is called ‘God’.”\textsuperscript{165} In other words, an absolutely perfect being is identified with the substance we conceive as most perfect.

Not only does my ulterior cause contain perfections I perceive, but lack; it also contains perfections “I conceive to be capable of existing in God alone.” There are attributes I conceive, then, which set the nature of God apart from other beings. Immensity is one—and probably the most important for Descartes—and indifference is another, which is most significant for my purposes. Leibniz believes every divine perfection sets God apart with respect to the way they unite in God: all of creation prompts worship because natural perfections direct us towards the \textit{ens perfectissimum}. Descartes has a similar view.

Before the next proposition, Descartes has a corollary that is entailed from the above: “God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. Moreover, he can bring about all that we clearly perceive, precisely as we perceive it.”\textsuperscript{166} The corollary and its demonstration return us to \textit{Principia} and Descartes’ use of formality and eminence there. Considered together, these passages reveal the moral quality of God within creation.

2. \textit{Ingenuity within the idea}. Reflecting on God brings us from impartially thinking about ideas to making judgments about beings. The perfection within our ideas is contained within God, and from that perfection we can reason about beings since natural perfections, generally, are also contained within him. But that is not enough. Even if natural perfections are within God, that does not ensure our perceptions are accurate. Instead, the perfection within our ideas must be

\textsuperscript{165} AT VII, 162; Ar 163.
\textsuperscript{166} AT VII, 169; Ar 166.
formally or eminently contained in their cause, not just objectively contained. In this way perfections ground our expectation of arriving at truth through reasoning.

I quoted a passage from *Principles* earlier in which Descartes writes that, as modes of thought, our various ideas are not much different. They are diverse according to what they represent. And what they represent differs according to its perfection. There is a positive proportion between the perfection of an idea and its cause. Descartes uses the example of an architect.

For the whole of the ingenuity involved in the idea which is possessed by this man objectively, as in a picture, must exist in its first and principal cause, whatever that may be [another building, knowledge of physics, or his own ingenuity], not only objectively or representatively, but also formally or eminently.\(^\text{167}\)

In other words, the perfection in the architect’s idea is formally or eminently contained within the cause of that idea: formally, if the perfections are the same, and eminently, if the perfections in the idea can be replaced by the perfections in the cause without a change in effect.

An idea’s perfection depends on its cause, then, and so the perfection within our idea of God is proof of his existence. The argument is similar to the ones we have already seen.\(^\text{168}\) “But after having considered the immensity of the perfection it possesses,” Descartes explains, “we are constrained to admit that we can consider it only as emanating from an all-perfect being.”\(^\text{169}\)

Here, it is the immensity of divine perfection—immensity itself being a perfection—that proves

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\(^{167}\) AT VIII, 11; Ar 235.

\(^{168}\) Proposition 20 and 21, for example, point out that God is our cause and what sustains us, and so must exist.

\(^{169}\) AT VIII, 11; Ar 235.
God’s existence. The immense unity of God is such that every perfection contained or perceived within us is formally or eminently within him. We perceive the divine identity through our idea.

In the Latin edition, Descartes wrote that the divine idea “is the completion of all perfection” rather than “of a very perfect being.” The change is worth noting (the Latin being written first) since the French edition seems more consistent with his argument. From our inspection of an idea, and despite our limits, we perceive the immense perfection of God. We are unable to perceive complete and absolute perfection. This means that Descartes’ argument does not prove an absolutely perfect being, but one who contains every perfection we can conceive. Since we cannot conceive a more perfect being, there are reasons to believe that the cause of our existence is absolutely perfect. But that is not proved.

In the fifth axiom of his geometric construction, Descartes wrote that perfections must be formally or eminently contained within their cause and that “the acceptance of this axiom is so necessary that the knowledge of all things, sensible as well as insensible, depends on it alone.” There is a similar claim in Principles:

For it is not only made manifest by the natural light that nothing can be the cause of anything whatever, and that the more perfect cannot proceed from the less perfect so as to be thus produced as by its efficient and total cause, but also that it is impossible for us to have any idea of anything whatever, if there is not within us, or outside us, an original that contains all the perfections belonging to the idea.

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170 omnium perfectionum complementum rather than “un être très parfait” (AT VIII, 11; Ar 235; Descartes, Oeuvres, 235).
171 The following suggestion also explains why the superlatives of the Latin edition are often weakened to comparatives or qualified with ‘very’.
172 At least not with the argument in Principles. The first proposition, which was dealt with above, claims that by considering the divine nature such a being can be proved.
173 AT VIII, 11-12; Ar 235.
Descartes’ third axiom was that nothing cannot be the cause of something; that greater perfection cannot result from lesser perfection is part of his eighth axiom and assumed throughout his proofs. But what was required for knowledge is now also required for having “any idea of anything whatever.” This is a stronger claim than the earlier one. We may have representative ideas without thereby having knowledge—namely, when the perfection of our ideas is only objectively contained in their cause. Ideas prior to knowledge are lost without something containing their perfection. For a given idea to exist, every perfection within it must be contained by an original or archetype.

The immensity of God means every perfection is contained within him, and we have seen how our substance, ideas, and perfections, those we contain and perceive, require a being in whom they adhere. Something is contained in something else, Descartes explains, when “it is true of that thing or that it can be affirmed of that thing,” so natural perfections can be ascribed to the Creator.\textsuperscript{174} This is the ninth definition of his argument in geometrical fashion. In Principles, too, the immensity of God entails that every perfection can be ascribed to him as either true or affirmed. If a select perfection formally exists in him, it is true; if it eminently exists in him, it can rightly be affirmed of him but is not true, strictly speaking.

Descartes continues, “Although we do not fully grasp the whole nature of God, there is yet nothing we know so clearly as his perfections.”\textsuperscript{175} An astuteness toward the divine nature makes this proposition clear. Descartes explains,

For, though we do not comprehend them because the nature of the infinite is such that we, being finite, cannot comprehend them, yet we conceive them more

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{174} AT VII, 162; Ar 163.
\textsuperscript{175} AT VIII, 12; Ar 236. There is a change from the Latin in the title, which lacks the adjective, ‘whole’ (\textit{Etsi Dei naturam non comprehendamus}…).
\end{footnotes}
clearly and distinctly than any material thing, because, being simpler and not being limited by anything that may obscure them, they occupy our mind more fully.\textsuperscript{176}

The divine perfections can be clearly and distinctly conceived, but not understood. And so, Descartes will go on to write, we must believe divine revelations although they “surpass our capacities.”\textsuperscript{177} But the above quote also states our limits when it comes to God. Immensity describes perfections taken singly, not only the divine nature as a whole. God’s infinite nature is such that individual perfections cannot be comprehended as they are within God, though “they occupy our mind more fully.” Perfections are the clearest and most distinct objects of our conception.

A divine perfection, then, cannot be defined or proved since it is infinite. Still, they are clear and distinct, and, as a result, a basis for judgment.\textsuperscript{178} “I call a perception clear when it is present and apparent to an attentive mind,” Descartes writes, such as when an object presents itself to view. “But I call a perception distinct when it is clear and so different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear,” that is, clear enough to distinguish one object from another.\textsuperscript{179} If God’s perfections were unclear or indistinct, they would not formally or eminently contain natural perfections.

Leibniz is unsatisfied with Descartes’ criteria for separating true ideas from false ones: clarity and distinctness assume that the perceived idea is possible. I will come to his specific criticisms in a moment. By questioning Descartes’ criteria, Leibniz challenges not only his arguments for the existence of God, but the role of perfection in the Cartesian system. Despite

\textsuperscript{176} AT VIII, 12; Ar 236.
\textsuperscript{177} AT VIII, 14; Ar 237.
\textsuperscript{178} See AT VIII, 21, prop. 43; Ar 242.
\textsuperscript{179} AT VIII, 22; Ar 242.
their clarity and distinctness, perfections may not be true of God or affirmed of him if there remain unjustified and hidden assumptions. Also, if clear and distinct ideas are the only basis for separating perfection from imperfection, moral qualities vacate natural and divine perfections. That is, our perceived idea of God does not entail a moral quality, which in turn puts reason at risk. Morality does not follow from immensity. Objective reality may not be perceived within things or it may reduce to the fact of God’s creation.

Still, the perfection of the whole divine nature and its various perfections imbue creation for Descartes. Both he and Leibniz conceive perfection as the backdrop for all reasoning. In a corollary under the demonstration of God’s existence from our own, Descartes writes that divine perfection is so great that our perception of creation can correspond with how things were created.

All these things clearly follow from the preceding proposition. For in that proposition I proved the existence of God from the fact that there must exist someone in whom either formally or eminently are all the perfections of which there is some idea in us. But there is in us an idea of such great power that the one in whom this power resides, and he alone, created the heavens and the earth and can also bring about all the other things that I understand to be possible. Thus, along with the existence of God, all these things have also been proved about him.180

Our idea of God and our existence prove the existence of an all-powerful being that created everything and in a way that grounds our expectation of arriving at truth through reasoning. But axiom four—that the reality or perfection of something is contained formally or eminently in its

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180 AT VII, 169; Ar 166.
first and adequate cause—need not be assumed. And, to Leibniz, the role of God’s moral quality is conspicuously absent.

For Descartes, on the other hand, that we have an idea of God constitutes his moral quality: it is the means by which we perceive the deity and the origin of our reasoning as its security. Reasoning in accord with the immensity and power of God is part of our commune with him since natural perfections can be affirmed of the divine nature. Before looking at Descartes’ argument for the moral quality of God and its effects, I have a few remarks on how divine immensity figures in reasoning.

3. Descartes’ method. Except for sin, everything is an effect of God’s creative act. A proper philosophical method moves from cause to effect or effect to cause. So in either approach, the deity has a role as the ultimate cause. For Descartes, the immensity and indifference of the Creator fix right reasoning. “In order for us to proceed most securely,” he writes, “every time we want to examine the nature of something, we should remember that God, who is the author of it, is infinite, and that we are altogether finite.” And so the method begins with remembering the divine nature and, especially, the immensity of God.

Bodies are extended and divisible, which means limited, and God is infinite. Descartes’ method cannot grasp the infinite, only the indefinite. He writes,

We call these things indefinite rather than infinite in order to reserve for God alone the name of infinite, first because in him alone we observe no limitation whatever, and because we are quite certain that he can have none; second, because, in regard to other things, we do not in the same way positively

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181 That is, by analysis or synthesis; see AT VII, 119-120; Ar 157-158.
182 AT VIII, 14; Ar 237.
understand them to be in every respect unlimited, but merely negatively admit that their limits, if they exist, cannot be discovered by us.\textsuperscript{183}

The universe is so immense that we cannot determine its limits, but that does not mean the universe is infinite. We are uncertain whether or not it has limits, so its bounds are indefinite. By contrast, a most perfect substance cannot have limits, and so is absolutely perfect, or infinite.

Separating the infinite from the indefinite suits Descartes’ claim that an object’s perfection formally or eminently exists in its cause. Perfections we perceive are immense, especially divine ones, yet they are perceived as indefinite. A finite being cannot conceive an actual infinity. Now there is a clear sense in which divine perfections eminently exist in their cause: natural perfections are finite counterparts to their infinite source. They cannot be conceived as they are, i.e., as infinite, yet are affirmed of the infinitely perfect being. But an object’s perfection also formally exists in its source, otherwise natural perfection would not be a real effect of God. An eminently existing perfection is so great “that they could fill the role of things existing formally,” but they are not the attributes filling that role.\textsuperscript{184} In another sense, however, natural perfections do exist formally in the first cause. Obtaining such a cause from currently perceivable effects surpasses our mental powers.\textsuperscript{185}

Descartes’ method is limited in another, similar way. The ultimate reasons for creation exceed our intellect because “we should not take so much upon ourselves as to believe that God could take us into his councils.”\textsuperscript{186} Divine perfection is evident in divine omnipotence as creation’s efficient cause. Beginning with a keen awareness of the finitude of all things,

\textsuperscript{183} AT VIII, 15; Ar 238.  
\textsuperscript{184} AT VII, 161; Ar 162.  
\textsuperscript{185} That is not to say an \textit{a posteriori} argument cannot be given for the existence of God, but that specific natural perfections (any we perceive) cannot be traced back to their source.  
\textsuperscript{186} AT VIII, 15; Ar 238.
philosophy cannot rise to final causes. “We shall merely try to discover by the light of nature he has placed in us,” he continues, and “applied to those attributes of which he has been willing we should have some knowledge, what must be concluded regarding the effects that we perceive by the senses.”

Reason, or lumen naturale, which “[God] has placed in us,” verifies our perceptions. The effects of divine perfection within us do not enable us to witness the ends of creation; rather, they ensure that our judgments about local causes and effects, when based on clear and distinct perceptions, are true. That is all Descartes’ method requires.

“The first of God’s attributes that comes into consideration here,” that is, with respect to scientific investigation, “is that he is supremely true and the source of all light, so that it is completely contradictory that he should deceive us.” Descartes appeals to the moral quality of God, ensuring that the efficient cause of things has aligned our ideas and perceptions with how things in fact are. The truth of objects is found by investigating them, not reflecting on the divine nature, yet our expectation that such reasoning will discover truth depends on our knowledge of the divine nature. “The will to deceive proceeds only from malice, or fear, or weakness, and consequently it cannot be attributed to God,” Descartes concludes.

Leibniz believes the sincerity of the deity is not enough to establish the moral quality of God and of reason, and, as a result, that Descartes has an impoverished notion of perfection.

**Indifference of God**

God does not feel like embodied persons, Descartes remarks, just understands and wills. Even this distinction is artificial since he does not “[understand and will] as we do, by operations

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187 AT VIII, 15-16; Ar 238.
188 AT VIII, 16; Ar 238.
189 AT VIII, 16; Ar 238.
that are distinct from one another in some way, but by one action, always the same and simplest, he thinks, wills, and accomplishes everything simultaneously.\footnote{AT VIII, 14; Ar 237.} God is pure act and, as such, is inconceivable, but to make sense of his action as a being who acts (as opposed to a rock that is caused to fall), we can ascribe understanding and will to him. Descartes’ concession here, and not to feeling, results from the need to preserve God’s unity while allowing him to be intelligible. Only a body feels, but a body is divisible; divisibility implies limits, which are imperfections.\footnote{See AT VIII, 13; Ar 237.} Neither the intellect or the will threaten the seamless unity of God because they are of the mind and the mind is indivisible.\footnote{Leibniz gives a similar argument in Rationale (see A VI 4, 2307-2308 and 2316-2317).} Though they are the same within his simple nature, an intellect and a will can be affirmed of him.

I mentioned above that the indifference of God is the rational basis of creation. For Descartes, it is also the moral quality of reason. Creation was a pure act of will, lacking a prior reason, and creation is good as a result. Leibniz criticizes Descartes for offering a mere formal reason for creation, which includes a weak notion of perfection. The mark of God’s perfection is nothing more than power on the Cartesian system. A moral quality drops off. While my focus has been divine immensity, a final pass on how an indifferent will entails creation's goodness brings together the earlier claims.

Descartes defines indifference in a letter to Mesland: “indifference seems to me, strictly speaking, to denote that state in which the will finds itself, when it is not carried by the knowledge of what is true or what is good to follow one side rather than another.” And so an indifferent will is not inclined toward one of two (or more) options. Because the will is indifferent it is free, yet only in an absolute sense. Descartes continues, “Thus, even when a very
evident argument carries us to something, even though, morally speaking, it is difficult for us to do the contrary, nevertheless, speaking absolutely, we can do it.”\(^{193}\) Knowledge of what is good or true inclines us one way or another so that we are not wholly indifferent, morally speaking. But the power to act against that inclination is a sign that our will is indifferent by nature.

On the next page, Descartes goes on, “In fact, greater freedom consists either in a greater facility of self-determination or in a greater use of that positive power we have to follow the worse while seeing the better.”\(^{194}\) Creation involved both the ease of self-determination and a great use of positive power. Returning to Descartes’ “Reply to the Sixth Set of Objections,” “…because God has determined himself toward those things that ought now to be made, they are for that reason, as Genesis has it, ‘very good’.”\(^{195}\) As the most perfect being, God’s self-determined act is also the most perfect one because it is in conformity with himself.

It seems that by Descartes’ own lights, creation is not moral, but absolute, which would explain what Leibniz means when he calls the divine will an empty, pure, and indiscriminate external denomination. What makes God's will a formal reason *toute nue* is the absence of a moral quality from the will. Knowledge of what is good or true is set outside God’s creative act. A will that is not inclined toward what is good or true is not good; like a tyrant, goodness is decided by an act of will. Arguably, such a will is also a purely formal reason, if by that we mean absolute or exclusively formal. God’s indifference entails that no attributes within his creation motivated him. The revelation of the Creator within creation is a predication outside the subject. But we have already seen that that is not entirely the case: the fact of our existence, which is one of our predicates, is a mark of the Creator as well as our idea of God. While they are not reasons

\(^{193}\) AT IV, 173; Ar 273.
\(^{194}\) AT IV, 174; Ar 273-274.
\(^{195}\) AT VII, 436; Ar 201.
for God to create us, they are candidates for God’s moral quality, or commune with rational beings. Leibniz criticism is stronger: with only a formal reason for creation, the fact of our existence and the idea of God are empty—they contain nothing positive.

For Descartes, the exigency of creation, the obligation or tendency things have to exist—their perfection, in short—comes from the divine will. He stresses that reasoning is secure when it directs itself according to divine perfection. Such reasoning accords with the exigency of things, and so conforms to the divine will, and it does so in two ways: (i) following the positive proportion between the perfection of things and their cause (establishing the causal relation) and (ii) recognizing and measuring imperfection from our innate ideas (delimiting proper objects of knowledge). An astuteness conditioned by meditating on perfection guides reasoning to truth and secures it. For Descartes, the roles of perfection depend on a most perfect identity that is bereft of moral qualities. Indifference, in other words, is a placeholder for such absence. This becomes clear in his definition of substance.

“By substance,” Descartes writes,

“we can understand nothing else than a thing which so exists that it needs no other thing in order to exist. And, in fact, only one substance can be understood which clearly needs nothing else, namely, God. We perceive that all other things can exist only by the help of God’s concurrence. That is why the word ‘substance’ does not pertain univocally to God and to other things…that is, there is no meaning that can be distinctly understood as common to God and to his creatures.”

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196 AT VIII, 24; Ar 244.
A substance is a self-sufficient existence. We saw how Descartes uses that definition to prove the existence a most perfect being. God is a substance because he has the power to bring about and maintain his own existence; on the other hand, nothing else is substantial because everything depends on God. Yet Descartes will speak about created substance in a qualified sense: namely, as a being that depends on God’s concurrence but is self-sufficient otherwise. The divine substance is nothing like created substance; there is no meaning of the word shared between them. And that sharp difference removes a positive moral quality.

Despite their sharp difference, Descartes thinks we can speak of God as a substance alongside the mind and the body. Still, Descartes warns, God should be set apart. His warning is telling since it confirms how little divine perfection informs our understanding of the world. After noting thinking and corporeal substances, he writes,

We can also have a clear and distinct idea of an uncreated and independent thinking substance, that is, of God, provided that we do not suppose that this idea represents to us all things in God, and that we do not mingle anything fictitious with it, but simply attend to what is evidently contained in the idea, and which we are aware pertains to the nature of an absolutely perfect being.¹⁹⁷

First, Descartes notes that our idea of God does not exhaustively represent the deity. Our minds are finite and he is infinite, so our idea is clear and distinct without comprehending. We perceive God is indefinitely immense, yet believe that he is infinite. Such an infinite unity cannot be understood, except inasmuch as everything requires it. That requirement is within ourselves as a requirement for our existence. Nothing else is known of God save through his ulterior revelations, like scripture. Second, Descartes says we should not add fictions to our idea of God.

¹⁹⁷ AT VIII, 26; Ar 245.
He does not give us an example. Instead, we are left wondering which common views of the deity are fictitious. Last, he tells us to attend to what is “evidently contained in the idea” and what is included in the notion of a most perfect being. His demonstrations of God’s existence seem to work in two ways: not only proving his existence, but also limiting what is contained in our idea of God to the requirement of a cause outside us. Our idea presents nothing more than the fact of his existence and the required power.

Descartes’ warning gives reason for someone like Leibniz to be worried about the Cartesian system. The “infallible rule” with which Descartes ends the first part of *Principia* is less comforting than it seems:

Above all, we should impress on our memory as an infallible rule that what God has revealed to us is incomparably more certain than anything else, and that we ought to submit to divine authority rather than to our own judgment even though the light of reason may seem to us to suggest something opposite with the utmost clearness and evidence. But in things in regard to which divine authority reveals nothing to us, it would be unworthy of a philosopher to accept anything as true that he has not ascertained to be such, and to trust more to the senses, that is, to judgments formed without consideration in childhood, than to the reasoning of maturity.\(^{198}\)

Revelations of God are incomprehensible, yet God is the source of all truth. What God reveals should be accepted regardless of whether the light of reason prompts otherwise. One issue concerns divine perfection, which Descartes had said was most clear and distinct. Because of God’s immensity, truth and goodness can at least be affirmed of God if they do not present the

\(^{198}\) AT VIII, 39; Ar 253.
divine nature as it is. With respect to the status of perfection, then, Descartes may not believe natural perfections are revelations proper or they merely reveal the existence of a most perfect being. Divine authority sanctions as much.

A second issue concerns submission to divine authority. The light of reason may be set at odds with divine authority so that doctrines “incomparably more certain” require us to submit to what does not seem reasonable. Faith begins where reasoning leaves off. Certainty in divine matters results from its origin, which is attested for, believed in, and submitted to, while its rationality remains dubious. Leibniz worries about a sharp break between reasoning and faith.\textsuperscript{199}

There are many other matters of belief in which divine authority “reveals nothing to us.”

A third issue is the credence given to a philosopher’s judgment. Descartes argued before that judgments based on clear and distinct ideas cannot err. Once prejudices from youth and the senses are done away with, a philosopher can organize an unassailable system of beliefs from their own clear and distinct ideas. But our limitations as well as the effects of original sin may threaten Descartes’ confidence.

\textsuperscript{199} The short dialogue, “Dialogus inter Theologum et Mrosophum,” written between 1678 and 1679, argues that matters of faith and reason cannot be at odds, but are complementary (see A VI 4, 2212-2219).
Chapter 3: The Dangers of Cartesianism

It is not known precisely when Leibniz acquired Descartes’ writings, though he put forward an opinion of Descartes and the Cartesians as early as 1669. Throughout the 1670’s, various criticisms of Descartes appear, and by the turn of the decade his campaign against Cartesianism was in full swing. Among his many writings from the period were Meditationes de cognitione, veritate, et ideis, published in 1684, and Brevis demonstratio erroris memorabili Cartesii, which was published in 1686. While these writings are perhaps most notable, his manuscripts leading up to Examen engage with Descartes as well. Those writings will be my focus.

But before looking at them, there is a main thesis of Descartes’ that was dealt with above. Leibniz’s criticisms revolve around it, so I will mention it again briefly. The thesis is that the perfection or reality in an object must not only be objectively contained in its cause, but must be formally or eminently contained therein. Otherwise, we cannot be sure that a perception matches the perceived object. Leibniz jots in the margin of Descartes’ Meditationes that it suffices for them to be objectively contained. He explains,

…for just as this objective mode of being belongs to ideas in virtue of their nature, so also the formal mode of being belongs to the causes of ideas—at any

200 In their remarks preceding Leibniz’s marginalia to Descartes’ writings, the editors of the Akademie edition remark, “Wir wissen nicht, wann Leibniz in den Besitz der Werkausgabe Descartes’ gekommen ist” (A VI 4, 1695). (For his early opinion on Descartes, see A VI 1, 24-25.)
202 Both were published in the journal, Acta Eruditorum (A VI 4, 585-592 and 2027-2030).
203 Dating for the marginalia I will be quoting from is uncertain; the Akademie editors set a range from 1677 to 1687. His notes form a backdrop to the criticisms given in his preparatory manuscripts.
rate, to the first and most important causes—in virtue of their nature. And although perhaps one idea can be born from another idea, still, an infinite regress cannot be allowed. Instead, eventually one must come to some first idea whose cause is an image of the archetype that contains formally all the reality that is in the idea merely objectively.\textsuperscript{204}

By questioning Descartes’ fourth axiom, Leibniz challenges the view that the security of reason amounts to an astuteness for clear and distinct ideas. He also reintroduces matters of faith into reasoning.

In 1684, Leibniz asked himself how we could be sure divine goods are human goods, and his solution relies on the perfection of a world in which they are the same.\textsuperscript{205} This is not a problem for Descartes. The goodness of God is shown in the fact that an object’s attributes are either formally or eminently contained in their cause. A good God is not a deceiver. Leibniz rejects that ideas can be the source of our assurance, instead stating that the Creator formally contains every reality at a remove. To start, our ideas have a first idea, though whether we can reason back to it is dubious. Second, the first idea is an image of its origin, not the origin itself. While ‘image’ suggests that the first idea contains the reality of the origin formally or eminently, Leibniz goes on to say that the reality is objectively contained in the idea. On the other hand, the origin itself, and not its idea, formally contains reality.

What of eminence? A couple pages over, Leibniz notes that bodily attributes—extension, figure, location, and so on—are contained eminently in our substance.\textsuperscript{206} They are affirmed of us

\textsuperscript{204}…nam quemdmodum iste modus essendi objectivus competit ideis ex ipsarum natura, ita modus essendi formalis competit idearum causis, saltem primis et praeceptis, ex earum natura: et quamvis forté una idea ex alia nasci possit, non tamen hic datur progressus in infinitum, sed tandem ad aliquam primam debet deveniri, cujus causa sit instar archetypi in quo omnis realitas formaliter contineatur quae est in idea tantum objective (A VI 4, 1699-1700).

\textsuperscript{205}See (A VI 4, 1514).

\textsuperscript{206}See (A VI 4, 1700).
yet can be replaced by our substance with no change of effects. Whereas Descartes reserves eminence for the deity as a way to affirm transcendence, Leibniz uses the concept to explain human substance. Accordingly, it is not through peaceful self-reflection that we access substance, human or divine.\textsuperscript{207} Many, if not most, of our ideas and notions are confused. In place of reflection, criteria are needed for narrowing the margin of error and zeroing in on the truth.

Leibniz goes on,

...and yet while God is not deceptive [or while he has a certain moral quality], it is entirely manifest that those ideas are not introduced within me immediately by himself, nor even by some creature in which their objective reality is not contained formally, but only eminently. In fact, since he has clearly given me no faculty for recognizing this, but, on the contrary, [has caused] \textit{a great propensity for believing them to be emitted from corporeal things, I do not see by what reason God himself can be understood not to be deceptive if they are emitted from something other than corporeal things}.\textsuperscript{208}

The ideas Leibniz speaks of are probably ideas of substances. On the top of the page on which the above was noted, Descartes concludes his explanation of how belief in bodies is more a "blind impulse" than a "well-founded judgment."\textsuperscript{209} There is slight difference between ideas as modes of thought; however, they differ according to the objects they represent. Ideas that represent substances have more objective reality than those of modes or attributes.

\textsuperscript{207} Leibniz says as much in a number of places to Arnauld (see A II 2, 49-50, 51-52, 69-70, 122; AG 73-74, 75-76; M 53-55; AG 80).

\textsuperscript{208} \textit{...atqui cum Deus non sit fallax, omnino manifestum est illum nec per se immediate istas ideas mihi immittere, nec etiam mediante aliqua creatura in qua earum realitas objectiva non formaliter, sed eminenter tantum contineatur. Cum enim nullam plane facultatem mihi dederit ad hoc agnosceendum sed contra, magnum propensionem ad credendum illas a rebus corporeis emitti, non video qua ratione posset intelligi ipsum non esse fallacem, si aliiunde quam a rebus corporeis emitterentur (A VI 4, 1701).}

\textsuperscript{209} AT VII, 40; Ar 115.
For Leibniz, God’s moral quality ensures that our ideas match their represented objects. The “blind impulse” to believe that our ideas align with objects was placed in us by God. If that were not the case, or if it was even questionable, we would give up reasons for believing in the divine’s moral quality. Leibniz will not always hold to such a strong position. Still, his recourse to our innate propensity to trust our ideas is telling. What is more, there is no reason to accept that God has a moral quality if the propensity to believe is not within bodies themselves. Again, Leibniz will nuance that position, but his criticism is aimed at the basic assumption of Descartes’ method: by suspending God’s moral quality and introducing a malevolent demon, we can discover a principle within ourselves for securing reason.

But there is no faculty for separating formally and eminently contained objective realities, or perfections, either. Such a distinction assumes that we can decide which realities are as we perceive them and which are not. In other words, it assumes we can perceive the origin of our ideas. Leibniz does not think there is a natural faculty for doing so, and instead encourages the use of logic to separate true and false ideas. More broadly, he develops criteria of absolute perfection that entail God’s moral quality and secures our reason. Rather than beginning from our ideas, Leibniz’s method starts with a notion of God. His criteria can be read as an alternative to Descartes’ formally and eminently contained objective realities.

The exigency of creation is within things themselves, not the divine will. A body’s perfection is its inclination and tendency to exist, which indicates its substantiality. The same can

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210 In the 28th paragraph of “Discourse,” for instance, God’s moral quality is not evinced in the propensity within our perception of bodies, but the immediate concurrence of God that “excites our perceptions” (A VI 4, 1573-1574; AG 59-60).

211 I interpret the opening paragraphs of “Discourse” as arguing that God’s moral quality is entailed from the notion of a most perfect being. See chapter four.
be said for minds. Leibniz’s criticisms of Descartes, including the criticisms within his more theological pieces, should be framed accordingly.

Criteria to End Dispute

The intellectual climate for religious debate in which Leibniz wrote and thought was hostile. In a number of texts, he describes its tone. For example,

Whoever contends in religious matters for victory, not truth, and fights with insults and evil cunning, seems to me like gladiators of old so that among them even free persons are led on by zeal for the masses and the applause of an insane theater to shed life and be killed by the most severe injuries. Often, then, we see and grieve for men acting in such a way, distinguished in learning and eloquence, but wasteful of their own and others' salvation, so that they seem to have sought an applause more than truth with great damage to souls.\(^{212}\)

A similar picture is also given of the sciences and philosophy.\(^{213}\) What is needed, he tells us, are criteria for distinguishing truth and falsity and an indisputable method of arguing, investigating, and deciding.

Descartes fails to provide such criteria, as Leibniz makes clear in the opening paragraph of *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate, et ideis*.\(^{214}\) He takes direct issue with clear and distinct ideas a few pages later. After noting how it is susceptible to abuse, Leibniz writes, “For, often,

\(^{212}\) *Quicunque in religionis negotio non ad veritatem sed victoriam contendunt, conviciisque et malis artibus certant, mihi veterum gladiatoribus similes videntur, ut enim inter illos etiam liberi homines vulgi studio et insanientis theatri plausu ducebantur, ut vitam exponerent, et crudelissimis vulneribus conficerentur. Ita saepe videmus ac dolemus viros doctrina et eloquentia egregios, sed suae alienaeque salutis prodigos ita agere, ut applausum magis quam veritatem quaesivisse videantur magno cum detrimento animarum* (A VI 4, 2299-2300). See also Leibniz's dialogue from 1677 through 1681 (A VI 4, N. 397-400, especially, 2223, 2228-2229, 2241-2242, and 2249).

\(^{213}\) Namely, in his proposals for a *scientia generalis* (A VI 4, 692-693, 698, 947-948, and 953).

\(^{214}\) “…an issue on which Descartes himself is not entirely satisfactory” (A VI 4, 585; AG 23).
what is obscure and confused seems clear and distinct to people careless in judgment. Therefore, this axiom is useless unless we use *criteria* for the clear and distinct..."\(^{215}\) Limits, or thresholds, must be fixed. But insufficient criteria are also a religious and theological problem, and not only because dispute is insolvable.

The Natural Light of Truth

Leibniz's essay, “De la philosophie Cartesienne,” exemplifies his campaign against Cartesianism.\(^{216}\) There, Leibniz seeks the Jesuits’ support for his *scientia generalis*. And he applauds them for “believing that the surest path is not to stray without necessity or demonstration from received dogma, which often involve religion.”\(^{217}\) Descartes, on the other hand, wants to establish a sect. This ambition waylays “one of the greatest minds.”\(^{218}\) From the approval he has received, Descartes has become too confident in his own natural light and reasoning. Leibniz explains,

> The ambition to form a sect has sometimes brought good minds to advance shocking and dangerous novelties. By doing this, however, they enter into war with one another, and do harm to the good things they say, as also to the ancient truths whose foundations they shatter in the opinion of those men who take a liking to novelty. Having thus filled up their heads with hollow subtleties devoid of demonstration, fighting with each other with capriciousness and passion,

\(^{215}\) A VI 4, 590; AG 26-27. Also, in “De la philosophie Cartesienne,” Leibniz writes, “The advice not only to doubt everything but even to reject as false what is dubious, even though it can be given a good explanation, is not necessary for the discovery of truth and can be subject to great abuse” (A VI 4, 1482; Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 99. (translation modified).

\(^{216}\) See Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 93.

\(^{217}\) A VI 4, 1484; Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 100.

\(^{218}\) A VI 4, 1483; Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 99.
people miserably lose precious time that they could have employed to advance solid knowledge.\footnote{A VI 4, 1482; Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 99.}

Like the gladiators of old, ambition compels us to pit ourselves against others rather than search for truth. Even “good things” are “harmed” by ambition. The second half of the quote suggests what that harm entails. If “solid knowledge” is among the “good things” ambitious persons say, the harm of their ambition is its misuse and privation. Rather than use that knowledge to perfect others—the end of science—their reasoning is distorted by “hollow subtleties” and an impetus to fight with others.

Descartes’ ambition leads him to speak as if he were an oracle. No marks are given for distinct knowledge, and so his criteria of clearness and distinctness cannot help others separate truth from falsity. Instead, he records an “interior testimony of his idea.”\footnote{A VI 4, 1484-1485; Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 101.} As a result, Cartesians mimic and paraphrase Descartes because they reason from his authority, not according to the truth.\footnote{See (A VI 4, 1487); Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 102-103.} In place of advancing solid knowledge, Descartes has spawned similarly ambitious followers, many of whom are not learned, and, surprisingly, the Cartesian program “has vanished with Mr. Descartes.”\footnote{A VI 4, 1487; Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 102.}

“\textit{In order to put an end to this disease,}” that is, the ambition to form a sect that Descartes has imparted to his followers, “\textit{it is time to establish both the ancient truths and the new discoveries by demonstrations that are so exact that they can no longer be shattered.}”\footnote{A VI 4, 1483; Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 99.} A series of demonstrations are needed, and a new system constructed, that unite ancient truths and new discoveries. Leibniz’s \textit{scientia generalis} would accomplish just that, and he petitions the Jesuit
order for learned men who are willing to work in harmony and under some authority to complete
“a work of this force.”\textsuperscript{224}

\textit{1. Church Unity.} Right reasoning prompts agreement and moderation, and develops a
method and criteria for achieving both. “For whoever will be thus affected toward God [i.e., love
God above all else], the same man will burn with the zeal of peace and truth.”\textsuperscript{225} Descartes’
ambition to found a sect, unlike Leibniz’\textit{s scientia generalis}, does not conform to the moral
qualities of Christianity and its church. But that does not mean Leibniz is criticizing Descartes
when he writes of theology. He may have other targets—namely, Socinians and Remonstrants—
in mind. An argument needs to be made that Leibniz alludes to Descartes. One can be: there are
criticisms in his preparatory manuscripts for \textit{Examen} that are almost verbatim with his explicit
attacks elsewhere. Leibniz’ theological criticisms of Descartes are complex, however, since at
times Cartesianism is merely conducive to heresy and atheism while at other times it entails
heresy and atheism. The strength of Leibniz’ accusations depends on the status of the moral
quality of reason.

Leibniz alludes to Descartes in “Thoughts on the nature and power of the Catholic
Church.” After the last sentence quoted, in which affection towards God brings about “the zeal
of peace and truth,” he writes,

And so he will strive for union with the rest of the faithful as a great good, and so,
by this very desire of his, he will immediately be in inward communion with the
Church. He will defend his errors not out of stubbornness of will but by the
judgment of his intellect. For it is not within our power to change our minds, since
every opinion arises either from awareness of present reasons or from memory of
\vspace{1em}

\textsuperscript{224} A VI 4, 1488; Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 103.
\textsuperscript{225} \textit{Nam quisquis ita erga Deum affectus erit, idem studio pacis et veritatis ardebit} (A VI 4, 2339).
past reasons. Now since past reasons are not now very vivid in the mind and are not distinctly perceived, we remember now that they were at one time perceived by us. But present and past things are not in our power; only future things are. But it is not always within our power to find new arguments that are more powerful than earlier arguments. Hence it is most wisely said that the punishment for those in error is to be instructed.\textsuperscript{226}

The heading for this passage is “Yet it is most dangerous for the saved, without even regard for their fault, to be outside the visibly established Catholic church.” Leibniz is explaining how those who disagree with church doctrine can remain within the community and how church authorities should respond to disagreement, given human intellect and will. He is responding to a difficulty: proper reasoning, or, specifically, \textit{ingens bonum}, unifies, yet there remain conflicts within the church, doctrinal and otherwise.

Descartes did not excuse himself from the church, though he did excuse himself from theological and religious issues. He writes to Mersenne, for example, “As for the question \textit{whether it is suitable to God's goodness to damn people for eternity}, that is a question of theology; that is why you will allow me...to say absolutely nothing about it.”\textsuperscript{227} To separate faith from reason so sharply is dangerous for Leibniz. Before seeing why, I want to recall the last paragraph in part one of \textit{Principia}. Descartes avows that revelations are more certain than anything else and that “we ought to submit to divine authority rather than to our own judgment

\textsuperscript{226} \textit{Itaque unionem cum caeteris fidelibus tanquam ingens bonum affectabit; et jam tum proinde ipso voto suo in communione Ecclesiae interna erit; errores autem non pertinacia voluntatis sed judicio intellectus defendet; sententiam enim mutare non est arbitrii nostri cum omnis opinio vel a conscientia praesentium rationum vel a memoria praeteritarum oriatur. Praeteritarum scilicet cum nunc non satis in animo sunt praesentes, nec distincte percipiuntur, modo reminiscamur aliquando a nobis perceptas; praesentia autem et praeterita in arbitrio non sunt, sed futura tantum: rationes vero novas invenire prioribus validiores non semper in potestate est. Unde sapientissime dictum est Errantis poenam esse ut doceatur.} (A VI 4, 2339).

\textsuperscript{227} AT I, 153; Ar 30.
even though the light of reason may seem to us to suggest something opposite with the utmost
clearness and evidence.”228 Where church authority and reason conflict, we must submit to the
church. Only in matters of reason should we accept as true what we judge by clear and distinct
ideas. In the long passage just quoted, Leibniz gives an alternative by which someone can remain
within the church body, yet disagree with established doctrines. They can remain among the
faithful without denying what is obvious and rational to them.

First, the principle of unity within the church is not forced submission, but the effects of
*ingens bonum*. In the section preceding the long quote above, Leibniz declares that loving God
over all is the one requirement for salvation, that such love depends on the incarnation and a
work of the Holy Spirit, and that someone does not need to be part of the established church to
be saved.229 Nor do schisms leave one group outside the kingdom of God and another within.
And *ingens bonum* is likely synonymous with love of God, or there is overlap with respect to
community, minimally.230 They describe a disposition, tendency, or inclination that is essential to
“right reasoning,” a concept Leibniz uses elsewhere to describe how the true church ought to be
defended.231 Since every believer wills the same as God, the effects of *ingens bonum* unify them.

Next, a person enters the church from promise. Leibniz does not tell us exactly what he
means, nor does he develop an account of church membership. Instead, he states that someone
can belong to the church and be in error; these are not mutually exclusive. Then he explains why.
Already he sets himself apart from Descartes and the Cartesians because submitting to church
authority is not the beginning or end of belonging to the church. Someone cannot submit to the
church, then reason as they please. Nor is a domain of reasoning wholly irrelevant in matters of

228 AT VIII, 39; Ar 253.
229 See (A VI 4, 2338). Similar claims are made in Examen (A VI 4, 2369-2371, 2378).
230 I demarcate love of God more precisely in the next chapter.
231 See (A VI 3, 226-233 and A VI 4, 2298).
faith, or vice versa. For Leibniz, affection is coupled with an internal promise. There is room for
disagreement as long as it is grounded in affection towards others and commitment. As a result,
“the penalty of the Lost is to be instructed,” not condemned, because affection and commitment
dispose believers to reason together rightly.

Once among the faithful, a person errs from their intellect, not from an obstinate will.
Affection and promise do not suffice to bring about doctrinal agreement. There are a few
implications of this insufficiency, one especially contrasting Leibniz with Descartes. Perceiving
the agreement of everyone else, someone cannot change what they think by an act of sheer will.
The believer may want to agree due to their affection toward other believers and their
commitment to the church community since she is disposed toward unity with other believers.
But Leibniz sets himself apart from Descartes by lessening the role of the will and integrating the
will with the intellect. Even the promise that brings someone into the church is not merely
willed, but concurrent or after the renewal of the mind. In a like way, submission to the church
cannot be merely willed. There is the affection and promise that dispose the believer to submit,
but not in direct conflict with reason.

Leibniz delimits the effect of perceiving others’ agreement to show how those similarly
disposed may still disagree. Such perceptions are of past or present, but they “are not in our free
will,” which is of the future. But if we act and decide according to our will, it is unclear why the
perception of others’ agreement does not prompt us to will the same—unless, in fact, Leibniz is
pointing that out. For believers, there is no basis for disagreement in the will. He seems to have
two claims. On one hand, since there is disagreement among those disposed to agree, their
disagreement must originate from the intellect. There is no other source of contention. On the
other hand, perceiving does not suffice for action. If perceiving agreement were enough to bring
it about, persons would not have free will. Perceptions are of the past or the present, and a person exercises their will toward the future. The latent criticism of Descartes is that clear and distinct ideas do not suffice for right action and secure decision.

Rational demonstrations will not always be in the offing. Sometimes, finding new reasons from prior ones is not within our power. Leibniz is not separating matters of faith from reason, however. Action and decision cannot always, or often, proceed with rational certainty. If he were following Descartes, Leibniz may separate actions based on revelation from those based on reason. Those who err would need to be instructed in revelations as they have been handed down in tradition and the scriptures. That instruction would assume submission. Regardless of what instruction entails, Leibniz’s point is that those who err with their intellects can remain in the church. Rational disagreement does not preclude unity. In other words, Leibniz allows doctrinal disharmony within the church (to a degree) and explains how disagreement does not undermine unity. Submission, as Descartes describes it, has no place.

2. Private Opinion as Superstition. Without criteria for narrowing our judgments, we are liable to illusion, prejudice, and dogmatism. Leibniz often names a criticism of this kind when speaking of Cartesianism, and one of these we have already seen: Descartes speaks like an oracle, testifying of his clear and distinct ideas. His testimony does not benefit the reasoning of others, and so reverts to an unprofitable dogmatism. Leibniz’s appeal for criteria, while similar across texts, changes when it appears in matters of physics, metaphysics, theology, and logic. Criteria have effects beyond their discipline, especially the ones of our concern. But the absence of criteria in varying domains is the same—illusion, prejudice, and dogmatism.

Continuing with Leibniz’s manuscript on Cartesian philosophy, he warns, “The advice to not only doubt everything that can be doubted, but even to reject as false what can be doubted
even if it can be given a good explanation, is not needed for the discovery of truth and can be subject to great abuse.”

232 The hypothesis of an evil demon does not obtain a criterion or principle. For Descartes, it reveals an unshakeable intuition—specifically, the intuition that he is a thinking thing, which grounds his demonstrations. 233 But, for Leibniz, an intuition is little better than personal testimony if there are no marks by which to distinguish true ideas from false ones. Leibniz alludes to Descartes’ evil demon in Examen when discussing revelations. As we should expect, Descartes’ hypothesis is opposed to criteria.

“Now a revelation must be distinguished by certain marks (commonly called motives of belief),” Leibniz writes, “from which it may be established that its apparent content is the will of God, not the illusion of an evil demon or a wrong interpretation of ours.”

234 As an allusion to Descartes’ hypothesis, this passage can be read in a few ways, non-exclusively. First, then, Leibniz suggests that the hypothesis of an evil demon threatens our judgment of revelations and must be circumvented. He suggests this risk without assuming radical doubt. And because he pairs his allusion with a “wrong interpretation,” too, Leibniz does not seem to be adopting Descartes’ strategy. Nonetheless, we require some basis of judgment beyond the phenomena themselves.

So far, Leibniz may not be criticizing Descartes, but referring to a (by then) well-known trope that reveals the possibility of deceit. “A wrong interpretation of ours,” however, may do more than deflate the evil demon hypothesis. Instead, there is a latent criticism of the Cartesian strategy: we may wrongly interpret which ideas of ours are clear and distinct by taking as clear

233 See (AT VII, 28-29; Ar 109-110).
234 Porro revelatio notis quibusdam insignita esse debet (quas vulgo motiva credibilitatis vocant) ex quibus constet id quod in ea continetur nobisque ostenditur Dei esse voluntatem non illusionem mali genii neque nostram sinistram interpretationem (A VI 4, 2361).
and distinct what is not. In his marginalia on Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, for example, Leibniz notes that the words, *cogito ergo sum*, contain nothing clearly; rather, it is assumed that whatever thinks must thereby exist.\(^{235}\) The problem is being rightly attentive to distinct perceptions, otherwise such words lead to a false sense of security. And what is more, by conjoining the threat of a wrong interpretation with the evil demon, he may be noting that the former is as devastating and pernicious as the later. If so, Leibniz is using the rhetorical force of Descartes’ hypothesis against him.

A latent criticism in this passage fits well with what has already been said. Leibniz accuses Descartes of endorsing a revelation that cannot be tested, which is no better off than superstition. He writes, “Thus, faith should in no way be put in lots, visions, dreams, seers, or other like nonsense, which we inanely call divinations (as if they were signs of the divine plan),” nor in Descartes, who fashions himself an oracle.\(^{236}\) At issue is the nature of ideas.

Leibniz summarizes his criticism of Descartes’ criteria well in the last paragraph of *Specimen of Catholic Demonstrations, or, Apology for the faith through reason*:

I understood, of course, that it [namely, appeal to clear and distinct ideas] is prone to misuse, and is worthless unless marks of ‘clear’ and ‘distinct’ are identified. For everybody thinks that he understands clearly and distinctly whatever has impressed itself strongly upon him, and if he appeals to the inner testimony of the spirit then all debate at once ceases with him, and an incurable error remains in his mind. Thus there is need for everybody to have not private marks of the truth, but public ones, no more so in religion than in philosophy.\(^{237}\)

\(^{235}\) See (A VI 4, 1697).

\(^{236}\) *Itaque sortibus, visionibus, somniis non facile, auguriis, ominibus, aliisque id genus nugis, quas inepte divinationes (quasi divini cujusdam consilii signa) appellamus, nullo modo fidendum est* (A VI 4, 2362).

\(^{237}\) A VI 4, 2327; LGR 107-108.
Faith and Reason

Between 1678 and 1679, Leibniz composed a discussion between Theologus and Misosophus on the conformity of faith and reason. Misosophus begins by quoting the first letter to the Corinthians, which says that “the wisdom of man is foolishness to God.” In response to his claim that faith must leave reason behind, Theologus defends the rationality of faith. “The metaphysical principles,” he later claims, “are mutually divine and human.” The natural light of reason and the principles of faith are consistent and complementary.

Misosophus could stand in for Descartes, or at least popular receptions of his philosophy. Although Descartes thinks natural reason does not conflict with revelation, revelation might seem unreasonable. For Leibniz, the gap between natural reason and revelation is not a break—that is, one cannot conflict with the other. Faith and reason are mutually supportive. On a page added to “Rationale of the Catholic faith against sects of every kind,” he writes,

For, since I see many learned minds suspended with anxiety of the future, not holding to what they say or do not say about God or the soul, sometimes believing, sometimes not believing in their strength to create, how can I not give thanks to God that such disturbance of mind remains stilled in my peaceful, supreme pleasure, which has raised my mind above the vanishing concerns of mortals by a constant hope of a future life, and which shows me the wonderful consistency and beauty of his divine philosophy and the harmony of grace joined

238 1st Cor. 3:19 (A VI 4, 2213; LGR 96).
239 A VI 4, 2215; LGR 99.
240 Antognazza summarizes the three roles of reason in matters of faith, for Leibniz: (i) historical and philological verification of the scriptures, (ii) interpretation of the scriptures, and (iii) defense of revealed truth (Antognazza, *Trinity*, 69).
with nature? For, although I am no less persuaded from familiar principles of faith without considering reasons, I would still be partly blind to the great things of that incredible will that I now frequently perceive if the consistency of faith and reason was withheld from me.  

Besides listing the moral effects of his philosophy, Leibniz criticizes the Modern disposition. The Modern philosophies engender an anxiety about the future. As a result, their views and confidence waver. Leibniz thinks such anxiety is deeply problematic, hindering the sciences, piety, and happiness.

Descartes’ mechanism can explain specific natural phenomena, Leibniz grants, and he also agrees that the Scholastics’ misuse form and matter as an explanatory principle. In the above quote, however, Leibniz takes issue with Descartes’ separation of faith and reason. Leibniz accepts, like Descartes, that Christian truths can be persuasive “from familiar principles of faith without considering reasons” (though Descartes may be catering to the Sorbonne theologians when he comments to that effect). To proceed solely from principles of faith or principles of reason leave a thinker “partly blind.” So the dangers Leibniz sees in Cartesianism revolve around a blind spot of reason when divorced from faith. An example is the oracular

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241 Cum enim videam tot praeclara ingenia futuri anxia haerere, nec habere quod de Deo aut de anima dicant vel non dicant, et nunc in credendo nunc in non credendo sibi vim facere: nonne Deo gratias agam, quod tantam animi tempestatem in me jucundissima quiete composit. Quod mentem futurae vitae spe constabilita supra res mortalium fluxas erexit, quod mihi ostendit admirabilem consensum et pulchritudinem divinae suae philosophiae, ac gratiae cum natura conspirantis harmoniam. Quanquam enim non minus persuasus sim ex domesticis fidei principiis, nullo rationum respectu, magna tamen incredibilis illius voluptatis quam nunc subinde percipio, parte carerem, si fidei rationisque consensus mihi detrheretur (A VI 4, 2304).

242 I will return to the moral effects of his philosophy in the next chapter.

243 See (A VI 4, 1543; AG 42).

244 To Misosophus’ remark that “I have always been pleased by the modesty of those who humbly profess that they believe without any inquiry,” Theologus responds, “Believe me, often those who speak like that in earnest are either very simple...or true hypocrites and secret atheists...For when they introduced serious problems they pretended that they were yielding to the authority of the Church and that these problems were not obstacles. There is no greater enemy of religion and piety than he who asserts faith contrary to reason, which is to prostitute faith before the wise” (A VI 4, 2218; LGR 102).
declaration of clear and distinct ideas; another is the definition of body as extension; yet another
is the removal of final causes from physics. Instead, the consistency of faith and reason forms the
highest expression of the divine will.

1. Principle of Contradiction. For Descartes and for Leibniz, the principle of
contradiction is an eternal truth. Descartes explains that an eternal truth is a “common notion”
that “has its seat in our mind” and that “we cannot fail to recognize them when the occasion
presents itself.”\(^\text{245}\) And he believes God created these truths, and so could have created them
otherwise. Leibniz disagrees.\(^\text{246}\) The principle of contradiction is the bridge between matters of
natural reason and faith, human truths and divine ones. Although the identity of God cannot be
fully comprehended by finite minds, it does not violate our principle of contradiction.
Consequently, we can conduct an “analysis of faith” while acknowledging the inscrutability of
the mysteries. Even mysteries do not violate certain standards.\(^\text{247}\)

In a fragment written around 1685, Leibniz responds to a position advanced by the Jesuit,
Father Fabri, who held that some divine matters exceed the human mind such that they must be
believed on faith and faith is required because contradictory predicates are included in the
godhead. Examples given are the trinity and the incarnation.\(^\text{248}\) Like Descartes, Fabri held that
the divine will and nature are not limited by the laws of human thought. Apparent contradictions
can be unified in God. Thus, faith is understood as believing doctrines that conflict with reason
and an analysis of the mysteries is impossible.

\(^\text{245}\) AT VIII, 24; Ar 243-244.
\(^\text{246}\) See chapter 2.
\(^\text{247}\) For rational reconstructions of Leibniz's argument that the mysteries can be reasoned over, see Marcelo Dascal,
and Thought (Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1987; Adrion Bardon, “Leibniz on the Epistemic Status
\(^\text{248}\) See (A VI 4, 2340). More specifically, the discussion centers on virtual reasons, where diverse reasons are
actually the same.
Leibniz states a few unpalatable results of Father Fabri’s view. Primarily, if we admit contradiction into the deity, no argument can be given for the existence of God. There is a difference between a formal contradiction and our way of conceiving in the intellect. How we must think about God to understand him does not mean there is a violation of the law of non-contradiction. A formal distinction of the divine nature—between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for instance—does not entail a contradiction. Leibniz answers for Fabri: there is a formal contradiction when one predicate negates another, and the Father is not the Son, the Son not the Holy Spirit, and so on. Our way of conceiving is either true or false. The trinity forces us to both affirm that the Father is not the Son and to affirm that the Father is the Son insofar as God is one. The contradiction, Leibniz goes on, speaking for Fabri, results from the infinite nature of God, which defies finite understanding.  

However, the principle of contradiction should be applied to human and divine spheres for two reasons: nothing absurd can be ascribed to the deity and divine matters can be reasoned over. “Generally, nothing in divine matters can be said to be against reason, many things are above it.” To allow divine matters to conflict with reason opposes the fifth Lateran Council in which it is acknowledged that “though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason.” By excluding natural reason from faith, the existence of God cannot be reasoned over, let alone demonstrated. A few lines down he goes on, “It will therefore be wiser and sounder to say that contradictory propositions must not be admitted either concerning God or concerning creatures.”

249 For a discussion of Leibniz’s explanation of the trinity at this time, see Antognazza, Trinity, 70-73.
250 Communiter dicitur nulla in divinis esse contra rationem, multa super eam (A VI 4, 2341).
252 Prudentius ergo et sanius dicetur, neque in divinis neque in creatis admitendas esse propositiones contraditorias (A VI 4, 2341).
Descartes does not endorse Father Fabri's strong view, though holding that we must submit to the church even when the mysteries appear to conflict with reason. For Leibniz, that is a risky pronouncement. To hold reason and faith apart suggests that matters of faith cannot be rationally analyzed and that they do not contribute to and prompt reasoning. But exercising the mind is our highest perfection, so we should expect matters of faith to dispose us to reason and reward us for reasoning.

2. Uncertainty. To secure reasoning by the cogito disables judgments and decisions of the future. Or, rational beings make decisions assuming that the future is determined. Regardless, there is a persisting arbitrariness in nature that resists being reasoned over, and, as a result, there is anxiety about the future. Since faith is involved in day to day decisions, reasoning must be secured rationally without removing our dependence on faith. An intuition alone cannot remove uncertainty. But certainty must be achieved for reason to be secure. At best, an intuition offers security when we clearly and distinctly perceive it. But that is not always the case, nor does it justify our reasoning before others or help them reason for themselves. And, as we have already seen, Descartes has no communicable reason to believe his clear and distinct ideas are in fact clear and distinct. Yet Leibniz believes we can reason with certainty. In the first draft of Rationale of the Catholic Faith, he locates certainty in the pursuit of knowledge and divine providence, writing, “Science [Scientia] and divine providence indeed remove uncertainty from things.” Before examining Leibniz's claim to certainty, I will note why anxiety is problematic for him.

\[253\] See chapter 1.
\[254\] See (A VI 4, 2363).
\[255\] Scientia et providentia divina tollunt quidem ex rebus incertitudinem (A VI 4, 2310).
Science aims at the perfection of minds.\textsuperscript{256} The pursuit of truth is necessary for happiness, Leibniz observes, because happiness requires contentment, which requires an assurance of the future.\textsuperscript{257} Scientific results enable safe predictions and explanations, and so curb anxiety. But Leibniz notes in the above quote that anxiety also hinders the search for truth. To overcome crippling uncertainty, Leibniz sought to develop a \textit{scientia generalis}, including a method for discovering truth. Descartes’ call to begin with clear and distinct ideas does not ease anxiety because there are no marks by which others can recognize those ideas as such. Nor does he provide means for supporting one’s judgment before others. And, more problematically, clearness and distinctness limit the kinds of judgments we can make of the future. For Descartes, we must resign ourselves to the divine will.\textsuperscript{258}

Further, anxiety distorts the natural light of reason, like a prejudice. In “On attempting an apology for Catholic truth,” Leibniz summarizes his approach for what will be the \textit{Examen}. The work will be anonymous and will avoid accusations altogether even when they are true, for just as rough waters admit no light, so also a mind disordered by anger and hatred do not admit the light of truth.\textsuperscript{259}

Anxiety for the future undermines the natural light of reason, similarly. Leibniz’s worry is that rational beings will not be confident in their reason or will limit the scope of reasoning unnecessarily, as Descartes does. The principle on which love is founded—“that God always acts in the most perfect way and the most desirable way possible”—responds to our anxiety about the future.\textsuperscript{260} In \textit{Examen}, he explains,

\textsuperscript{256} See (A VI 4, 697).
\textsuperscript{257} See (A VI 4, 3).
\textsuperscript{258} Leibniz comments, “It also seems to me that placing the conciliation of free will and God’s concourse among the inexplicable things is to favor necessity” (A VI 4, 1482; Leibniz & Laerke, “Leibniz,” 99.
\textsuperscript{259} “etiam cum verae sunt, tamen nocetur ver<\textless;iatit>, ut enim liquores agitati claritatem, ita mens ira atquae odio turbida lucem veritatis non admittit” (A VI 4, 2300).
\textsuperscript{260} A VI 4, 1535; AG 38.
…those who understand these things, who fix them deep inside their mind and express them in their life, never grumble about the divine will, knowing that all things work together for the good of those who love God, and just as they are content with the past, so they endeavor, with regard to the future, to do everything which they judge to agree with the presumed will of God. 261

Divine perfection secures our reasoning, past and future, by assuaging our uncertainty in the face of an unknown and uncontrollable future. To Leibniz, Descartes offers no recourse, which is evident in Cartesian morality.

**Forced Patience**

Although Descartes never published a full ethical system, Leibniz accuses him of Stoicism. 262 Leibniz sees this moral implication as a further danger of the Modern’s views.

And this [i.e., Descartes’] Stoicism that is brought back to life, that makes a virtue out of necessity, and that places all happiness in a certain forced patience, is not quite the same as Christian morality. 263

Because of how Descartes secures reason, what is out of our control must be passively accepted. Our moral quality reduces to a will that is liable to the passions, external events, and bodily constraints. 264 Stoicism results from the view with which my study began: that the divine perfection expressed throughout creation is no more than a formal reason.

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261 A VI 4, 2358; LST 202.
262 See (A VI 4, 1385; AG 282).
264 For example, in the third part of his *Discourse on Method*, Descartes’ third maxim is “always try to conquer myself rather than fortune, and to change my desires rather than the order of the world; and generally to accustom myself to believing that there is nothing that is completely within our power except thoughts.” He goes on a few lines down in a vein that affirms Leibniz’s criticism: “And this alone seemed to me sufficient to prevent me in the future from desiring anything but what I was to acquire, and thus to make me contented” (AT VI, 25; Ar 57).
God's Moral Quality

In *Rationale of the Catholic Faith*, Leibniz affirms God’s goodness or justice. The passage echoes claims made in the first and second paragraph of “Discourse” as well as the opening paragraphs of *Examen*. It also reiterates his criticisms of Descartes. I will focus on those criticisms.

In fact, it is a very dangerous opinion of those who consider that the just and the good derive not from the actual notions of things but from the sheer choice of a legislator, and who make every law positive, just like the preacher of tyranny in Plato, who defines justice as that which pleases the powerful. On this basis there would be no notion of justice in itself, nor would justice be something attributed to God, nor would God differ from a tyrant except in terms of power. And why, I ask, would God be praised for the beauty and perfection of the things he had made or for the justice of his own decrees; how would he have seen that what he made was good if it didn't matter what he would make, if anything he would have made would be, by that very fact, beautiful, good and just, even those things which are now considered wicked? Lastly, how can he be said to have acted wisely and as befits the most perfect mind if, in that which he produces, it happens as though by a kind of fated lot rather than reached by a definite rule of choice?\(^{265}\)

There are clear similarities between his criticisms here and those given in the second paragraph of “Discourse,” most notably where he writes,

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\(^{265}\) A VI 4, 2319-2320; LGR 76-77.
Also, in saying that things are not good by any rule of goodness, but by God’s
will alone, it seems to me that we unthinkingly destroy all love of God and all his
glory. For why praise him for what he has done if he would be equally
praiseworthy in doing the opposite? Where will his justice and wisdom reside if
only a certain despotic power remains, if will holds the place of reason, and if,
according to the definition of tyrants, what pleases the most powerful is in itself
just?266

The overlap is important because it draws together Leibniz’s philosophical and theological
views—specifically, those of the “Discourse” and of the Examen. Descartes (and Spinoza) are
criticized philosophically as well as for the theological implications of their claims. Divine
perfections must be perceived within creation and judged as perfections from created things,
otherwise perfection amounts to no more than a show of force. But that has been dealt with
above, except, now, we can add that on Descartes’ view our response to the divine act, and so
our commune with God, is submission to its unfolding. Such submissiveness is Descartes’
Stoicism. Drawing from my earlier discussion, I will now detail how a moral quality drops out of
Descartes’ system and, as a result, out of reasoning altogether.

In these passages Leibniz is worried about Cartesianism’s danger to piety, which is
evinced by his rejection of the search for final causes, his belief that there is no justice,
benevolence, or truth except as God wills, and that matter takes all possible forms.267 Those
positions lead Leibniz to suspect the loss of the moral quality of reason in Descartes’
philosophy—they do not entail the loss of that moral quality. Divine perfection entails a moral
quality and secures our reasoning, and so is the object of Leibniz’s concern.

266 A VI 4, 1532-1533; AG 36.
267 See (A VI 4, 1386; AG 282).
For Descartes, perfection links an idea to its object or to its cause. His arguments for the existence of God center on the innate idea we have of God, then on the requirements for my existence. When I perceive the perfection of an idea, it exists either formally or eminently in its object—that is, either as I perceive it or in such a way that the perfection of the object could produce the effects of how I perceive it. Eminence allows divine perfection to be effective and expressed throughout creation without being in creation as such. And, ultimately, the need for perfection, or reality, relating idea and object shows how an absolutely perfect being is assumed in every step of reasoning. Leibniz will be committed to a similar claim.²⁶⁸ The problem is that, although perfection comes in degrees, its perception is not ruled or measured, save as the strength of an impression. For Leibniz, a moral quality within reason ensures that the divine intellect can be comprehensible, even if never fully comprehended or intuited, and this means that it is susceptible to analysis and criteria.²⁶⁹

By claiming divine perfections are eminently contained in all created things as well as holding that perfection results from the divine will, Descartes separates the nature of God from reasoning about nature. The requirements for reasoning are that God creates and sustains, meaning that the individual divine perfections we perceive in creation are power and immensity. If there is a moral quality left, the passage in Rationale affirms that it is pure positivity, or good because it is willed and exists. Rational beings do not recognize that as justice, but tyranny. On the other hand, justice is rational because there is a balance between what is done and the consequences. Rewards and punishments are requirements of justice, but Descartes leaves us with an indifferent God who is not concerned with human acts. Perfection does not implicate the effects of human action, good or bad.

²⁶⁸ The role of perfection in his philosophy is discussed in chapter 4.
²⁶⁹ For instance, Leibniz observes that perfections are the limits of God (A VI 4, 2216; LGR 100).
Perfection must enable us to judge the presumed will of God with reason and security for rational beings to have commune with God. If we must resign ourselves to God’s future will instead of anticipate it, we cannot participate in the divine plan: our actions are formally within the divine economy insofar as we exist, but our actions and decisions cannot contribute or take away from the perfection of creation. Said otherwise, reasoning does not have a moral quality. And so we should be able to derive goodness and justice from our notion of things, which contain marks of their Creator. On the other hand, we must be able to judge the value of creation apart from the Creator’s decision to create it; otherwise, creation is not amenable to rules of goodness and the moral quality of God is effaced, or at least incomprehensible.

Shortly, I will argue that the opening paragraphs of “Discourse” and Examen are concerned with prompting right reasoning, a main part of which is security in the face of an unknown future. For Leibniz, Descartes’ philosophy does not incorporate love of God, which characterizes right reasoning, and so he cannot make judgments that presume the divine will with the risk that he is wrong. Descartes’ security must be given apart from rational commune with God, and so his philosophy results in passivism.

The Past and the Future

In paragraph four of “Discourse,” Leibniz separates himself from Miguel de Molinos and his followers, the Quietists. After defining love as sameness of wills, coupled with the belief that God wills everything that occurs, Leibniz expects his views will be misconstrued as passive compliance. Some brand of passivism seems to follow his rejection of the view that God could have created a better world. But his avoidance of passivism results from his notion of love. “I

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270 See Arieew's and Garber's footnote, AG 38.
271 See (A VI 4, 1533-1534; AG 36-37).
believe it is difficult to love God well,” he tells us, “when we are not disposed to will what he
wills, when we may have the power to change it.” 272 Besides being the will of God, whatever
happens is for the best, the most perfect and most desirable. That truth is the foundation of love,
yet risks undermining love’s activity.

“I hold, therefore, that, according to these principles, in order to act in conformity with
love of God, it does not suffice to have patience by force,” Leibniz continues, “rather, we must
be truly satisfied with everything that occurs to us following his will.” 273 The error of Quietism
(and Descartes) is endorsing “patience by force,” which is no different than discontentment. 274
And those who are discontent are not much different than someone in rebellion. Ceasing activity
is not desiring whatever happens, so passivity does not exclude rebellion. By reminding us that
love is a disposition, Leibniz offers an alternative to passivism that secures our reasoning of the
future. The lover’s regard for the past and the future is distinct—“I mean this acquiescence with
respect to the past,” Leibniz clarifies. Being “truly satisfied” conforms to a sort of activity
because it is a disposition and tendency, not brute will.

The lover’s regard for the past and the future is noted in “Discourse” and Examen. The
distinction is crucial for understanding the nature of love. In Examen, Leibniz observes that
“those who believe this [i.e., that God does what is most desirable and perfect], and fix them
deeply in their minds, and express them in their lives, never murmur against the divine will.”275
Stress should be placed on the fact that the lover’s life expresses their belief. Love is a pervasive
disposition of the soul expressed throughout one’s life. Since everything that occurs expresses

272 A VI 4, 1535; AG 37.
273 A VI 4, 1535; AG 37-38.
274 Leibniz writes of Descartes and Spinoza, “If they knew that all things are ordered for the general good and for the
particular welfare of those who know how to make use of them, they would not identify happiness with simple
patience” (A VI 4, 1385; AG 282).
275 Qui enim haec sentiunt, penitusque animo infigunt, et vita expriment, hi nunquam obmurmurant divinae voluntati
(A VI 4, 2358).
the divine will, and the Creator’s good is our own, love is an affirmation of and desire for what has occurred. The past is accepted *per se*, not endured for the sake of something else, or *propter aliud*. Only the former describes love. With forced patience, on the other hand, the divine will is not an immediate source of pleasure and happiness, or desired for its own sake. This is why those who believe the past could have been better are like someone in rebellion and hate God: their will does not align with the deity’s, the expression of the divine will does not contribute to their perfection, nor is it perceived as such.

To be “patient by force” stymies action since the will does not act, but endures. When Leibniz writes that God “demands nothing else than right intention,” he speaks of intent expressed through action—a tendency, disposition, or inclination.²⁷⁶ Requiring correct intention allows for a discrepancy between the intent of an action and its effects, which may be outside our control. The future is not within our power, and so someone cannot be sure their actions will contribute to the general good, that what they desire can be realized, or that the perceived good is truly good. Even so, the *ens perfectissimum* ensures that nothing bad happens to those who love him. Everything required to know and love God is provided. The past can be accepted and affirmed as the basis for acting towards the future. And, further, the past exemplifies the truth that what happens is the most perfect and desirable, and so secures the expectations by which we act.

“As for the future...it is necessary to act according to the presumed will of God insofar as we can judge it.”²⁷⁷ From the above-mentioned uncertainties, there is nonetheless a gap between the certainty of God's will being done and our capacity to participate in his plan (and what our participation means). This gap, I suggest, is an element of God’s moral quality—that is, it

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²⁷⁶ A VI 4, 1536; AG 37.
²⁷⁷ A VI 4, 1535-1536; AG 38 (see A VI 4, 2358).
enables our rational commune with the Creator. There are general principles to help us anticipate the divine will, such as expecting the best and most desirable, loving our neighbor, obeying the scriptures, and working to perfect all things.\textsuperscript{278} Leibniz echoes a similar point in \textit{Examen}, again emphasizing our action: there are rewards and punishments set by God for whether or not we perform our duty to conform to the divine will.\textsuperscript{279} While complete knowledge of the good transcends us, God has revealed himself in certain ways to direct our actions. He does not oblige us beyond what is in “our power.”\textsuperscript{280} Revelations enable us to act.\textsuperscript{281}

**Heresy of Spinozism**

“I know that their phrases are very different than some of those that I just presented,” Leibniz writes of Descartes and Spinoza, “but when you have penetrated the foundation of their thoughts you will remain in agreement with what I have said,” namely, that their systems threaten piety or the moral quality of reason.\textsuperscript{282} Cartesianism entails Spinozism, an accusation in its own right.\textsuperscript{283} There is a parallel entailment that is just as threatening: the moral consequences of certain Protestant sects, specifically, Anabaptists and Antitrinitarians. And I would like to conclude by noting some similarities between Leibniz’s criticisms of Cartesianism and Protestantism. Doing so presents how the moral quality of reason brings together philosophy and theology for him. Of course, Leibniz did not think Descartes was a covert Protestant, but he does claim that both Descartes and Protestant doctrine harm the moral quality of reason.

\textsuperscript{278} See (A VI 4, 1535-1537; AG 37-39).
\textsuperscript{279} See (A VI 4, 2358). An almost identical remark is made in “Discourse” (see A VI 4, 1539; AG 40).
\textsuperscript{280} A VI 4, 1536; AG 38.
\textsuperscript{281} I return to revelations in the conclusion.
\textsuperscript{282} A VI 4, 1385; AG 282.
\textsuperscript{283} For a brief but detailed interpretation of Descartes’ \textit{Meditations} that reveals its affinities with Spinozism, see Annette Baier, “The ‘Meditations’ and Descartes’ Considered Conception of God,” in \textit{The Cambridge Campanion to Descartes’ Meditations}, ed. David Cunning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pgs. 299-305.)
Leibniz summarily criticizes the effects of Protestantism in a group of annotations, which begin the series of preparatory manuscripts that culminate in *Examen*. For those outside the Christian tradition to be accountable, there must be a divine expression within creation. Leibniz writes, “There would be no obligation to believe if God had not lavishly provided by design signifying marks in us from which God’s word is distinguished from the deceiver’s word.” Put differently, the marks that enable persons to separate truth from falsity are in their nature. Here, Leibniz does not tell us what those marks are, but only that the divine must be expressed to all rational beings in a distinct manner. Otherwise, non-believers who are remote from Christendom could not be justly damned.

However, Protestants exaggerate the sufficiency of an individual’s marks, which threatens the Christian tradition in another way. “Those Protestant theologians have been forced to divorce their theory with practice,” Leibniz continues, “and by that very fact they bear witness against themselves.” That is, the moral effects of their theology testify against them. First, “they do not yield to others the freedom that they assume,” presumably, the freedom to reason. Instead of telling us which freedom they enjoy but deprive others of, Leibniz names two culpable effects.

When they brought the protestant theory about discipline to practice, Anabaptists and other Tremblers introduced among people of their kind a horrendous confusion in which

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284 *Nulla esset obligation credenda nisi Deus ipse per rationem in nobis loquens notas suppeditasset quibus verbum Dei a verbo impostoris discerneretur* (A VI 4, 2298).
285 *Ipsi Theologi protestantium coacti sunt Theoriam suam a praxi sejungere et eo ipso testimonium contra se perhibent* (A VI 4, 2298).
286 *neque…aliis concedunt libertatem quam sibi sumserunt* (A VI 4, 2298).
whatever comes into anyone's mind is spoken as if it were a dictate of the divine spirit and is obeyed as if it contained divine law.\textsuperscript{287}

The first effect is seen in the Anabaptist tradition. Every thought that comes to someone in prayer is received as if it were the Holy Spirit, and so the natural marks holding all people accountable for believing in God become divine. Thoughts themselves are marks of God’s existence because every thought comes directly from the deity. The response to such an exaggeration is Leibniz’s main worry, though. He goes on,

Moreover, when the same theory—now, about doctrine—was brought to practice,

Anti-trinitarians and those who believe similarly reduced almost to nothing the mysteries of Christian faith among themselves.\textsuperscript{288}

Apart from the church and its tradition of biblical interpretation, and relying on natural signifying marks and one’s own reasoning alone, the Reformation brings about a reduction of Christian mysteries almost to nothing. But, for Leibniz, the mysteries are the content of faith and the ends of reasoning.

Spinozism also rejects the mysteries. While Descartes says he accepts the mysteries in submission to the church, his philosophy entails Spinozism—at least, so Leibniz charges. After declaring that divine perfection must be perceived within things, in “Discourse,” he remarks,

So the works must carry his [that is, God's] character in themselves. I confess that the contrary view appears extremely dangerous to me, and very close to the opinion of recent Innovators that the beauty of the universe and the goodness we

\textsuperscript{287} Anabaptistae autem et Tremuli aliique id genus homines cum theoriam protestantium circa disciplinam ad praxin transulissent illam horrendam confusonem introducerunt in qua cuivis quicquid in mentem venit tanquam dictatum divini spiritus dicere et facere fas habetur (A VI 4, 2298).

\textsuperscript{288} Antitrinitarii autem et similes cum eandem Theoriam ad praxin transulissent circa doctrinam jam pene ad nihilum apud eos redacta sunt Christianae fidei mysteria (A VI 4, 2298).
attribute to the works of God are only chimeras of humans who conceive God after their own manner.\textsuperscript{289}

The recent innovator is Spinoza. Elsewhere, Leibniz groups Descartes and Spinoza together as modern Stoics.\textsuperscript{290} And in his religious writings, Leibniz does not distinguish their views. While their metaphysics differs, the moral quality their philosophies endorse and engender is the same.

In brief, Descartes’ position entails Spinozism in the following way. The reasons Descartes gives for the world’s excellence depend on something outside creation—namely, God’s act of creating—and so are formal reasons. In Genesis, which Leibniz and Descartes both cite, God stepped back from his work and saw that it was good. But goodness is restricted to the divine will and its effects, for Descartes, and so cannot be ascribed to creation itself. This introduces arbitrariness into the relation between God and the world, and in the world itself, since there is no reason to choose this world over another. Nor is there an overarching reason and plan that organizes creation. As a result, we cannot expect everything to be amenable to rational analysis, and so reason is insecure. Spinoza’s mistake is similar.

To accept the divine cause as a formal reason results in the view that beauty and goodness are not perfections. So, in \textit{Examen}, Leibniz writes,

Therefore we must shun those [i.e., Descartes and Spinoza] who conceive God as a certain supreme power from which all other things emanate, but indiscriminately, by a kind of necessity of existence, without any choice of the beautiful or the good, as if these notions were either arbitrary or not established in nature but only by human imagination.\textsuperscript{291}

\textsuperscript{289} A VI 4, 1532; AG 36.
\textsuperscript{290} See (A VI 4, 1385; AG 282).
\textsuperscript{291} A VI 4, 2357; SLT 201.
Goodness and beauty cannot be ascribed to God without forming him in our image. Leibniz’s test for setting perfections apart from other attributes requires more than a formal reason, unlike a definition of perfection. Descartes’ definition of perfection seems orthodox, yet it loses some of the perfections included in the divine. Goodness and beauty become no more than illusions when God is nothing more than an efficient cause, which Spinoza concludes. Instead, criteria are needed to incline us toward perfection, direct us appropriately, and create a disposition.

At first, there are few similarities between the loss of the mysteries in Protestantism and their loss in Cartesianism. Descartes does not call every thought divine, nor is he retreating to that belief, he does not reach Spinozism from a theory about discipline, nor is he Protestant. Also, Leibniz’s annotations are very quick and schematic—evidence would need to be sought in other writings for showing the kinship between Descartes’ views and those of a Protestant sect. But I want to emphasize Leibniz’s perspective for objecting: “Protestant theologians have come together to join their theory with practice and, accordingly, bring a testimony against themselves.” Similarly, in spite of Descartes’ pious avowals, when his views are brought to practice, that is, when someone lives out the Cartesian program, he brings a testimony against himself. Descartes’ positions evince an underlying and largely implicit moral quality. The first paragraphs of “Discourse” and *Examen* are confronting and amending a conception of the moral quality of reason.

If my interpretation is right, philosophy and theology overlap in the notion of perfection for Leibniz. They share a conception of right reasoning as the highest perfection of rational beings. For philosophy, rules of perfection are needed from which to reason and demonstrate, and within which the sciences operate. For theology, love of God must be proclaimed and
realized. Rules of perfection can be given and supported apart from theology; love of God can be realized apart from philosophy. Yet, together, they form the highest.
Chapter 4: Leibniz’s Test

When the object of our affection is God, as with charity or pleasure, we can fully realize our own perfection. God and man share goods because of the moral quality of reason and as indicative of that moral quality. And so “the more enlightened and informed we are about God’s works, the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and in complete conformity to what we may have desired,” Leibniz writes. In hope, we are affected toward natural perfections as they are divine effects; those perfections dispose us toward their source, which perfects us. Such affections cannot fully realize our own perfection until hope becomes charity. Once we reason from the most perfect being, our reasoning is secure.

I am arguing, in other words, that Leibniz’s concept of love for God has a role in his philosophy as a basic concept. It serves as a key for teasing out the relation between philosophy and theology in Leibniz’s thought. Earlier, I structured the argument thus:

1. A moral quality is required to secure our reason.
2. From a most perfect unity, a moral quality follows.
3. Love of God is our highest perfection.
4. Love of God secures our reasoning.

The first pair of claims is philosophical; the latter is theological. And there is a gap between the first and second pair: a moral quality is not synonymous with love of God. The second pair declares that love of God is the moral quality of human reason and is the highest expression of

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292 A VI 4, 1531; AG 35.
God’s moral quality. In what follows, I support my proposal by focusing on texts from Leibniz’s middle period (especially, the “Discourse” and *Examen*).

The success of my interpretation and Leibniz’s argument depends on the concept of perfection. I will approach this concept metaphysically, then morally: according to the divine identity and then according to our love for God. In the initial half, my claim is as follows: if perfection succeeds in characterizing the divine unity, it secures our confidence in the future, removes arbitrariness, and justifies our ascription of natural predicates to God. Its characterization entails a moral quality of God, which secures our reason. This security comes from the realization of our highest perfection in love for God. So I argue in the latter half.

**Criteria**

“Discourse” begins with criteria, or a test, for discerning perfections. On one hand, perfections are complete; on the other, they are infinite. They are capable of a highest degree, yet are unlimited. To which we can add that perfections are individual—beauty, knowledge, power, and goodness are among them—though form a singular whole. And they are in God and in nature without conflating God and nature. The task now is to determine the role of these criteria in Leibniz’s first philosophy.

Leibniz makes clear in a short fragment on a book by Father Fabri and, again, in a writing about the trinity that the apparent conflict within divine perfection cannot violate the principle of contradiction. If the principle of contradiction was not applicable to God, nothing could be said of him. What is more, the trinity is the archetype of substantial identity, natural and

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293 See (A VI 4, 2340-2341 and 2346; LGR 202-203, for the latter).
294 Adams notes that the existence of God and the law of non-contradiction coincide, and this is the domain of Leibniz's ontology of logic (Adams, *Leibniz, 177*).
divine. So an individual substance is a mystery that cannot be fully comprehended by us, but this does not mean the general requirements for identity surpass our capacities. On one hand, there is a transcendent unity in divine substance and one in a created substance; on the other hand, there are criteria that direct us toward both.

Leibniz gives us three sets of criteria in 1686: one of perfection in the first paragraph of “Discourse,” one for ideas, and one for revelations in Examen. His criteria of perfection dispose us rightly toward the Creator, which forms the context for the latter two sets. In other words, right reasoning is the backdrop from which judgments are made and truth sought. It is not grounded on a certain intuition, but on the moral quality of reason. To make my case, I will deal with the three sets of criteria in turn, beginning with the definitions and knowledge.

**Cognitio**

In the winter of 1676, Leibniz jotted down, “A perfection is what I call every simple quality that is positive and absolute,” an absolute quality being one that expresses without limit. And between 1683 and 1685, he writes, “Perfection, moreover, is pure reality or what is positive and absolute in essences.” Almost ten years pass between these writings and much had changed. But the definition’s variance is hardly as drastic as Leibniz’s negative appeal to the nature of perfection in “Discourse” and Examen. Instead of defining perfection, he defines God,

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295 See (A VI 4, 2346; LGR 202-203). For an extensive analysis of the trinity, a doctrine I will touch on briefly here, see (Antognazza, Trinity).

296 There is a fourth, logical criteria of truth, which is presupposed in his criteria for ideas, and a fifth, criteria of divine justice. Due to limits of space, I will touch on those briefly, though they have import for my analysis as well. I treat his criteria for revelations in my conclusion.

297 A VI 3, 578. Adams begins his treatment of perfection with this definition. He stresses absoluteness as the stable characteristic of perfection throughout Leibniz's career (Adams, Leibniz, 113).

298 *Perfectio autem est realitas pura seu quod in essentiis est positivum atque absolutum* (A VI 4, 556).
then cites stock examples of divine attributes. Perfection and God, it seems, are mutually primitive and simple, and so a test for discerning which attributes are not perfections is outlined, which falls outside a definition proper.

I will return to Leibniz’s negative criteria for perfection, which circumscribe his positive criteria of ideas. For now, there are two passages of concern: paragraph 24 of “Discourse” and Meditations on Knowledge [Cognitione], Truth, and Ideas, published in 1684. Leibniz’s motivation for proposing criteria of true ideas is clearest in the opening sentence of Meditations. He writes,

Since controversies rage today among distinguished persons over true and false ideas and since this is an issue of great importance for recognizing truth, an issue on which Descartes himself is not altogether satisfactory, I would like to explain briefly what I think can be established about the distinctions and criteria that relate to ideas and cognitio. He prefaces his criteria in “Discourse” as clarifying the “nature of ideas.” His basic motivation is showing that there are marks within ideas for separating true ones from false ones. And so his earlier criticism of Descartes in which perfection is vacated from things, leaving merely a formal reason tout nue, also effaces marks of truth and falsity.

Leibniz then summarizes how his demarcations line up:

Thus, cognitio is either obscure or clear, and again, clear cognitio is either confused or distinct, and distinct cognitio either inadequate or adequate, and

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299 His reason for omitting a definition in “Discourse” and Examen need not be the same for the purposes of my argument.
300 A VI 4, 585; AG 23.
301 A VI 4, 1566; AG 56.
adequate *cognitio* either symbolic or *intuitive*: and, indeed, if *cognitio* was at the same time both adequate and intuitive, it would be absolutely perfect.\(^\text{302}\)

Suppositive *cognitio* is added in “Discourse,” but that is not the only change. As we will see, the presentation is noticeably different and stylistic changes may be instructive for what Leibniz is doing in each text. Additionally, it is not obvious that the neat categorization beginning *Meditations* exactly holds almost two years later.

Maybe the most obvious change is the order in which the categories are listed. For contrast, here is the title of paragraph 24: “What is clear or obscure, distinct or confused, adequate and intuitive or suppositive knowledge [*connoissance*]…”\(^\text{303}\) The series begins with two pairs of opposites, though their order is reversed. In *Meditations*, the positive category is placed last because the next two are its subcategories. The relation of dependence is less obvious in the title of “Discourse,” but, as a heading, that may be expected. More dramatic changes appear in the second half of the series: the title in “Discourse” does not end with opposites, symbolic knowledge drops out, and it does not end with absolutely perfect knowledge. Suppositive knowledge either replaces absolute perfection or the conditional framing perfect knowledge makes them synonymous. Whereas the categories in *Meditations* lead to the highest form of knowledge, “Discourse” seems less ambitious. But to see whether these surface changes are substantial, we should look at the categories themselves.

*Cognitio* has often been translated “knowledge,” and with reason.\(^\text{304}\) Leibniz is speaking of something stronger than awareness, thought, or cognition. Nonetheless, we do not typically

\(^\text{302}\) A VI 4, 485-486; AG 23. Antognazza cites this essay as presenting Leibniz’s basic methods and criteria (*Antognazza, Trinity*, Introduction).

\(^\text{303}\) A VI 4, 1567; AG 56.

\(^\text{304}\) AG and Leibniz & Loemker, *Philosophical*. I will refer to *cognitio* and *connoissance* as ‘knowledge’ in what follows while leaving it untranslated in quotations.
talk of knowledge as obscure or confused; it is equally strange to speak of a mind knowing everything, though unaware of all it knows. By *cognitio*, though, Leibniz means the way in which minds have an idea. This, too, requires explanation because an idea is not a mental representation, as it now sounds, but an aspect of thinking itself. In a short fragment titled, “What is an idea?,” Leibniz explains, “*An idea consists, not in some act, but in the faculty of thinking.*”  

He goes on to qualify an idea as a “near-faculty” since we can receive ideas from outside us, which his first definition does not appreciate, and then he rejects his qualification. What he comes to is revealing:

> That the ideas of things are in us means therefore nothing but that God...has impressed a power of thinking upon the mind so that it can by its own operations derive what corresponds perfectly to the nature of things. Although, therefore, the idea of the circle is not similar to the circle, truths can be derived from it which would be confirmed beyond doubt by investigating a real circle.

Leibniz struggles to define a true idea in this fragment. My point is that none of the definitions he entertains concern ideas as mental objects, but rather a mental prowess to think of things in a certain way. Similarly, derivations from the idea of a circle result in *cognitionibus* of a circle.

So, around 1677, Leibniz is unsatisfied with his definitions of an idea. Nonetheless, for there to be a mental prowess of the kind he describes, ideas must express their objects.

Continuing in “What is an idea?,” though before the earlier quote, Leibniz writes, “That is said to express a thing in which there are relations [*habitudines*] which correspond to the relations of the

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306 A VI 4, 1371; Leibniz & Loemker, *Philosophical*, 208.
307 Contrast what follows with Descartes' discussion of the objective reality of an idea.
thing expressed.”

Relations’ as a translation of *habitudines* suits a later definition Leibniz offers Arnauld in 1687: “One thing expresses another when there is a constant and ordered relation between what can be said of one and of the other.” A model expresses the constructed object, speech expresses thoughts, characters numbers, as long as certain relations hold between them. Yet *habitudines* can also mean ‘condition,’ ‘form,’ ‘state of being,’ or ‘appearance.’

Because of the variety of expressions, which Leibniz goes on to note, ‘relations’ may be the best choice. Still, the Latin evinces an ontological structure that holds when one thing expresses another.

When Leibniz proposes criteria for *cognitionibus* or *connoissance*, then, his concern is the nature of ideas—that is, what ideas are, and how we have and judge them. In short, his concern is ontological. In the last paragraph of *Meditations*, Leibniz separates our ideas from divine ideas, weighing in on Malebranche’s controversial identification of our ideas with God’s. He does not reject the claim that we perceive everything within God “if it is understood properly.” And so,

…if we were to see everything in God, it would nevertheless be necessary that we also have our own ideas, that is…affections or modifications of our mind corresponding to that very thing we perceived in God. For certainly there must be some change in our mind when we have some thoughts and then others, and, in fact, the ideas of things that we are not actually thinking about are in our mind as the shape of Hercules is in rough marble.

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308 A VI 4, 1370; Leibniz & Loemker, *Philosophical*, 207.
309 A II 2, 231; M 144.
311 A VI 4, 591; AG 27.
An idea is not an affection or modification, but brings about affects or changes in the mind.\textsuperscript{312}

Since affections and modifications are not part of an idea, but are its effects, Leibniz thinks our ideas are unique because of their effects, which correspond to the object of an idea. There are two reasons these effects are unique. First, our minds change by thoughts, or the ideas we think about, whereas with God, no change occurs. On the other hand, the ideas we have are constants whether or not we are thinking about them. So they have effects, even if we ignore or are unaware of them. And, again, with God, his mind is not formed by latent ideas.

Leibniz assumes that criteria for \textit{cognitio} express the nature of ideas, at least partially, by giving us marks to distinguish true ideas from false ones. There is no secure intuition from a reflection on one’s own ideas; rather, we must test the ideas we seem to have in order to avoid misjudging or misrepresenting an idea’s effects on our thought. And so we must be attentive, not to ideas, but to their marks in our perceptions. These marks differ in strength, and I will consider each briefly in turn.

\textit{1. Obscure and Confused, Clear and Distinct.} In his treatment of “the variety of \textit{connoissances},” Leibniz does not follow the order of his paragraph title in “Discourse,” which is closer to the order of \textit{Meditations}, instead beginning with confused knowledge. “When I can recognize a thing from among others without being able to say what its differences or properties consists in,” he writes, “the knowledge is \textit{confused}.”\textsuperscript{313} A similar definition is given in \textit{Meditations}: knowledge is

\textsuperscript{312} Leibniz states this explicitly in “What is an idea?” (A VI 4, 1370) and Leibniz & Loemker, \textit{Philosophical}, 207.

\textsuperscript{313} A VI 4, 1567; AG 56.
confused when I cannot enumerate one by one the marks sufficient for
differentiating a thing from others, even though the thing does indeed have such
marks and requisites into which its notion can be resolved.314

Color, for instance, is known confusedly because we rely on the “simple testimony of the senses”
without the capacity to separate its particulars from others. Colors are distinguished from one
another by sense, not by their constituent marks, but those marks are present for resolving the
notion. Leibniz had first written ‘confused’ in his title, before settling on ‘obscure’.315 Yet he
leaves obscure unmentioned in the paragraph. That is either a slip or because obscure requires no
definition.

On the other hand, Leibniz defines ‘obscure’ in Meditations: “A notion which is not
sufficient for recognizing the thing represented is obscure.”316 For example, when the memory of
a flower or animal cannot help us decide which flower or animal it was among others, the
memory is obscure. We can recognize something without discerning what sets it apart for
recognition when we know it confusedly; obscure knowledge cannot recognize the particular. A
term without a settled definition is obscure, then, because it lacks distinct marks into which it
could be resolved.

A few paragraphs later, Leibniz drops obscure from his basic criteria, claiming that the
mind “already thinks confusedly about everything it will ever think about distinctly.”317
Obscurity is either a sub-category of confusion, as in the examples above where the marks for
distinguishing the object are vague, or it is knowledge that will never be known distinctly. To
recall, Leibniz’s motivation for laying out criteria of ideas is presenting marks for judging truth

314 A VI 4, 586; AG 24.
315 See the critical apparatus (A VI 4, 1567).
316 A VI 4, 586; AG 23.
317 A VI 4, 1571; AG 58.
and, thereby, to present the nature of ideas. A true idea has certain effects. Obscurity falls outside this goal, unless it is a type of confusion, because its marks do not distinguish a given object. Reflecting on an obscure idea cannot lead us to clarity and distinctness, but must be amended by other means (settling on a definition, for example), and so it seems like an obscure idea is not one at all.

The first positive rung in Leibniz’s criteria is clarity. Though the order is the same between texts, the definitions slightly differ. In *Meditations*, Leibniz writes, “Therefore, knowledge is *clear* when I have the means for recognizing the thing represented,” which is contrasted with obscure knowledge, or when I lack the means for recognizing the object.\(^{318}\) In “Discourse,” however, confusion grounds clarity:

> It is in this way [namely, from confused knowledge] that we sometimes know something *clearly*, without being in doubt about whether a poem or a picture is done well or badly, simply because it has a certain something, I know not what, that satisfies or offends us.\(^{319}\)

When speaking of confusion in *Meditations*, Leibniz makes a similar remark:

> …we see that painters and other artists correctly know [*cognosco*] what is done properly and what is done poorly, though they are often unable to explain their judgments and reply to questioning by saying that the things that displease them lack an *unknown something*.\(^{320}\)

The object is recognized as such, and so clearly, but the basis of our judgment is confused. The constituent marks in our perception from which our judgment arises cannot be separated out one

\(^{318}\) A VI 4, 586; AG 24.

\(^{319}\) A VI 4, 1567; AG 56.

\(^{320}\) A VI 4, 586; AG 24.
by one. The effects of the idea are known—we are satisfied or offended—but the marks bringing about those effects are confusedly perceived.

Clear knowledge recognizes the object of the idea in both texts, though our clear perception can be either confused or distinct. In the text from 1684, confused knowledge is placed under clear knowledge, which is under obscurity. Leibniz places clarity after confusion a couple years after. What changes is the status of ignorance. The earlier writing allows for obscurity—that is, a perception of ideas that we cannot hope to recognize within the limits of our understanding and intelligibility. Obscurity excludes the effects of those ideas from intelligibility as well. That pessimism is removed from “Discourse,” if only with hesitation. The title of the paragraph keeps insuperable ignorance alive, whereas the paragraph itself suggests, at a minimum, that we can make confident judgments from ideas by attentiveness to their effects even if the idea remains confused. Either there is no insuperable ignorance, it cannot be spoken of, or it is not worth speaking about.

Leibniz’s definition and explanation of distinct cognitio is almost the same between texts. Writing in Meditations, “A distinct notion is like the notion an assayer has of gold, that is, a notion connected with marks and tests sufficient to distinguish a thing from all other similar bodies.”321 The marks of a notion are sufficiently present not only to recognize an object apart from other objects, but also to enumerate the differences. Nor must the marks be immediately perceived; they (or their effects) can also be present in such a way that admits testing. Similarly, in “Discourse,” Leibniz writes,

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321 A VI 4, 586; AG 24.
But when I can explain the marks which I have, the knowledge is *distinct*. And such is the knowledge of an assayer, who discerns the true from the false by means of certain tests or marks which make up the definition of gold.\footnote{A VI 4, 1568; AG 56.}

Leibniz’s example of the assayer is well chosen: perceiving the rock, however attentively, does not suffice for confirming gold. In spite of their similarity, there are a few changes in presentation.

First, in “Discourse,” Leibniz states that explaining the marks that produce an object’s effect separates distinctness from clearness. Since Leibniz uses an identical contrast in both texts (a painter’s evaluation and an assayer’s), the capacity to explain is likely implied in *Meditations*. But in his earlier definition, it is the connection between a notion and its marks, or tests, that is highlighted. Exclusively clear knowledge lacks a connection to its underlying marks. Later, Leibniz contextualizes his example by stressing the capacity to explain those marks, leaving out their connection to a notion. As before, the connection can be read into the *Discourse*; and, further, we expect it to be implied given his subsequent outline of definitions. My concern is the changed emphasis. For clear knowledge to become distinct in the metaphysics of 1686, the marks by which the idea is judged must be explainable to another.

There is a second change in presentation. The marks and tests, which are used for separating out an object (and its effects) in *Meditations*, are used for discerning a true idea from a false one in “Discourse.” The earlier text is concerned with individualizing an object while the later text concerns judging an idea. No doubt, these are similar tasks: to separate an object from others on the basis of its marks is to judge its true idea, though not vice versa.\footnote{Since a true idea of an object can be judged when someone has exclusively clear knowledge.} Leibniz had already dealt with the requirements of an individual substance in paragraphs 9 and 13 of
“Discourse” and, now, he is illuminating the nature of ideas. Significant in its difference from *Meditations* is that marks of a perceived object tell us whether or not an idea of that object is true. I can illustrate the difference with Leibniz's example.

An assayer discerns whether the rock that seems like gold is in fact gold. In *Meditations*, the assayer has a specific notion of gold that contains certain marks and tests, and he applies that notion to the object to determine whether or not its gold. The point, in short, is that the assayer’s notion comes with criteria for separating gold from worthless rocks. In “Discourse,” the example has a slightly amended purpose to better respond to the problem with which *Meditations* begins—namely, ending dispute over true and false ideas. The persisting problem is that each disputant will claim their notion is like the assayer’s. In “Discourse,” the criteria include separating the assayer from the novice. The assayer has tests or marks for deciding which idea of an object is the right one. His notion can be shown as the one that makes up the definition of gold and, thereby, excludes others with that pretense.

The connection between a notion and its marks segues into kinds of definitions. Definitions have varying strengths depending on how they relate a notion and its marks. In his outline of the various kinds, Leibniz inserts his concept of perfection so that perfection serves a dual role. On one hand, Leibniz’s test for what is or is not a perfection sets the backdrop for his criteria of ideas. We are disposed toward the divine nature according to the requirements of perfection. But, on the other hand, our perception of ideas is more or less perfect. So an idea of God, who is absolute perfection, is perceived as more or less perfect. I need to explain how this can be.
2. Nominal, Real, Causal, Essential. When an object may or may not be possible, its definition is nominal. There is no overt contradiction between the subject and predicate terms, but an analysis has not been conducted to demonstrate that there is no contradiction. So we can doubt the possibility of the object. Our notion may contain a contradiction that we do not perceive; or, the notion may contradict other, realized concepts, and so is impossible by implication. We lack an experience or proof that would confirm or negate its possibility. Where a nominal definition of a notion explains some occurrence, another explanation could be given that contradicts it. Both fit our experience so that “we cannot be confident of the consequences drawn from it.”

Different examples are given for a nominal definition. In Meditations, “notions common to several senses” pertain to nominal definitions, like hope and fear and, I would add, love. He also mentions primitive notions that are known through themselves, or constitute their own mark. In “Discourse,” Leibniz refers to an endless helix. Whether such a helix can go on indefinitely will not be known for someone ignorant of a helix’s components. Yet the example shows that a reciprocal property, or a property containing inverses that equal one when multiplied, is nominal. Both examples are important for Leibniz’s definitions of God and perfection.

But there is a further distinction in Meditations under nominal definitions, adequate and inadequate. Leibniz notes that there are definitions without a complete enumeration of marks. So the assayer decides whether or not a rock is gold according to heaviness, color, and solubility, but those notions cannot be enumerated, or analyzed. While the marks of true gold are perceived, and so the notion of gold is distinct, there are no definitions for those marks. If an analysis could

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324 See (A VI 4, 587 and 1568; AG 24 and 56-57; A II 2, 66; M 72).
325 A VI 4, 1568; AG 57.
326 A VI 4, 586; AG 24.
be given for those marks, and then for their marks, and so on, until we arrive at primitive notions, *cognitio* is adequate. But, Leibniz comments parenthetically, “I don’t know whether humans can provide a perfect example of this, although the knowledge of numbers certainly approaches it.”\(^{(327)}\) He remains uncertain about a complete analysis in 1686, which I consider in a moment.

A real definition, on the other hand, is possible. If its possibility is shown only by experience, it is merely real.\(^{(328)}\) If its possibility is demonstrated a priori, or from causes to effects, it is a real and causal definition.\(^{(329)}\) A causal definition holds within itself a subject's possible generation. Put differently, it contains the requirements for a thing to come to be. However, requirements are not the same as necessary and sufficient conditions, which deserves comment.

Adams notes that requirements fuse “causal and conceptual dependence in Leibniz’s thought,” such that there are no causal requirements, on one hand, and conceptual requirements, on the other. Leibniz’s “calling something a ‘requirement’ must normally be assumed to have implications about both causal and conceptual relations.”\(^{(330)}\) A definition is an enumeration of something’s requirements. So the marks that we clearly and distinctly perceive that enable us to individualize an object are its requirements for existing. Leibniz writes in *Meditations*, for instance, “One has distinct knowledge of an indefinable notion, since it is primitive, or its own marks, that is, since it is irresolvable and is understood only through itself and therefore lacks requisites.”\(^{(331)}\) Requirements are also an object’s perfection. Contemporary discussions of

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\(^{(327)}\) A VI 4, 587; AG 24.  
\(^{(328)}\) See (A VI 4, 1569; AG 57).  
\(^{(329)}\) As Adams and Garber note, ‘a priori’ was undergoing a shift in meaning at this time (Adams, *Leibniz*, 109-110; Garber, *Leibniz*, 104). Its oldest sense is as a proof from causes to effects. This is the sense Arnauld and Nicole use in *Logique de Port-Royal*, IV, 1, which is cited by Adams. Such a proof gives reasons for a fact. The second, emerging sense is as a non-experiential proof. Since Leibniz notes that a causal definition “contains the possible generation of a thing,” he probably intends the first sense.  
\(^{(331)}\) A VI 4, 586; AG 24.
necessary and sufficient conditions, then, are at best analogous to requirements. Requirements are the reasons something exists, which are the reasons God created it, which we know must be the perfections an object’s existence contributes to the divine plan. Those kinds of reasons are not often appealed to today.

A cause and a concept, then, are fused, which is reinforced by the last kind of definition. Along with having an a priori proof for its possibility, an essential or perfect definition is an analysis of an object’s primitive notions. Nothing is assumed by the proof so that the subject term is defined from the basic principles or elements that form the whole. It is a complete, or perfect, definition since it contains the reason for the particular’s existence as well as the reason for the creation of this universe. As Leibniz explains in a letter responding to Arnauld’s accusations, when God chose to create the first man, he chose to create this universe. The decision to create an individual in a world decides the world.

3. Symbolic, Intuitive, Suppositive. Most of our cognitio is blind or symbolic, Leibniz admits in Meditations, since

we don't usually grasp the entire nature of a thing all at once, especially in a more lengthy analysis, but in place of the things themselves we make use of signs, whose explicit explanation we usually omit for the sake of brevity, knowing or believing that we have them in our power.

Symbolic knowledge drops out of the categorization in “Discourse.” Instead, he uses a different category. But in the earlier text, words, numbers, or symbols can be used in place of ideas, which allow us to reason of notions whose details we are blind to. When we can grasp the nature of an entire thing at once, our knowledge is intuitive.

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332 A II 2, 16-18; M 13-14.
333 A VI 4, 587; AG 25.
In both texts, Leibniz posits our capacity of intuitive knowledge, though “this is extremely rare since the greater part of human knowledge is only confused or suppositive,” or symbolic.\textsuperscript{334} Leibniz weakens his claim in “Discourse,” however. Two years before, he writes that “there is no knowledge of a distinct primitive notion except intuitive.”\textsuperscript{335} Primitive notions are assumed in all reasoning because all reasoning assumes they are intuited. He goes on, “From this [i.e., that a distinct primitive notion is intuited] it already follows that we don’t perceive ideas of even those things we know distinctly, unless we make use of intuitive thinking.”\textsuperscript{336} What is intuited changes in “Discourse.” “And when my mind understands all the primitive ingredients of a notion at once and distinctly, it has intuitive knowledge of it.”\textsuperscript{337} An intuition, in other words, is not of primitive notions, but of every primitive ingredient of a notion. Maybe we still intuit those ingredients, but that is different than intuting the ens perfectissimum.

Leibniz does not have suppositive cognitio as a category in Meditations. These are notions we suppose we understand, though they are not conceived, intuited, or demonstrated in our use of them. Such is suppositive knowledge. But in his published essay of 1684, he does have a passage to that effect.

And, indeed, it happens that we often mistakenly believe that we have ideas of things in mind when we mistakenly suppose that we have already explained some of the terms we use. Furthermore, what some maintain, that we cannot say anything about a thing and understand what we say unless we have an idea of it, is either false or at least ambiguous.\textsuperscript{338}

\textsuperscript{334} A VI 4, 1568; AG 56.  
\textsuperscript{335} A VI 4, 588; AG 25.  
\textsuperscript{336} A VI 4, 588; AG 25.  
\textsuperscript{337} A VI 4, 1568; AG 56.  
\textsuperscript{338} A VI 4, 588; AG 25.
So, on one hand, intuition is required for perceiving ideas since every idea is made up of primitive notions. On the other hand, the perception of an idea (or a primitive notion for that matter) may only be supposed. There remains the risk of error in the perception of ideas despite our intuition. The assumed primitive notions, which amount to perfections, do not ensure our perceptions are correct. Similarly, the assumption of primitive notions within our ideas, especially our idea of God, does not prove the existence of God, an absolutely perfect being. If Leibniz was working with a real definition of God, or one in which the possibility of God had been demonstrated, the ontological argument would succeed in *Meditations* or “Discourse.” Presumably, he is not using such a definition.

I believe this sketch of Leibniz’s criteria of ideas suggests two concurrent roles of God and perfection within his system. The concepts do not fit squarely in one of the categories. First, both notions seem to be intuited since God is a primitive notion and his attributes, the perfections, are likewise primitive. This means that the intuition of God, or his perfections, is assumed in all reasoning and perception—in short, that “God alone is the immediate object of our perceptions.” But this cannot mean that we have a perfect or real definition. If we did, we would understand God’s choice to create this world and other divine mysteries. We would also possess exhaustive knowledge of the world and everything in it. That is, we would perform an infinite analysis. Second, due to our inability to comprehend a perfect or real definition of God, these concepts are supposed. When Leibniz begins “Discourse” and *Examen* with a definition of God, it is either intuited or supposed. God is defined in terms of perfection; perfection is

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339 “Perfections are primitive, in the sense that they are first or ultimate constituents in the analysis of other qualities” (Adams, *Leibniz*, 116).
340 See (A VI 4, 588-589, 1566; AG 25 and 56).
341 A VI 4, 1573; AG 59.
understood in terms of God. A test is given by which we can separate out perfections, and this is enough to establish moral certainty that God exists for those who intuit his perfection, more or less.\textsuperscript{342} As a result, analysis cannot begin or end with God, though it does proceed within the security of divine perfection for some.

Analysis

Throughout 1686, Leibniz articulated the basis for analyzing notions according to their form. After moving to Hanover, he began work on the foundations of logic in 1679.\textsuperscript{343} His most comprehensive manuscript, “General Investigations concerning the Analysis of Notions and Truths,” was composed sometime between Spring of 1686 and the year’s close.\textsuperscript{344} The text is incomplete, fragmentary, and unpolished, with quite a few repetitions and restarts. Likely, he picked it up and set it down throughout the year. Here, he is confronting the formal equivalent of the problem I am concerned with: perfection both secures reasoning and is the object of reasoning.\textsuperscript{345}

The basic logical unit is a term. There are ten kinds depending on how they are resolved. As I hope to show, pure integral terms—those we would expect to formalize the divine attributes—are not equivalent to the divine attributes. This is significant because Leibniz’s ontology is founded on the divine nature. At least in theory, a perfect demonstration begins with God when moving from causes to effects or, if moving from effects to causes, ends with God. “We need an enumeration of such integrals that are unresolvable into oblique and partial terms,”

\textsuperscript{342} After dealing with analysis, I return to this claim.
\textsuperscript{343} Antognazza, Biography, 240.
\textsuperscript{344} Date given by the editors of the Akademie edition. A draft of a letter intended for Arnauld begins with “the first principles of truth,” the subject of “Generales” (A II 2, 56). Written in June, the draft supports the view that his logical manuscript was underway, although the letter and his manuscript do not begin in the same place.
\textsuperscript{345} Grosholz, too, argues that analysis should be understood according to Leibniz's concepts of God and perfection (Grosholz, Theomorphic, 5ff).
Leibniz writes, “which an analysis of the remaining terms will give.”^346 Access to integral terms comes from composite ones, or from experience, where analysis begins. Leibniz does not expect to enumerate pure integral terms from the start. Instead, certain composite terms can serve that purpose. “And, to begin,” he continues, “it will suffice to enumerate as pure integrals those of which a resolution into non-integrals seems less needed.”^347 The beginning of an analysis is provisional, with terms handled as if they were integrals in integrals or unresolvable.^348

“I conceive, therefore, that every true proposition is immediate or mediate,” Leibniz remarks to Arnauld.^349 An immediately true proposition is true by itself, its predicates are fully contained in the subject, it's identical, or it contains its own requirements for existence. All other propositions are mediate, which is where “the predicate is comprised virtually in the subject such that the proposition can be reduced in the end to identical truths by the analysis of the subject.”^350 In other words, symbolic knowledge involves mediate truths rather than intuitions. An analysis is confined to mediate, virtual truths.

By contrast, Leibniz begins “Generales” with a self-imposed restriction, not a distinction between immediate and mediate truths. He writes, “For now, let us set aside every Abstraction so that every Term is understood to be only about the Concrete, whether they are of substances, like Ego, or a phenomenon, like a Rainbow.”^351 This opening restriction fits nicely with his view that

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^346 A VI 4, 741-742; Leibniz & Parkinson, *Leibniz*, 49; Leibniz & O’Briant, *Gottfried*, 30. Probably because of the placement of *in obliquos et partiales* between *talium integralium* and its adjective *irresolubium*, O’Briant renders the sentence, “We need an enumeration of such integrals which are, as far as we are concerned, unanalyzable into obliques and partials…” While making potential connotations explicit, O’Briant’s translation exceeds what is warranted by syntax. The phrase *opus est* take a dative subject, which is *nobis*. To avoid the double use of the word, Parkinson restricts it to the qualifying phrase. Their choices support my interpretation, but the connotations they make explicit are left implicit in my translation. In their support, Leibniz will make those connotations explicit shortly.


^348 This is what Leibniz commends of Pascal's geometrical method: obscure terms can be provisionally defined and resulting truths provisionally accepted (A VI 4, 591).

^349 A II 2, 56.

^350 A II 2, 56.

our conceptions originate from created things. He goes on to note that he will be using logical notation, which is abstract, but only in reference to the concrete and substantial. Although he does not bring up immediate and mediate truths, we should not expect a formal language to be applicable to immediate truths. At best, notation presupposes such truths, like the law of non-contradiction. To limit the range of logical possibility, as well, Leibniz assumes what is at stake are concrete and substantial things. Put otherwise, he assumes an ontological structure.

There are two ways terms link up to one another. “Two integral terms are joined in recto,” Leibniz writes, “when they constitute a new integral,” or a new complete or perfect term. Given the opening restriction, a complete term includes reality so that ‘great’ means ‘a great being’ and its negation ‘a great non-being’ (or something great that does not have being). There is a parallel between a term and its being. “Being [Ens] is either through itself or through an accident,” to which Leibniz adds, “or a term is necessary or changeable.” When two integral terms join in recto, then, they constitute a new being, either a substance or an attribute.

Leibniz continues, “However, not every term to which another is added in obliquo is partial.” Though he does not define a relation in obliquo, the contrast provides his sense: in obliquo means the combination of terms such that a new term is not given. For example, an integral term is ‘A is similar to or the same as itself.’ Nothing need be added to the subject or predicate for the term to be a proposition, a proposition being a coinciding of two terms.

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352 See (A II 2, 51).
353 A VI 4, 741; Leibniz & Parkinson, Leibniz, 48; Leibniz & O’Briant, Gottfried, 29. The Latin reads, “Et in recto junguntur duo termini integrales constituentes novum integralem.” Parkinson renders this, “Two integral terms are joined ‘directly’ when they constitute a new integral term.” The nominative plural, duo termini integrales, is moved up front, which is more natural in English. In recto is translated ‘directly’, which O’Briant and I leave untranslated. As a participle, constituentes can be handled a few ways. Parkinson introduces the nominal relative, ‘when’, and O’Briant introduces the relative pronoun, ‘which’. I prefer the former since it more clearly expresses that the object of the participle is the qualifying feature.
354 A VI 4, 740; Leibniz & Parkinson, Leibniz, 47; Leibniz & O’Briant, Gottfried, 28.
355 A VI 4, 741; Leibniz & Parkinson, Leibniz, 47; Leibniz & O’Briant, Gottfried, 28.
356 See (A VI 4, 750; Leibniz & Parkinson, Leibniz, 55; Leibniz & O’Briant, Gottfried, 37-38.
partial term requires an integral to be complete. Examples of partial terms are ‘the same as’ or ‘similar to’, which are completed by a self-relating $A$. Leibniz explains, then, that integrals can relate in obliquo, and so without defining a new term.

An integral term related in obliquo to a partial term can result in an integral term (though not a new term). ‘Sword’ can have ‘of Evander’ added and its result, ‘Sword of Evander’, is integral. In such cases, an integral term is preserved. When a partial term is added to an integral one such that without the integral the term remains partial, the terms are related in obliquo. This happens when an indefinite term is joined with a particular, the particular taken priority as concrete. But an integral term can also be formed out of a relation in obliquo when separated from its integral. In other words, when a partial term no longer relates to an integral, that remaining term can be used to form an integral by relating to itself in recto. So, ‘Peter is the person who denied Christ’, after removing the predicate, can become ‘Whoever is the person, Peter.’

These two ways of joining terms enable us to speak of singular beings in particular and general terms, as the last example illustrates. An adequate formal ontology requires both: particulars enable a being to be singled out, yet certain properties can be generalized, which allow us to relate that being to others. Those general properties are nothing without the beings they adhere to. All individuals can be represented by ‘$A$ is A’, while ‘$A$ is not $A$’ represents none. “And, likewise, there is a need for certain general terms of things or terms,” Leibniz notes, which he then applies to proper names.\footnote{A VI 4, 741; Leibniz & Parkinson, Leibniz, 48; Leibniz & O’Briant, Gottfried, 29.} Instead of \textit{Caesar est similis Alexandro}, Leibniz adds the Greek definitive article after \textit{similis} to pick out the generalizability of a proper name—that is, ‘to
whoever is Alexander.’ Once generalized, Leibniz can speak of other features of the singular being as the subject, such as Alexander’s royalty.

Leibniz concludes his section on the basic two combinations of terms by putting forward a central problem for his ontology: “We will see whether an integral can similarly be formed from a particle itself, such as ‘A existing in something that is B’ in place of ‘A in B’.” As Leibniz famously claims, truths are inesse (not inexistens). Since Leibniz restricts himself to the concrete, he need not worry about esse, which includes ideas exclusively in the divine mind. So there is a rough equivalence in his logical treatment and his inesse theory of truth. Importantly, he wants to demonstrate the formation of an integral from a particle, and so a relation in obliquo. From a move similar to ‘Whoever is the person, Peter’ from the partial, ‘Peter’, Leibniz wants to form an integral term by combining two partial terms.

Leibniz sets himself this task because of the limits of his logic when beginning from experience. He wants to move from effects to causes, yet our perceptions of effects are more often than not partial. “Thus, partials—as well as particles that become direct terms when added to oblique terms or that become integral when added to partials—should be explained before the integrals that are resolved into partials and particles,” he writes. There are bounds for analysis,

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358 A VI 4, 741; Leibniz & Parkinson, Leibniz, 48; Leibniz & O’Briant, Gottfried, 29-30. I avoid translating posse as ‘possible’ so as not to conflate Leibniz’s comments on the nature of possibility from other less technical expressions. Also, I translate inexistens, though Parkinson does not. As he notes in a footnote, ‘in-’ has negative connotations that drop from its literal rendering. In other words, the verb notes that something’s existence is found in something other than it. Lastly, I reverse the other of Leibniz’s example, like Parkinson.

359 A VI 4, 741; Leibniz & Parkinson, Leibniz, 48; Leibniz & O’Briant, Gottfried, 30. Parkinson and O’Briant translate resolvere ‘analyze’, which makes the connection between an analysis and the operation that characterizes an analysis explicit. Since there was not a verb form of analysis at the time and resolvere often served that purpose, their translation has support (see R. E. Latham’s Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)). Analyze and resolve share meanings (see Oxford English Dictionary entry II.4 of ‘analyze’ and entry IX.a and c for ‘resolve’). I translate resolvere with its English cognate because it preserves some of its metaphysical connotations. Here are some relevant definitions, again taken from OED: “of a material thing [which should be stressed here] to undergo dissolution or separation into constituent parts or elements, or into a more basic or fundamental state;” “to produce (a substance) by disintegration or decomposition;” “to convert, transform, alter, render (a material or immaterial thing) into some other thing or form.”
given the two kinds of terms at our disposal. On one side, there are partial and oblique terms. On the other side are primitive and integral terms. And Leibniz is not sure with which side to begin, taking back what he just said a moment later: “But, still, those integrals that either do not resolve or resolve only into integrals should be explained before partials and particles.”

That an analysis ends at unresolvable terms, which may be oblique, partial, direct, or integral, suggest epistemic limits to Leibniz’s project. That is, we may be unable to resolve any term further due to our ignorance, confused notions, or forgetfulness. Leibniz does not tell us why analysis stops here, but he notes elsewhere that the current state of the scientific method is imperfect because it cannot resolve its terms down to the structure of reality itself.

There is also the possibility that analysis continues indefinitely (a possibility that he will later affirm for contingent propositions). Primitive integrals are unresolvable ones and those that resolve into other integrals indefinitely, with no end resulting from our intellects or an integral’s nature. “Primarily, such integrals must be independent from partials, at least generally,” such as formal terms and Ens, “for partials need these in order to change into integrals.” Perfections probably fall into this type so it is significant for our purposes. A partial term lacks perfection, or completeness, a lack which separates them from integrals. To recall, Leibniz also calls an integral term perfect. So a concept of perfection is operating in his logic. This is seen in another way as well. He continues, “Since partials need these in order to change into integrals, when the final complement of partials or oblique terms, which changes them into integrals, is integral, it cannot be resolved into an integral and a partial in turn.” Said otherwise, an analysis must

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360 A VI 4, 741; Leibniz & Parkinson, Leibniz, 49; Leibniz & O’Briant, Gottfried, 30.
361 See (A VI 4, 713, 959, 969-970).
362 A VI 4, 741; Leibniz & Parkinson, Leibniz, 49; Leibniz & O’Briant, Gottfried, 30.
363 A VI 4, 741; Leibniz & Parkinson, Leibniz, 49; Leibniz & O’Briant, Gottfried, 30. The Latin reads, “…nam his ipsi partiales indigent, ut transeant in integrales, ultimum enim complementum partialis vel oblique, ut in integrale transeat, cum sit integrale, rursus in integralem et partialem resolvi non potest.” Following Parkinson, the first purpose clause (ut…) is treated as a dependent clause with a relative pronoun. He also treats Leibniz’s
proceed toward greater perfection. It, too, is directed toward by criteria of the *ens perfectissimum*.

When a partial or oblique term is resolved into an integral, it cannot be resolved back into a partial or oblique term. The asymmetry means there is an inherent tendency within an analysis. Since an integral is more perfect than a partial and if an integral that only resolves into other integrals is more perfect than others, analysis moves toward perfection. This would also explain how analysis increases the perfection of creation. Once ‘similar to Alexander’ becomes ‘Caesar is similar to Alexander,’ the operation cannot be reversed because the former is contained within the latter. Although the predicate can be resolved into ‘Herod is similar to Alexander,’ too, analysis does not abstract ‘similar to Alexander’ once the partial has been resolved. It only perfects.

Though sketched, the foundation of Leibniz’s logic and the method of analysis assume a concept of perfection, just like his criteria for true and false ideas. Divine perfections are not the first, integral notions with which analysis begins or ends, except in the sense that the perfecting of analysis expresses the divine economy. The analysis of the partial term ‘*A in B*’ into an integral term would situate an object within existence, or with respect to the primitive notion of the universe and God’s choice of this world. The formal structure coincides with such a

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364 See Grosholz, *Theomorphic*, 6ff. My account differs from hers insofar as I do not define perfection as intelligibility.
placement, at least. But when speaking of definitions and terms, Leibniz could be using ‘perfect’ in another less metaphysical sense. The word also means ‘complete’, which of course describe a finished analysis and an integral term. If so, it seems to fall outside our discussion since the criteria of divine attributes would be unrelated to his use of perfection in logic.365 While perfection as it operates in logic can be held apart from the concept elsewhere, I believe Leibniz intended his criteria of true and false ideas, method of analysis, and criteria for revelations to be understood from perfection—specifically, God’s.

**Perfection**

“God is an absolutely perfect being,” “the most perfect substance,” one, eternal, present everywhere and omniscient.366 In “Discourse” and *Examen*, a definition of the deity is as close as we come to a definition of perfection. One response to the lacuna is to reject it altogether and import a definition given elsewhere. The response is compelling since we find stable characteristics of perfection throughout Leibniz's writings, up to 1686 and after.367 And, although I will argue for a different approach, how Leibniz handles perfection in the writings of 1686 is consistent with his definitions. But I think there are reasons Leibniz left perfection undefined (or defined in terms of God) in the writings of our concern. And I think his lacuna suggests a specific role of Leibniz’s concept that is easily missed.

365 Adams makes a similar move with respect to possibility, writing, “I think it is clear, however, that the conceptions of possibility and necessity connected with the theory of infinite analysis are not the conceptions employed in Leibniz's discussions of the necessary existence of God” (Adams, *Leibniz*, 140). I find that hard to believe, but, more importantly, it seems problematic to legislate a sharp distinction where Leibniz did not.  
366 A VI 4, 1531 and 2357; AG 35 and SLT 201.  
A Top-Down Account

Robert Adams has proposed a framework for understanding Leibniz’s notion of perfection. For him, Leibniz “proposes...a general top-down theory of the constitution (and not just the causation) of the constitutive properties, or realities, of finite things as deriving their positive content from those of the infinite being.” On a top-down approach, the properties needed for an object to be what it is are more perfect than those that could be removed. An object is a collection of perfect attributes, as ‘A in B’ suggests. A person’s intellect is more perfect than her arm since the loss of intellect makes her less of a functioning person than an amputee. One is more essential, and so more perfect. With a top-down theory, every perfection is grounded in the godhead, explicable in terms of, and deriving their reality from, the deity.

Adams goes on to specify four aspects of perfection: it is (i) qualitative, as opposed to relational, (ii) simple, (iii) metaphysically positive, or real, and (iv) absolute, or expressing without limit. A quality is a predicate unique to a substance. A simple quality is one that is not resolvable into terms of any other property. A positive or real property lacks any negation and an absolute property extends a quality’s positivity to infinity. On Adams’ reading, absoluteness is the most important because it is restricted to qualities and includes positivity by definition. And absoluteness is “the most durable feature of Leibniz’s conception of perfection.”

1. Interpreting Leibniz’s Test. Those four aspects can be set beside the tensive criteria for perfection with which Leibniz begins “Discourse.” He writes that attributes qualify as a divine perfection if (a) they are capable of a highest degree, yet are endless, and (b) are complete, yet infinite—to which we can add that perfections (c) form into a simplex, or a unique subject,

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368 Adams, “Priority,” 103.
369 See Adams, Leibniz, 113-114; Adams, “Priority,” 105.
370 Adams, Leibniz, 113.
though many, and (d) are in God and in nature without conflating God and nature. These criteria seem to say less than his definition. There is no mention of positivity and reality, nor it is obvious that perfections are qualitative as opposed to relational, though simplicity seems to preclude relations. The criteria also say more: namely, the tensive nature of divine perfection that is smoothed over in the definition. Leibniz’s test also rules out attributes that are not perfections rather than determining what a perfection is. I would suggest, in fact, that the test is meant to dispose the reader in love toward God. But more on that shortly.

We can use the four aspects of perfection to interpret Leibniz's test for perfection. So a perfection is unlimited, or endless, and of the highest degree because it is real and positive. “Absoluteness is an intensification of positiveness,” Adams explains, “for limitation is conceived here as partial negation” such that a highest degree lacks all negativity in its possession or expression. A number is not a perfection since to have three is not to have two or five, and is expressed as neither. This is also why perfections are qualitative. A number can be determined by its relation to others so that three is the sum of one and two. There is nothing over and above that sum which is three.

For there to be no lack in perfections, they must be infinite and complete. A partial attribute lacks reality since more can be realized, like when a person’s natural capacity is not fully developed. A child is incomplete, or imperfect. Only an infinite attribute, however, is absolute. Along with their endlessness, perfections are actually infinite. This can mean a few things, which are listed from weakest to strongest: every single divine attribute is infinite; the whole of which perfections consist is infinite; perfections are infinite such that their individuality is realized in a simple, infinite whole. Adams stresses the first, acknowledges the second, and

rejects the third.\footnote{Adams, *Leibniz*, 105-106; Adams, “Priority,” 120-122 & 145-146.} But it is the simplicity and uniqueness of God that distinguishes Leibniz’s test.

In Adams’ construction, then, Leibniz’s robust top-down theory goes something like this. Every object, concept, and property is either simple or built from simple terms. Divine attributes are simplest, so other complex organisms are built from them. Compounds are formed by conjunction or negation. Creation possesses at least one of the divine attributes in a negated or limited form. Since negation is a logical operation, not a predicate, God can possess every predicate. And if these attributes are simple, they must be absolute since limitation or negation bring complexity or nothingness. Adams concludes, “The less than perfect properties of finite things must all be composed, by logical operations including various degrees of limitation or partial negation, from the simple perfections of God.”\footnote{Adams, “Priority,” 106.} This is the sense in which perfection is prior on Leibniz’s account.

2. Adams’ Criticisms & Solutions. Leibniz’s top-down strategy has two problems, which Adams details: motivating the plausibility of every finite property’s construction from the divine nature (the basic thrust of a top-down approach, especially a theistic one), and equating divine attributes with the simplest ones.\footnote{Both Adams and Antognazza note that Spinoza has a solution to these problems by collapsing the categorical difference between God and creation (Adams, “Priority,” 98-101; Antognazza, “Comments,” 127-128). No doubt, such a move compromises Leibniz’s theological commitments.} I will focus on his first criticism and his proposed solution.

In principle, a complete deduction of the universe can be executed from a definition of God. The essential properties of finite things can be derived from divine attributes, like omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, and so on. But since the derivation operates by conjunction and negation, the top-down strategy cannot begin. This is because finite things either
have a property identical with the deity’s or its negation. Since omnipotence is simple, there is no obvious way of joining it to other qualities or negating it such that only a limited portion of it is left. There is no portion of omnipotence to negate, so man is either omniscient or wholly ignorant. Leibniz rejects both. And so we have our first problem. “Partial negation,” Adams points out, “is exactly what is wanted here.”375

Maybe finite attributes should be treated like comparatives, which are partial negations without a negation of parts. This is Adams’ first proposal for salvaging a Leibnizian top-down account. We could say Peter is more righteous than Judas without analyzing them into their moral, intellectual, and physical parts—similarly, for Peter is less righteous than God. Said differently, a quality of Peter can be defined in relation to Judas’ without enumerating everything that makes up that quality. All that is said is that the righteousness of one is more or less than another’s without saying what is contained or lacking in either object. And this seems to respect how finite things share in the divine: “the relation of finite things to God with respect to power is precisely that they are less powerful than God.”376 Their attributes are grounded within God via their relation to him; for example, our power is constituted by being less than that of the deity. Our finitude, too, is defined by an external dependence of our attributes.

Then, Adams notes a theological objection to a comparative account that should make us suspicious. Divine perfections, he says, are traditionally thought to be immeasurably greater than creatures. There is an infinite difference between the infinite and the finite.377 If Leibniz strays from orthodoxy and claims that omnipotence and less-than-omnipotence are of the same kind, a common measure encompasses God and creation. A result is that the infinite difference between

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the infinite and the finite can be grasped by limited intellects like ours, or the gap between them is finite. This undermines their near-categorical difference, something Leibniz is not prepared to do. 378

Despite the questionable set-up, Adams finds the explanation promising. On one side, God has the simple property of omnipotence; on the other, a finite being has a complex property of omnipotence with the limiting, comparative operator ‘one-billionth of’. These two attributes are not identical: one is simple, the other is complex. Still, the complex one is derived from the simple one because the first is explained by the second, which is ontologically basic. A finite being contains approximations of the infinite.

So by conjoining and negating, Leibniz wants to derive finite properties from the infinite. A critic may doubt that an analysis of this sort exhausts all of creation. Adams’ solution, and maybe Leibniz’s, is restricted to relational properties, like power, but other non-relational properties could be fundamental, too. It seems that they must be for there to be objects that relational properties relate. In other words, “There is no provision for a positive, non-comparative property to be possessed by the creature as part of the basis for its possessing the positive comparative property.” 379 Some ontological stuff must be there. Peter and Judas are righteous apart from one another to varying degrees. Peter’s righteousness does not depend on Judas’, it seems, but is prior to their contrast. If so, the top-down strategy fails.

Adams offers another solution. Perfections can be thought of as scalar magnitudes: the temperature of a room is nothing else than degrees—cold the absence of warmth, blue a shade of light on the spectrum. Likewise, human power is an inferior degree of omnipotence. Adams finds

378 See, for example, (A VI 4, 2410). But Leibniz also wants the same measure (in some sense) of goodness and justice to apply equally to God and man.
the proposal clarifying, but inadequate. While quantities fit nicely with the example, qualities are less likely to be constituted by degree. A certain shade of blue can be placed on a color spectrum and then located by its proximity to other colors, but “knowing how it is related, by likeness and unlikeness, to other shades of colour is one thing; knowing what it looks like is another.” The coordinates of a certain color on the spectrum are not constitutive of it.

In the end, the top-down strategy cannot stand on its own. “It seems that degrees of knowledge and power do supervene on facts…about what their possessor knows and can do, and how,” Adams concludes, which implies that perfections are not the basic attributes of all things. Although an interpretation of perfection as comparatives fails as a general approach, it does explain some properties, like comparative ones such as power, knowledge, and goodness. Divine attributes have some explanatory role, but they fail to explain other facts that enable these capacities (i.e., anatomical ones). And this is all Adams wants to show: a bottom-up strategy can benefit from its contrary, and some mix of the two is preferred. Perfection cannot fill out a complete ontology.

Structurally, “Discourse” and Examen seem to mold onto a general top-down schema: they begin with definitions of God, then detail the consequences, natural and revealed. Also, one of Leibniz’s ambitions was something like a deduction from basic, divine properties to created and finite ones. During his stay in Paris, for example, Leibniz claimed that all things are conceived through divine attributes, express these attributes in a certain manner, and this basic relation to the deity explains our inability to thoroughly comprehend any one thing. These

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381 Adams, “Priority,” 111.
382 “But I think it is well worth exploring the hypothesis that there are also important contexts in which a ‘top-down’ strategy of understanding and representing the less perfect in terms of the more perfect or more complete will be best” (Adams, “Priority,” 91-92).
383 See (A VI 3, N. 72).
kind of statements, which appear throughout Leibniz's writings, lend themselves to a top-down heuristic. Appeals to perfection can be read as a limit to the sufficiency and exhaustiveness of physical concepts for natural explanation, though not achieving a general account.

Beginnings

Replying to Simon Foucher in August of 1686, Leibniz distinguished human knowledge from religious concerns. Unlike religion, human knowledge needs to progress “even when this would only occur by establishing many things on a few assumptions.” These assumptions stand in need of demonstrations, yet result in useful “hypothetical truths” and agreement. Such a provision remains when our ideas seem clear and distinct. With such ideas, “It is still the case that we need to assume certain truths, or renounce the hope of making demonstrations because the proofs would go on to infinity.” Specifically, the law of non-contradiction must be assumed as well as the belief that necessarily true propositions do not depend on a free decree (or the divine will and choice), “otherwise you could defend at every moment the exact contrary of what you said.” Leibniz’s method assumes these truths, which are prior to, yet assumed throughout, reasoning and writing. And this is also where we should expect the role of divine perfection to emerge, securing our reasoning.

The geometric method advances knowledge in spite of ignorance. In Nouvelles Ouvertures, a short piece dated between April and October, Leibniz writes, “I find two things necessary to man to benefit from his advantages and to make everything that can contribute to

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384…quand même ce ne seroit qu’en établissant beaucoup de choses sur quelque peu de suppositions (A II 2, 88).
385 Il est même constant qu'on doit supposer certaines vérités, ou renoncer à toute esperance de faire des demonstrations, car les preuves ne sauroient aller à infini (A II 2, 89).
386…autrement vous pourriez defendre à tout moment tout le contraire de ce que vous dites (A II 2, 89).
387 Leibniz claims this just before the line cited. Unlike Descartes, Leibniz does not believe geometric figures and quantities can explain all natural phenomena (see AT VIII, 78-79). Elsewhere, Leibniz also criticizes Descartes for not applying the method he praises (A VI 4, 704-705).
their proper happiness, at least in matters concerning knowledge.”\textsuperscript{388} One is an inventory of current knowledge, the other is a general science, or method for acquiring knowledge. While the method he envisions is along the lines already discussed, the inventory describes where our method begins. Leibniz explains, “This inventory I am speaking of would be very different than systems and dictionaries, and would only be composed of a quantity of Lists, numberings, Tables, or Progressions, which...need to serve at the base of reasoning.”\textsuperscript{389} The inventory would have a mathematical and logical structure organizing it and also inherent to it since there is a “necessary order for finding what it [i.e, the current state of knowledge] requires.”\textsuperscript{390}

In view of the provisional nature of scientific beginnings—the acknowledgement that science deals primarily with hypothetical truths and that there are undemonstrated assumptions even in the principle of contradiction—I think a top-down framework is misleading. The beginning of reason is provisional, guided by what is useful, and following the inherent structure and gaps of our current state of knowledge. For him, the definitions and axioms with which a demonstration begins can be questioned, and should be.\textsuperscript{391} Since integrals in integrals can go on indefinitely, there may be no ontological foundation. In spite of our provisional beginnings, there is an ideal that secures our reasoning, God and his perfection. Rather than beginning with simple properties as a kind of foundation and deriving finite attributes, analysis is like the intersection of $x$- and $y$-axes, except that the zero point is chosen from already scattered coordinates. While fixing a zero point helps us systematize these coordinates, discover others, and give arguments

\textsuperscript{388} Je trouve que deux choses seroient necessaires aux hommes, pour profiter de leur avantages, et pour faire tout ce qu'ils pourroient contribuer a leur propre felicité, au moins en matière de connaissances (A VI 4, 690).

\textsuperscript{389} Cet inventaire dont je parle seroit bien eloigné des systemes, et des dictionnaires, et ne seroit composé que de quantité de Listes, denomnements, Tables, ou Progressions, qui...doivent servir de base au raisonnement (A VI 4, 691).

\textsuperscript{390} l'ordre necessaire pour trouver ce qu'il faut (A VI 4, 691).

\textsuperscript{391} Between 1688 and 1690, for example, he writes that assuming axioms that can be demonstrated harms the perfection of our minds (A VI 4, 696).
for or against a chosen systematization, we may need to move that point to better suit the coordinates.

So human knowledge must begin and progress, albeit provisionally, for which logic, grammar, and formalisms are useful. Since the law of non-contradiction has assumptions of its own, it is exposed to scoff. Further, it is not grounded in the divine nature, if by ‘grounded’ we mean demonstrated from the deity or perfectly resolved. We do not comprehend the deity in such a way as to perform such a demonstration. Yet religious matters do have a role in securing our reasoning.

Before summarizing the geometric method to Foucher, Leibniz notes where the ancients were right.

The philosophy of the Academicians, which is the knowledge of the weaknesses of our reason, is good for beginnings, and as we are always in the beginning in religious matters, it is without a doubt aptly for the best to submit reason to authority.392

The authority Leibniz has in mind is the Catholic church. And his call for reason to submit seems contrary to his ambition to reconcile the churches on the basis of reason. To see whether there is conflict requires us to look at what it means for reasoning to always begin in religion. Presumably, it involves Leibniz’s claim that matters of faith are not against reason, but above reason.393 And to make sense of an endless beginning, we should turn to the first paragraphs of the “Discourse” and Examen.

392 La philosophie des Academiciens qui est la connoissance des foiblesses de nostre raison est bonne pour les commencemens, et comme nous sommes toujours dans les commencemens en matiere de religion, elle y est sans doute propre pour mieux sousmettre la raison à l’autorité (A II 2, 88).
393 See Antognazza, Trinity, xv.
There are two beginnings in *Examen*, if you will, one from natural evidence and a revelation. The second is marked by the transition,

So far, nearly all of what we said is evident from the light of reason itself. But the hidden economy of the divine plan to restore humanity can be known only by God's revelation.

Leibniz then restates his definition of God, stressing his moral quality as before, then defines revelation. The first and second beginnings both concern religion, so presumably get no further than the origin, as described to Foucher. However, the first relies on no more than the “light of reason.” Although the ancients were right about our weaknesses, religious matters are thoroughly rational. The first beginning of *Examen* enacts a conception of right reasoning.

*Examen* opens, “For some time I have mulled over religious controversies, appealing to divine assistance and removing myself, as far as humanly possible, from partiality, like a neophyte who came from a new land and still has not chosen a side.” Leibniz planned to publish this anonymously. And he is assuming a rational perspective, where contingencies like where one was born and how they were taught do not obscure the truth hidden by church division. Further, he takes a “strategy of defense” in which the truth of Christianity is accepted on the authority of the church. With the mysteries, the onus is on the unbeliever to prove their impossibility, while the believer must show they are possible.

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394 I will focus on the first beginning here, the second in the conclusion.
395 *Et quidem quae hactenus diximus fere omnia ipso ex rationis lumine manifesta sunt, at quae fuerit in restituendis hominibus divini consilii arcana oeconomia, a solo Deo revelante disci potuit* (A VI 4, 2361).
396 *Cum diu multum invocato divino auxilio sepelitisque, quantum forte homini possibile est, partium studiis perinde ac si ex novo orbe neophytus nulli adhuc addictus venirem controversias de religione versaverim* (A VI 4, 2356-2357).
397 See (A VI 4, 2300).
398 See Antognazza, *Trinity*, xvii.
When rightly disposed toward God and his plan, someone is brought into conformity with that plan. Conformity is affective and dispositional, though, not intellectual. But such a disposition is required to search for truth. In a letter to Arnauld, Leibniz describes what likely motivates “Generales” and how we are rationally oriented to truth. “It is necessary that truth has some general nature, which is proper to itself within itself without relating to us” since “our experiences are marks, and not causes, of truth.”

He then speaks of eternal truths. But it is the next distinction that has special interest. There are identical truths, which have their reason or proof within themselves, and non-identical truths, which have their reason and proof external to themselves. The non-identical truths have relations to the whole universe. They require eternal and contingent truths. Without eternal verities, non-identical truths are unstable and arbitrary, parted from divine reason. The godhead is identically true.

Non-identical truths occupy the human mind, yet someone who removes themselves from partiality better perceives the eternal truths within them. And Leibniz imagines himself as a neophyte. Just like any finite mind, a neophyte cannot grasp identical truths, or a singular identity. But the more such a person is aligned with the most perfect whole, and the less allied to any faction, the clearer and more distinct eternal truths are. Religious doctrine comprises both eternal truths and contingent ones, some within the light of reason and some above our natural light. Religious truths involve continual reflection on an identical truth—namely, God and the divine economy—that cannot be resolved like natural truths. This is because it is an identical truth expressed through eternal and contingent truths simultaneously, consisting of God’s choice to create this world.

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399 A II 2, 56.
400 I return to this claim in the conclusion.
“After weighing everything,” the *Examen* continues, “I settled and established the following, which, to someone impartial, seems supported by sacred Scripture, ancient piety, right reason and the authority of history.”⁴01 If on religious matters it is best to submit, here are the authorities Leibniz has in mind. As the treatment throughout *Examen* acknowledges, in religious matters there is always the capacity to dispute. A finite intellect can never fully perceive religion’s object. But this does not mean submission to authority is a setting aside of reasoning: scripture was directed by God and is interpreted by reason, ancient piety conforms to the good, which is included in the moral quality of reason, and history reveals the divine plan in an ordered and intentional way. These authorities are enough to settle and establish doctrine, remove dispute within the church, yet without complete demonstrations.

For Leibniz, submission is part of the moral quality of reason because a disposition toward unity is an effect of right reasoning. Knowledge of divine governance does not suffice, though it prompts us to such unity. Love of God embodies an understanding of the divine economy in spite of ignorance. It also allows us to decide in the face of unknowns and ignorance. Leibniz explains,

> God is not only the supremely great author of things, he is also the supremely good prince of minds, and indeed the Legislator, but he demands nothing from his subjects than that their souls be sincerely affected and endowed with right intention, persuaded of this very beneficent and most just government, and about the beauty and goodness of the most lovable Lord of all; likewise, they do not merely fear the power of the supreme and all-seeing monarch, but are assured of

⁴01 *...haec tandem mecum ipse statui, atque expensis omnibus sequenda putavi, quae et Scriptura sacra, et pia antiquitas, et ipsa recta ratio et rerum gestarum fides homini affectuum vacuo, commendare videntur* (A VI 4, 2357).
its benevolence, and lastly—what brings everything together—burn with a love of God above all else.  

In Leibniz’s program for a renewed science, he repeats the need for science to be organized and developed according to the natural advantages of the species. Recognizing the deity’s moral quality and reasoning accordingly is a first step. Then we perceive the rule of goodness permeating all things.

**Love of God**

“Love of God” secures our belief and trust in the Creator; it also grounds our explanations of natural phenomena. Love is a disposition toward, an expectation of, and will for the good of someone else. Such is Leibniz’s view well before 1686 and after, though I have focused primarily on writings from that year. Since the discovery of the universe’s harmony glorifies the Creator, the expectation of order, as well as searching for and presenting the reasons for creation, are elements of love.

**Defining Love**

Although love of God is our highest state of perfection, it is not obvious that it is a central notion of “Discourse.” The notion appears in paragraph four, where Leibniz explains how he avoids Quietism, but comes across as a pious frill. While we live in a most perfect world in

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402 A VI 4, 2357; SLT 202.
403 See (A VI 4, 687 and 694).
404 For example, “Elementa verae pietatis, sive de amori dei super omnia” describes love similarly as Examen and “Discourse” and was written between the start of 1677 and the first months of 1678 (A VI 4, 1357-1366). A less developed account of love appears in Elementa juris naturalis of 1670 and 1671 (A VI 1, 459-465). In a letter to Nicaise of May 14, 1698, Leibniz again offers a similar account (A II 3, 439-444). For a detailed interpretation and comparison of these texts, see Gregory Brown, “Disinterested Love: Understanding Leibniz’s Reconciliation of Self- and Other-Regarding Motives,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19:2 (2011): 265-303.
which everything that happens is willed by God, we should not be passive. Love acts, he tells us, because it is characterized by a certain “disposition” toward the world, others, and God. Later, after listing the advantages of his views, Leibniz remarks that his principles enflame “a divine love,” which draws us to the source of truth, knowledge, and goodness. But since he describes this effect as a “utility” of his doctrines “in matters of piety and religion,” it seems like divine love results from his philosophy but is not one of its cornerstones. When we look elsewhere, however, Leibniz clearly has more in mind: a certain tendency and disposition that sets our expectations for reasoning and that coincides with corporeal motions.

Examen, on the other hand, is centered on love of God, with features of Leibniz’s metaphysics and physics appearing as well. Though a conceptual analysis is absent from “Discourse,” one is given in Examen. Leibniz nuances amor with other terms—adoratio, caritas, dilectio—and friendship and hope are defined as species of love. Once amor is related to these other terms, the refrain, amor Dei super omnia, extends from a pious attitude to an ontological disposition coinciding with “primal motions.” It describes a substantive tendency toward perfection and a disposition receptive to the divine. Before considering Leibniz’s treatment of love in paragraph four of “Discourse,” I will set out a couple of his nuances.

“Charity [caritas], or love [dilectio] that is a divine virtue consists in our loving God above all else and seeking our highest good in him,” Leibniz writes. The one who is charitable identifies their own good with the loved object or person. As a result, the good of another

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405 A VI 4, 1535; AG 37.
406 A VI 4, 1580-1581; AG 63-64.
407 That Leibniz believes there is a correspondence with the bodily is evident in his marginalia to Descartes’ Passiones animae (see A VI 4, 1703-1705).
408 Robert Adams and Maria Rosa Antognazza call the theology of Examen a “theology of love” (See Adams, “Leibniz’s,” 527 and Antognazza, Biography, 257 & 259).
409 Caritas autem illa sive dilectio quae divina est virtus, in eo consistit ut Deum super omnia amemus, et in eo summum nostrum bonum quaeramus (A VI 4, 2375).
becomes my own good, their happiness my happiness, and their perfection my own. True love “places our own happiness and perfection in the perfection or happiness of the loved object,” and such an identification is active. For example, parents’ good are the success of their children. Such a good is finite, Leibniz notes, since the child’s success is not the parents’, strictly speaking. On the other hand, when the object of our good is an infinite being, our perfection and happiness are realized by pursuing the infinite being’s good (strictly speaking). The good of another finite being can only contribute so much to our own perfection; seeking the good of an infinite being fully realizes our own finite perfection.

“Among theologians,” Leibniz continues, “hope is the love that they call concupiscence, or an affection towards God that originates not from reflecting on the preeminence and perfections of God,” which is charity or pleasure, “but on his beneficence towards us and the greatest goods.” When the object of our perception shifts from divine goodness to the goods he provides, or from the source of goodness to its effects, charity becomes hope. And so a pagan’s reflections on the good life and the hope that results can become charity when they are brought to goodness itself. In this way, Leibniz explains how some ancients had an affection towards the true God.

Charity, pleasure, and hope are affections, or active dispositions and tendencies, which make up love of God. The first two are directly aimed at the Creator (or the loved object); the last indirectly relates through his effects. With the initial pair, divine perfections are the source of

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410 For an in-depth analysis of such an identification, see Brown, “Disinterested.” I will return to a few claims his paper deals with shortly.
411 ...in perfectione sive felicitate rei amatae ipsam felicitatem et perfectionem collocemus (A VI 4, 2375).
412 This distinction admits degrees into our identification of another's good with our own.
413 ‘Spes’ vero apud Theologos est amor quem vocant concupiscientiae, seu affectus erga Deum, qui non ex consideratione praestantiae et perfectionis Dei, sed beneficentiae ejus erga nos bonisque maximis aeternae inprimis vitae (A VI 4, 2375).
414 Antognazza argues that Leibniz believed many of the Greek ancients were saved (Antognazza, Trinity, 68 & 73). See also A VI 4, 2338.
our perfection and happiness, while hope arises from the perfection or happiness that come as a result of the divine.\textsuperscript{415} Leibniz has much to say on loving one’s neighbor,\textsuperscript{416} but here love is defined in terms of someone’s relation to God. When someone has affections toward God, she perceives, responds to, and acts on phenomena in a certain way—differently than someone who lacks them. Love of God conforms our conduct and reasoning with the divine nature, and so achieves our highest perfection.

Since everything that happens to us is the will of God, and since God wills what is the best and most perfect, everything that happens brings happiness and perfection to the one who loves God. \textit{Amor Dei super omnia}, or love of God above all else, then, wills creation as a whole as a perfect act of the loved object. Sameness of will is prompted by direct or indirect affection: direct as charity or pleasure and indirect as hope. Leibniz tells us there can be a change from hope to charity when “reflection on the beneficence of God…manifests his goodness and perfection.”\textsuperscript{417} In either case, there is a disposition and tendency toward sameness of will, or love.

\textbf{The Same Good}

Leibniz’s definition of love in 1686 is similar to one he gave in an earlier manuscript, “Elementae verae pietatis,” written between the start of 1677 and the first months of 1678: \textit{“To love is to delight in the happiness of another, or to take pleasure in the happiness of another.”}\textsuperscript{418} Here as elsewhere, love is a disposition and tendency of the will. But in “Discourse” and

\textsuperscript{415} See Brown, “Disinterested,” 286-303. I am assuming that the distinction Leibniz articulates in the late 70’s and 90’s (following Brown’s interpretation) held in the mid 80’s as well.
\textsuperscript{416} For instance, Leibniz claims that love of our neighbor emerges from divine love (see A VI 4, 2378-2379).
\textsuperscript{417} \textit{…consideratio beneficiorum Dei bonitatem...et perfectionem ejus nobis manifestet} (A VI 4, 2375).
\textsuperscript{418} \textit{Amare est felicitate alicuius delectari, seu voluptatem capere ex alterius felicitate} (A VI 4, 1357). Date given by editors of the \textit{Akademie} edition.
Examen, Leibniz leaves out definitions of those terms (and others) that he proffers in “Elementae.” While the concepts may be the same across texts, his concerns in 1686 are distinct. Love of God accomplishes something specific in his evolving system.

In “Elementae,” Leibniz puts forward and responds to what Gregory Brown has named the conflict-of-motives problem. It follows from three commitments: (a) we only act on the basis of our own good because (b) goodness is what contributes to our own pleasure or happiness, but (c) love is the desire for the good of someone else for their sake. So if love is the desire of a good other than our own, but we only act for our own good, which is pleasing to us, love seems to be hopelessly ideal. We may desire someone else’s good, but we will only ever act for our own. There is a conflict of motives in Leibniz’s concept of love.

The problem is resolved by distinguishing what is good propter aliud (for the sake of something else) and what is good per se (in itself). The difference is between what contributes to our pleasure or happiness through a mediate, propter aliud, and what does so immediately, per se. We do not desire pleasure itself but pleasure as an effect of an object, so someone else’s good can be identified with our own to the extent theirs is an immediate source of pleasure. In other words, perceiving their good can bring us happiness, and so we can desire their good just as we desire our own. In fact, their good can become constitutive of our good insofar as it brings us pleasure and happiness and, consequently, perfects us. Their good may be desired per se rather than desired propter aliud, and so we can love them while still acting on the basis of our own good.

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419 See Brown, “Disinterested.” See his essay for a more in-depth analysis than what I will give here. Leibniz had posed the problem in an earlier text on jurisprudence (see A VI 1, 459-465). Broad deals with this problem, as well (C. D. Broad, Leibniz: An Introduction, ed. C. Lewey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 146-147).

420 See Brown, “Disinterested,” 278, for textual support.

The conflict-of-motives problem reappears in a short fragment that has been tentatively dated 1684.\textsuperscript{422} Whereas Leibniz asks how beings who only desire their own good can love another, in “Elementae,” he asks in this later fragment how we can identify the good of the most perfect being with our own. Of course, everything God creates results from his own thought and will, or “according to what he finds good.” But what reason do we have to expect divine goodness to be our own good?

I reply that he would not be perfect or competent if he did not make everything good for his works [i.e., us] also. And I believe that without this, they would not have been good for him or sufficiently good, which is the same, because what would also be good for them would be best, speaking absolutely.\textsuperscript{423}

Rather than explain sameness of goods in terms of mutual pleasure, we can trust that our good is the same as the deity’s from his perfection. If God created a world with a misalignment of goods, his good being different from a creature’s, it would be less perfect than a world in which they align. But to create a less-than-perfect world is the product of an imperfect being.\textsuperscript{424}

With our relation to God, the conflict-of-motives problem is solved through an awareness of divine perfection. This is implied in the first paragraph of “Discourse” where Leibniz notes that “the more enlightened and informed we are about God’s works, the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and in complete conformity to what we may have desired.”\textsuperscript{425}

That is, realizing the perfection of the universe increases our love of God, or our disposition to find creation and its details excellent and desirable. The more we love God, the more we will

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\textsuperscript{422} Again, the date is given by the editors of the Akademie edition. They also title the piece, “Sur la bonté des ouvrages de Dieu.”

\textsuperscript{423} Je répondis, qu’il ne seroit gueres parfait ny habile, s’il ne rendoit tout bon encor pour ses ouvrages. Et que je croyois que sans cela elles ne sçauroient estre bonnes pour luy, ou ce qui est la meme chose, ne le seroient pas assez. Car ce qui seroit encor bon pour eux, seroit mieux parlant absolument (A VI 4, 1514).

\textsuperscript{424} See A VI 4, 1533-1534; AG 36-37.

\textsuperscript{425} A VI 4, 1531; AG 35.
find the universe perfect. There is a positive proportion between our knowledge of creation and our love of God that testifies to our sameness of goods.426

To my knowledge, Leibniz does not use *per se* when speaking of charity or pleasure, nor *propter aliud* when speaking of hope. If he used the distinction for love of God like he does for love of neighbor, it may go something like this. As an affection towards God, charity finds my good in divine goodness *per se*. Since the object of affection is infinite, we can fully realize our perfection. But whereas the finitude of another limits how much their perfection can realize mine, my ignorance of the divine nature and plan (and his creation) limit how much I can love God. Only the past is a sure mark of the divine will and pleasure. While hope may be love *propter aliud*, it is because natural perfections are loved for the sake of their source. On the other hand, someone can love God *per se* according to natural perfections. So the distinction breaks down, especially where the occasion for love is an atrocity. Leibniz may have had reasons for not using this distinction with love of God.

The consistency of the divine good with ours is central to the question of whether God has a moral quality, or commune with rational beings, and what that quality entails. Throughout “Discourse” and *Examen*, Leibniz affirms that he does.427 The deity’s moral quality follows from his perfection; for the same reason we can trust his goodness is our own. And further, metaphysics and morality join in perfection.428 This link resonates within human nature: charity, pleasure, and hope increase as we learn about creation, and we learn more about creation from

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426 This is echoed in Leibniz’s criticisms of the Moderns (see A VI 4, 1533-1534; AG 36-37).
427 A summary of the relevant passages: A VI 4, 1532-1534 (AG 36-37); 1536-1637 (38-39); 1538 (39); 1539 (40); 1560-1561 (52-53); 1564-1566 (54-55); 1575-1578 (60-62); 1578-1580 (62-63); 1580-1581 (63-64); 1584-1586 (66-67); 1586-1588 (67-68); 2357 and 2361.
428 See A VI 4, 1531 and 1553; AG 35 and 48.
our charity, pleasure, and hope. The conflict-of-motives problem resolves in a disposition, which obtains more or less.

A Rational Disposition

The first paragraphs of “Discourse” concern right reasoning. Within the bounds of the divine attributes, and directing ourselves appropriately, we can safely expect truth. Leibniz describes this expectation as follows in Examen: “the one who understands the whole plan of the divine economy will discover a model of the most perfect commonwealth, in which the wise man can want for nothing nor have any wish unfulfilled.” 429 In “Discourse,” Leibniz writes, again describing an expectation,

From which it follows that God, possessing supreme and infinite wisdom, acts in the most perfect way, not only in a metaphysical sense, but also morally speaking, which with respect to ourselves can be expressed thus: the more we are enlightened and informed of God's works, the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and entirely satisfying to anything we could have desired. 430

Divine perfections set the bounds that secure our reason. But it remains unclear why Leibniz’s test for perfections should be accepted, why it should dispose the philosopher as well as the theologian. Leibniz’s philosophy seems depend on an assumption that the divine good is the same as our own.

There are two claims at stake in the initial paragraphs of “Discourse”: (i) a moral quality is required to secure our reason, and (ii) from a most perfect unity, a moral quality follows. The first claim does not become clear until the second and third paragraphs, where Leibniz criticizes

429 A VI 4, 2357; SLT 201.
430 A VI 4, 1531; AG 35.
some Moderns for failing to appreciate the moral quality of God, and so of reason. For the Moderns, we lack a reason to anticipate an exhaustively ordered and harmonious pattern throughout all of creation, including its beauty and goodness. The second claim is defended in two ways in the opening paragraph—from the absolute perfection of God, then from the moral effects of our reasoning.

As the *ens perfectissimum*, the divine substance is unique, containing every perfection in their highest degree and doing so most perfectly. Consequently, it removes arbitrariness. By a proper understanding of the divine unity, there is a reason to investigate everything with respect to a most perfect whole.\(^{431}\) That understanding comes from Leibniz’s test. So perfections are complete, yet infinite. They are capable of a highest degree, yet are unlimited. They are individual, while forming a single whole. And they are in God and in nature without conflating God and nature.

Divine perfections are in every way superlative, meaning that they cannot be primitive integral terms except symbolically. Since there is no real distinction in God, comprehending one of his perfections is to comprehend all of them. The divine nature resists definitions altogether. This means that Leibniz cannot perform an analysis from the deity, nor deduce a system from the identity of God or the completeness of nature. At best, his system can approximate complete and absolute perfection from suppositions, and those can conform more or less.\(^{432}\)

Leibniz seems liable to the objection that he supposes the existence of God without proof. Many places elsewhere, including *Rationale*, Leibniz gives proofs for God’s existence.\(^{433}\) But in

\(^{431}\) For this reason, my interpretation of God’s role in the first paragraph of “Discourse” differs from Grosholz’s. For her, if God is not assumed “we risk violating the very conditions of intelligibility” (Emily Grosholz, “Plato and Leibniz against the Materialists,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 57 (1996): 255-276). I do not think Leibniz’s thesis is about intelligibility, but an expectation of the exhaustive rationality of creation.

\(^{432}\) He explicitly writes theological suppositions in a preparatory manuscript for *Examen*. See (A VI 4, 2351-2354; LGR 236-239).

\(^{433}\) See (A VI 4, 2314; LGR 72).
**Rationale**, the oneness of God comes before the proof. So while a complete demonstration is not given (cannot be given) from the divine nature, moral certainty of his existence does, which is why “the more we are enlightened and informed of God's works, the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and entirely satisfying to anything we could have desired.” If reason is secure, there must be a moral quality of reason. For there to be a moral quality of reason, there must be a God who is not only an emanating force, but the “prince of minds.”

If my interpretation is right, there remain questions about the persuasiveness of the first paragraph. Leibniz defends the moral certainty of God’s perfection, and so the security of reason, by a hypothesis of how we would be disposed if we knew the divine plan, the reasons for God’s choice of this world, and how God governs us. And he defends that hypothesis by noting a positive proportion between our knowledge of the world and the perfection perceived in the world. My first question is whether this is sufficiently different than Descartes “interior testimony.” Does it not amount to a testimony of what the wise man perceives? Must we simply trust Leibniz’s pronouncement, or assume it, and reason accordingly to see that he is right?

A second question, which was raised by Robert Adams, is whether the God of absolute perfection is the traditional God of Christianity. Because Leibniz argues for deity’s moral quality as a consequence of absolute perfection, his God is no doubt closer to the personal God embodied in the incarnation. A promising response to this charge is that Leibniz’s test is consistent with, and maybe inclines us toward, the Christian God. It need not entail such a God. If it is consistent with the trinity and the incarnation, that is enough for Leibniz’s purpose.

The second pair of claims is theological, the part of Leibniz’s thought that is “always beginning.” First, love of God is our highest perfection and, second, love of God secures our

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reasoning. Its security is moral since it concerns our disposition and moral affects more so than
demonstration. These two claims contextualize the first paragraph of “Discourse” in a richer
conception of the moral quality of reason and explain why Leibniz corrects the Modern
disposition with love in the fourth paragraph. Faith, hope, and charity, which make up love for
God, are elements of rationality. They form expectations according to divine perfection and
enable us to anticipate the divine will.

But there remains a gap in Leibniz’s system between the beginnings of philosophy and of
theology. One is not justified by the other. This gap is a problematic since it is not a straight
forward break. Love of God features in his philosophy and theology, though its role in
philosophy seems distinct from its role in his theology. Philosophical concerns motivate his
theology, and vice versa. Reason encompasses both, though the domains of philosophy and
theology remain separate. Much remains to be done in working out this relation. But Leibniz’s
philosophy and theology are entwined such that writings like “Discourse” and Examen can and
should be read side by side. And, lastly, it seems Leibniz’s philosophy read apart from his
theology overlooks his encompassing notion of right reasoning, which he seeks to practice and
engender in others as humanity’s highest perfection.
Conclusion: Science and Prophecy

In a letter to Arnauld, Leibniz wrote that it is harder to be a prophet than a mathematician. The complete concept of a triangle is not like the infinitely complex notion of a single person.\footnote{A II 2, 75; M 59.} Though harder, prophecy informs mathematics and the sciences: prophetic truths express reality, as do proofs and explanations. While their strategies, evidence, and objects are distinct, these pursuits coalesce in the order and regularity of the divine nature. The prophet, mathematician, and scientist share a “love of God,” or a disposition receptive to the perfection in all things. To conclude my study, I will examine some implications of Leibniz's commitment to the moral quality of reason by looking at his reconciliation of miracles with natural law.

Leibniz believes miracles have a specific role as expressions of the divine will.\footnote{One significant role being the founding of Christianity. In Specimen of Catholic Demonstrations, or, Apology for the faith through reason, he writes, “The Christian faith does not rest upon ordinary reasoning, but upon the testimony of the Catholic Church received from miracles and martyrs…” (A VI 4, 2323; LGR 104).} They, too, are grounded in a love for God and should be reasoned over. But there is a tendency in current scholarship to overlook the significance of what Leibniz will later call “miracles of the second rank,” such as changing water into wine.\footnote{Adams, Leibniz, 94. No doubt, Leibniz’s distinction between first and second rank miracles helped him respond to certain objections. But my concerns are historical: what motivated Leibniz to deal with miracles as he did in 1686 (and thereabouts). So, I will set the distinction aside. However, even if the distinction is maintained, prophecy does not fit squarely in either category.} This tendency ignores the miraculous and revelatory within natural phenomena. What is more, it leaves the moral quality of reason undervalued. The tact for building a persuasive picture of Leibniz’s thought has been (i) reducing second rank miracles to first rank ones, which is Adams’ strategy,\footnote{Adams, Leibniz, 93. See also Donovan Cox, “Leibniz on Divine Causation: Creation, Miracles, and the Continual Fulgurations,” Studia Leibnitiana 34:2 (2002): 185-207.} (ii) altering Leibniz’s
account, or (iii) eliminating miracles altogether. With the first strategy, only miracles of the first rank are truly miraculous and “surpass all the force of creatures.” Real miracles include creation and the incarnation. Second rank miracles are not truly miraculous, but seem so from our inadequate or confused knowledge. The second strategy is concerned less with what Leibniz thought than constructing a persuasive argument inspired by his writings. But I am concerned with what Leibniz thought. The third strategy argues that there are no miracles on Leibniz’s system. What seem like miracles, including creation and the incarnation, result from the divine nature.

In 1686, Leibniz does not separate events according to first and second rank miracles; he supports miracles generally and includes as miraculous “some other actions of God,” beside creation, conservation and annihilation, and the incarnation. There are different strengths of the miraculous. Also, while Leibniz does not think miracles regularly occur, he believes they have a precise role in the divine economy. Miracles are a result of God’s moral quality: they are means by which God commune with rational beings.

From his concept of a love of God (and other, related views), Leibniz reconciles miracles with the universe’s rigid order exhibited by natural laws. Or, if he does not reconcile them, he gives us a reason to accept an apparent paradox. This may not be satisfying to philosophers.

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440 Those who see him as a Deist or non-believer would likely argue as much (see Stuart Brown, “The Regularization of Providence in Post-Cartesian Philosophy,” in Religion, Reason, and Nature in Early Modern Europe, ed. R. Crocker (Dordrecht: Klumer, 2001), 3; Shelby Hunt, Controversy in Marketing Theory: For Reason, Realism, Truth, and Objectivity (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 33; George MacDonald Ross, “Leibniz on the Origin of Things,” in Leibniz and Adam, eds. M. Dascal & E. Yakira (Tel Aviv: University Publishing Project Ltd, 1993), 252; All three discussed in Strickland’s “Introduction,” to LGR 10). Leibniz seems to suggest as much himself (see A VI 4, 1555; AG 49). I will address this passage later on.

441 Adams, Leibniz, 94.

442 Adams, Leibniz, 94.

443 In paragraph nine of “Discourse,” he shows he does not fear the risk of paradox (A VI 4, 1541; AG 41), nor again in a draft intended for Arnauld (A II 2, 50).
today who see such a concession as a threat to reason. A miraculous exception undermines a universal and exceptionless order. But it is from his concept of reason that prompted Leibniz to defend miracles in this way. Reason has a moral quality unlike that of Descartes’ and Spinoza’s philosophies: beauty, freedom, and goodness as well as personal commune with his creatures. Miracles are unique expressions of God because they relate the divine will to specific persons—at least for those who love God.

Miracles are a kind of revelation. Like all phenomena, they prompt a disposition in those that perceive them and are received in a certain way according to a person’s disposition. Specifically, miracles further our understanding of the Creator’s plan for our lives and the manner in which he wills us to act. So miracles reinforce and complement the perfections revealed by natural laws while exempt from such laws. Otherwise, the divine perfections would conflict. And this brings us to my concluding thesis: Leibniz’s defense of miracles and their role are motivated by his notion of an *ens perfectissimum*, which is transcendent, consistent, simple, and good. Leibniz approached the reconciliation of miracles with natural laws in “Discourse” according to the implications of his notion of the deity. Although an intellectual reconciliation remains dubious, miracles and natural laws cohere in a love of God.

My reading depends on a robust understanding of love for God. Although not love proper, creation itself has a tendency and disposition toward perfection. A rational being’s love is not confined to the intellect, but coincides with bodily motion. Only in this way can love play

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444 See A VI 4, 1532-1534 and 1586-1587; AG 36-37 and 67-68.
445 This is how I interpret Leibniz’s claim in the first paragraph of “Discourse” that “the more we are enlightened and informed of God's works, the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and entirely satisfying to anything we could have desired” (A VI 4, 1531; AG 35).
446 Presented in the Chapter 4.
447 See, for example, Leibniz’s marginalia to Descartes’ *Passions of the Soul* (A VI 4, 1703-1705).
a part in reconciling miracles with natural laws.\textsuperscript{448} In what follows, I begin by examining Leibniz’s conception of natural laws or subaltern maxims. Adams notes an ambiguity here, which I argue is not resolved in 1686: natural laws are not neatly situated in our nature or essence. Our substantial unity is a mystery—miraculous even—although Leibniz simultaneously explains the mystery away. This ambiguity allows miracles to present the divine will for our lives, the next subject I turn to. The opacity of our substantial form as well as its prompting to love and trust the Creator are embodied in the prophet.

**Natural Laws, Revelations**

In “La vraie méthode,” Leibniz declares that science is necessary for true happiness because happiness requires contentment, which then depends on an assurance of the future.\textsuperscript{449} Almost ten years later in “Discourse,” a similar view appears with respect to the divine: “As for the universal order, everything must conform to it” such that God cannot feign irregularity.\textsuperscript{450} Science contributes to our happiness, then, since it reveals creation’s regularity, ensuring the future, and also because observing, reflecting on, and inferring from the harmony of the universe bring about happiness. With such a pivotal role, science is threatened by miracles unless they conform to the general harmony. What sets miraculous phenomena apart, however, is their irregularity. The consistency of the universe and divine perfection are not the only issues in reconciling miracles with natural laws. Above all, Leibniz is concerned with securing our reasoning, and so must explain how the breach between miracles and natural laws contributes to the perfection of the world.

\textsuperscript{448} If right, the strength of this commitment is lessened in his later writings and may be unique to his middle period (Garber, “Foundations of Physics”).
\textsuperscript{449} A VI 4, 3.
\textsuperscript{450} A VI 4, 1537; AG 39.
Miracles concern the relation between God and man. That is one reason they occupy Leibniz. Another is because they threaten his notion of substance—a problem Gordon Park Stevenson fittingly calls the miracle problem.\footnote{Stevenson, “Miracles,” 171-172.} Leibniz believes that a substance contains all of its events and actions, including its relation to everything that occurs in the universe.\footnote{See A VI 4, 1539-1542; AG 40-42.} Nothing outside a substance occurs to it.\footnote{See A VI 4, 1549-1551, 1553-1554, 1572, 1574, and 1581-1582; AG. An additional question is how God, as a substance, can be said to act on substances if substances cannot interact (Cox, “Leibniz,” 191-207). That is where first rank miracles come in, like creation and annihilation.} The problem, then, is that a miracle is said to surpass what is contained within a substance. What must be explained is how Leibniz can place all events within a substance while admitting the supernatural.\footnote{Stevenson proposes some distinctions that he believes amend Leibniz’s account (Stevenson, “Miracles,” 174-188).}

The problem seems to be exacerbated when Leibniz’s many remarks on miracles are set side by side. In “Discourse,” he implies that miracles are contained in a person’s nature as a result of everything being so contained.\footnote{See A VI 4, 1546; AG 45.} Shortly after in his correspondence with Arnauld, he writes that miracles surpass a person’s natural force and, presumably, their nature.\footnote{See A II 2, 179-180; AG 83.} He uses ‘nature’ and ‘essence’ ambiguously: sometimes the words are used interchangeably, other times he distinguishes them to explain how miracles are possible. Besides relating God and man, miracles threaten Leibniz’s ontology.

\textit{1. Substantial Form.} To see what is at stake in the miracle problem, a synopsis of his core metaphysics is needed. In his early years, Leibniz adopted an Aristotelian conception of substantial form for theological reasons—namely, to allow for and explain the Christian
mysteries. The doctrine extends to his physics and broader metaphysics during his middle period. What once grounded theology alone now grounds physics as well as a basic metaphysical tenet. And in contrast to his later views, especially those of Monadology, his notion of substantial form is distinct. Daniel Garber summarizes Leibniz’s view, “Every substance is complex [in nature], made up of a soul joined to a body, a substantial form that makes some portion of organized matter into a unified complex being.” Put differently, a substance has a soul joined to a body with the soul forming the body into one being. There is more than one body involved. Leibniz also thinks that bodies are made up of other bodies, which are made up of more bodies, and so on, with each body having its own unifying form. An organism is not a simple substance, but an infinite complex of substances.

Paralleling substantial form, there are also two kinds of law: (a) universal and rigid harmony put in place by God’s creative act and (b) phenomenal regularity, which is the basis for scientific laws (natural laws or subaltern maxims). Universal harmony is infinite and exceptionless; natural laws are finite, vulnerable to exception, and occasionally present the erratic. A second problem, then, is explaining how universal and natural laws coalesce. Stevenson coins this the conformity problem. Given Leibniz’s commitments, we may expect substantial form to unify universal harmony and natural law. If so, it is unclear how they do so. With a miracle, divine intervention seems requisite and that would change a substance from outside. Substances do not contain miraculous events. As we just saw, Leibniz seems to reject

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457 Garber, Leibniz, 40-43.
458 Garber, Leibniz, 89. While I will not be directly responding to the thesis that Leibniz held the same core metaphysics from 1686 on, the interpretation for miracles given here supports Garber's thesis as much as it depends on it.
that possibility. There is not a clear solution to the conformity problem in 1686. But instead of importing a solution from elsewhere, I think there are reasons for Leibniz to tolerate a lacuna.

According to Stevenson and Adams, Leibniz’s nascent response to the conformity problem happens in paragraph 16 of “Discourse.” He invokes a distinction between ‘essence’ and ‘nature’ that corresponds to the one between harmony and natural law. Miracles conform to the universal harmony while suspending natural laws—that is, they adhere to a substance’s essence, not its nature. Since Leibniz uses these terms loosely, the passage can be read in a few ways.

…we can call our essence, or idea, that which includes everything we express, and since it expresses our union with God himself, it does not have limits and nothing surpasses it. But what is limited in us can be called our nature or our power, and in this respect what surpasses the natures of every created substance is supernatural.

On one reading, nature or power is substantial form, and so is causally efficacious and concrete. The essence is an idea in the mind of God and substantial form excludes universal harmony. Miracles intervene on a substance, despite Leibniz’s protests. On another reading, essence corresponds to substantial form as an idea in God’s mind, and is causally efficacious and concrete. Substantial form includes harmony, then, and miracles are contained within it. Phenomena are called miraculous when they surpass our natures or powers to bring them about or understand them. On yet another reading, emphasis is placed on what is expressed by us

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462 A VI 4, 1555; AG 49.
463 Adams notes a few passage in support of this reading, though doesn’t endorse it himself (Adams, *Leibniz*, 87-88).
and what is limited in us; substantial form consists in the unity of what we express and what is limited by our finite expression. Like all of creation, miracles are expressed by us, but they do not proceed from our nature or power.\footnote{While I will support this reading in what follows, I agree with Stevenson and Adams that Leibniz does not have a completely developed account of the unity of harmony and law in 1686.}

2. The Nature of Persons. As said, miracles go to the heart of Leibniz’s metaphysics, especially his concept of persons. The above passage should be read from that perspective, too, not just with respect to the general concept of substance. When explained in terms of persons, it becomes clear that the unity of harmony and law is trusted and believed by the one who loves God.

Persons are unique in creation because they can know and love God. A soul is “a certain expression, imitation or image of the divine essence, thought, and will, and of every idea that is comprised in it,” Leibniz writes.\footnote{A VI 4, 1573; AG 59.} Our intimacy with the Creator results from our causal dependence on him as our soul is an effect of his emanation. That is our metaphysical intimacy, at least. Our moral intimacy comes from the deity’s intelligibility and reason. “God is the sun and light of our souls,” Leibniz continues a few lines down, as the only external cause on us. Persons uniquely express the Creator because we perceive the reasons why certain things exist and express those reasons in the sciences. In recognizing things for what they are and how they relate to one another, we perceive and represent the divine mind. We perceive how God wants us to live and imitate him.

Persons are also embodied. And if there is anything real about bodies, there must be substantial forms, or a unifying force within them.\footnote{Garber, Leibniz, 76.} By reintroducing form, Leibniz replaces the
Cartesian definition of matter as extension. \(^{468}\) Something more than geometric properties is required to explain the unity of a body, or else such a unity is an infinite aggregate of bodies (and so not a true unity). A person is a unified, though infinite, complex of bodies. In a fragment slipped into “Discourse,” Leibniz defines body as “some extended phenomena that we attribute more particularly to ourselves.” \(^{469}\) His examples—running, hitting, and falling—are “considerable changes” that occur to us. They have enough force or clarity to be distinguished from another body’s movement, and so we ascribe them to ourselves. In turn, the soul is a “point of view,” expressing all things in a certain way, which the body fixes or limits. Although we express everything in the world, the form unifying our substance gives more distinctness and clarity to certain phenomena over others.

Whether or not we accept the doctrine of substantial form does not change how we explain the details of phenomena. \(^{470}\) If our form is changed by our love, it would seem to have no effect on phenomena. That is not the case: Leibniz does not say that his reintroduction of form leaves the nature of phenomena unchanged. For the Cartesian, natural phenomena contain something “imaginary” as a result of an impoverished ontology. \(^{471}\) Without including force in bodies, their reality is insufficiently accounted for. His claim is not that substantial form leaves the significance, interaction, and nature of phenomena unaffected; rather, the form of a body cannot be appealed to when we explain how a specific body acts on other bodies or reacts to them. The Scholastics’ error was thinking that science could be done by reflecting on the

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\(^{468}\) See (A VI 4, 1542; AG 48).
\(^{469}\) …quelques phenomenes d’étendue, que nous nous attribuons plus particulierement (A VI 4, 1552). The date of the fragment is uncertain, though it could have been included much later than 1686. A similar point with respect to real phenomena (not specifically bodies) is made in a manuscript written between 1683 and the beginning of 1686 (A VI 4, 1498-1504).
\(^{470}\) See (A VI 4, 1542-1544; AG 42-43).
\(^{471}\) See (A VI 4, 1545; AG 44).
ontology of bodies.\textsuperscript{472} Without an adequate metaphysics, on the other hand, mechanistic explanations will only be partially understood.

3. \textit{Expression of Love}. To reconcile his rejection of substantial interaction with everyday understanding, Leibniz adds, “We attribute to ourselves usefully and with reason the phenomena that we express more perfectly.”\textsuperscript{473} Expression is a technical term for Leibniz that describes two kinds of relations: (i) a causal relation where the effect presents certain features of its cause and (ii) an emergent relation across levels of analysis.\textsuperscript{474} Strictly speaking, all phenomena proceed from a substance as its effects, and so every phenomena expresses a substance. But this is not how we usually think of our experiences. Substantial form organizes phenomena in such a way that we attribute some to ourselves and some to other bodies. Which is which depend on the strength of given phenomena and relations between them. Our unity as an individual, both substantively and phenomenally, depends on substantial form. But what we “express more perfectly” has a moral sense, along with a metaphysical sense. Love characterizes the substantial form of rational beings, too. It is a heightened disposition or tendency to the perfection in all things and the divine, which is a matter of degree. All substances have a disposition toward their own perfection, and so love can characterize all things. But persons are unique because they can will the same as God.

The strength of phenomena and their relations depend on our own perfection. How we are disposed, inclined, and affected change how phenomena present themselves. Now Leibniz does not say that love characterizes substantial form outright. He writes to that effect, however. For example,

\textsuperscript{472} See (A VI 4, 1543; AG 42).
\textsuperscript{473} A VI 4, 1553; AG 42.
\textsuperscript{474} Stevenson, “Miracles,” 175.
And since the whole nature, end, virtue, and function of substances are only to express God and the universe...there is no room to doubt that the substances which express him with knowledge of what they are doing and who are capable of knowing the great truths concerning God and the universe, express him incomparably better than those natures that are either brute and incapable of knowing truths, or altogether lacking thought and knowledge.⁴⁷⁵

There are two reasons I think “express[ing] God and the universe” is characterized by love for Leibniz: first, sameness of will is a mutual expression, or two people expressing the same desire, and, second, finding one’s good in the good of another is an expression of someone else’s happiness or perfection. In both cases, the divine lover harmonizes with the divine so that loving God is an imitation of him—an imitation to our very core. Said differently, expressing the divine will and good are “the whole nature, end, virtue, and function of substances.” And every substance, rational or not, expresses God and the universe, the difference being that rational organisms join metaphysics and morality in themselves.

Loving God is our highest expression of him. This is further supported by the one truth on which divine love rests: God acts in the most perfect and desirable way. We love the deity, or are inclined to do so, when we know “this great truth.”⁴⁷⁶ In the second and third paragraphs of “Discourse,” Leibniz criticizes Descartes, Spinoza, and Malebranche for their deficient notions of God. Their views result from “the inadequate knowledge we have of the general harmony of the universe and of the hidden reasons for God’s conduct.”⁴⁷⁷ Our knowledge of the universe goes hand in hand with our knowledge of the deity since creation expresses the Creator. By

⁴⁷⁵ A VI 4, 1585; AG 66.
⁴⁷⁶ A VI 4, 1535; AG 37.
⁴⁷⁷ A VI 4, 1534; AG 37.
holding that the universe results from the brute divine will, instead of qualities like beauty and goodness, they overlook nature’s rich harmony as well as the perfection of the divine nature. Similarly, Leibniz emphasizes in *Examen* that the deity is not only “the supremely great author of things, but also the supremely good prince of minds, and indeed the Legislator.” God has a moral quality, or commune with rational beings, and he acts most perfectly to us and for us because of that quality. Loving God expresses this sameness of goods.

Those who love God can also be assured of their happiness, which is the end of science. Leibniz cites Romans 8:28 as a rule of perfection in “Discourse” and again in *Examen* when describing the city of God: nothing bad happens to those that love God or all things work together for their good. The apostle's words are taken seriously: “If, collectively, minds were always thinking this [that God acts most perfectly and desirably] and accompanying it with actions, they would live happily without question.” Though he notes afterwards that original sin disrupted perpetual, universal happiness, Leibniz’s claim is that love of God is enough to secure our happiness, at least in principle. Despite misfortune, someone who loves God knows that everything works out for her. She is disposed toward God in such a way that she is perfected by the manifestation of the divine will in events. She is “content with how things happened in the past” with a trust that the future will be perfect and desirable, too. And so her happiness is secure.

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478 *Deus ergo non tantum est maximus autor rerum, sed et optimus princeps mentium, et Legislator quidem* (A VI 4, 2357).
479 See (A VI 4, 1536 and 2358; AG 38).
480 *Si mentes igitur universae hoc semper cogitarent actionibus exequentur, beatae sine controversia viverent* (A VI 4, 2358).
Divine Expressions

A miracle is a suspension of natural laws, which presents a contrast from which phenomena stand out as irregular. For God to have a moral quality, and so relate to rational beings, a dichotomy between miracles and natural laws is required. According to Leibniz, natural laws are not violated when they seem to fail because they express the harmony of the universe without exhausting the universe’s harmony. Their suspension must be of a certain kind: irregular phenomena must compel us to praise the infinite wisdom of the Creator and prompt us to more exact laws. Natural laws give us access to a harmony that exceeds our mapping of causal regularities. When they lead to successful predictions, we witness nature’s order, and so the divine orderliness. When our predictions fail or an irregularity emerges, the natural laws enable us to witness a higher order in light of which our laws may be revised. The Moderns erred, then, by restricting the content of natural laws to our comprehension of the world instead of perceiving a transcendent harmony from them.

1. Substance and Phenomenon. A natural law is based on a phenomenal regularity or a “custom of God.” To begin, natural laws are rules for how phenomena relate and substances coincide. As said earlier, phenomena proceed from a substance and phenomena across substances coincide. Nature’s harmony, then, is a thoroughly consistent and regular coinciding of substances, and natural laws formally approximate their coinciding. As a result, the unique organization of phenomena that characterizes one substance is distinct from the coinciding of substances. Phenomena are exclusive to a substance, though the phenomena of one substance meshes with that of every other. Despite the gap between substances (i.e., their lack of interaction), phenomenal consistency suffices for making observations “useful for regulating our

481 A VI 4, 1539; AG 40.
conduct,” Leibniz remarks. Since they express substances, phenomena justify scientific generalizations. But the distinctness of their regularity from substantial form and the overall harmony explains how the sciences are fallible. There is a residual possibility of error and improvement.

2. A Definition of Expression. Natural laws are specific kinds of expressions, akin to how phenomena express their substance. Above, I noted two senses of expression: a causal relation and an emergent relation. Leibniz introduces the concept, ‘expression’, in paragraph nine of “Discourse,” writing, “Every substance is like a complete world and a mirror of God or of the whole universe, which each expresses in its own way.” In a letter to Arnauld of the following year, Leibniz defines the term: “One thing expresses another when there is a constant and ordered relation between what can be said of one and of the other.” Leibniz’s definition includes both senses noted by Stevenson. It is an ordered pair, such as a cause and an effect, and an emergence across metaphysical strata, such as substantial form, the organization of phenomena, and natural laws. Something expresses something else when they maintain a regular relation, causal or otherwise, in which the terms remain distinct.

Substances, phenomena, and their coinciding ultimately express God, yet our perception of nature as a whole is confused. If we could perceive the whole, we would know God’s plan for creation; natural laws would conform to the divine economy. But that is not the case. Still, natural laws are expressions of the divine plan. In the more local instance of a substance and its phenomena, the latter expresses the former when a constant and ordered relation maintains between them, and phenomena do not exhaust or become identical to their substance. More

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482 A VI 4, 1550; AG 47.
483 A VI 4, 1542; AG 42.
484 A II 2, 231; M 144.
485 See (A VI 4, 1542; AG 41-42).
broadly, natural laws can be suspended as long as their constant and ordered relation with the divine economy holds. If their suspension violates that relation, natural laws do not express God’s nature, and so fail to dispose us properly toward the Creator.

Leibniz separates our essence or idea, which is infinite, from our nature or power, which is finite. Our substance expresses everything according to its essence or idea, yet does so in a limited way according to its nature or power. The universal harmony is expressed by our essence or idea; phenomenal regularity is expressed by our nature or power. Natural laws are limited expressions that we devise according to our mental capacity and perceptions. And, as Adams observes, Leibniz does not tell us which of the two pairs involves substantial form. I am leaving that problem to the side, but mention it once more to bring up the question of unity. Clearly, there is a parallel gap between harmony and natural laws, and our essence and our nature. Just as natural laws express harmony, so our nature expresses our essence. One is the means for perceiving the other. But perception is not strictly a matter of knowing. Perceiving includes a disposition and tendency toward phenomena.486 There is an ontological structure at work: phenomena are constituted by and follow from their substance, as we have already seen, yet the perceptions of certain phenomena also set a substance apart. And so each substance is like a world, or an image of a city, and so unique.

Substances contain the “character of God’s infinite wisdom and complete power” so that reality is an expression of God.487 A substance contains a likeness of divine perfection, qualities like power, knowledge, and goodness. In “Discourse” and Examen, Leibniz conceives perfection in terms of God. He writes, for example, that God is “a most perfect substance that is one, eternal, present everywhere, omniscient and omnipotent…by whom everything else was created

486 For a discussion of the epistemic and metaphysical parallel in expression, see (Grosholz, “Theomorphic”).
487 A VI 4, 1542; AG 42.
from a most beautiful reason and is sustained by a certain continual production.”

“Discourse” begins, “The most meaningful notion of God that we have is expressed well enough in these words: God is an absolutely perfect being; but the consequences of these words are not sufficiently considered.” God is the most perfect substance because he contains every perfection, each in its highest form, and does so uniformly. Created substances are real to the extent they express absolute perfection, or approximate the divine nature.

Rational beings are more perfect, or have more reality, because they express the divine nature more so than animals or plants. Among rational beings, those who love God are more perfect than those who do not. Leibniz does not say this, to my knowledge, though he claims that loving God is our highest perfection and that few know what love of God means. Still, there seems to be room for more or less reality between persons. “All our phenomena…,” Leibniz writes, “are only the results of our being, and since these phenomena preserve a certain order, they conform to our nature, or to the world that is within us, so to speak.”

What a substance perceives is grounded in itself, not the object perceived, and so what the hater perceives as harmful may be received as a blessing by the lover. Given the “whole nature, end, virtue, and function of substances” and the difference between rational beings and animals, there likewise seems to be degrees of reality based on someone’s love.

4. Harmony of Substances. Natural laws describe the outworking of a substance, which harmonizes (more or less) with every other. Such laws approximate the harmony of the entire universe. Leibniz notes, “The perceptions or expressions of every substance mutually correspond

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488 …substantiam perfectissimam eamque unicam, aeternam, ubique praesentem, omnisciam et omnipotentem…a qua omnia alia pulcherrima ratione creatae sunt, et perpetua quaedam productione conservantur (A VI 4, 2357).
489 A VI 4, 1531; AG 35.
490 A VI 4, 2357 and 2386; 2222.
491 A VI 4, 1550; AG 47.
in such a way that each, carefully following certain reasons or laws that it has observed, coincides with others doing the same."\(^{492}\) As Leibniz was aware, if a substance's phenomena were completely insulated, their regularity could not justifiably be ascribed to reality, nor could I expect my generalizations to match others. For him, the coinciding of phenomena across substances results from the perfection of the divine plan. There are laws internal to each substance that ensure consistency between them. Again, there is a place for love in the sciences. The match between my generalizations and others expresses the universal harmony, which is completely perfect, and this increases my own perfection as I express the divine. Scientific laws are the result of a concerted effort of minds to perceive and formalize the universal harmony, and so perfect themselves. But outliers are expected to conform to the divine harmony by those who love God.

Natural laws should be situated in an ambitious, but incomplete, ontology. Substances are “infinitely extended” due to their relation to the entire universe, yet their “manner of expression” limits them.\(^{493}\) With respect to the deity, a substance is infinite because it expresses absolute perfection, yet finite since it does so according to its nature or power. A created substance is an expression and one among many, none of which exhaust the absolute. Lastly, the harmony of these substances with each other expresses the divine plan. Leibniz’s ambition is a philosophy to reorient and amend Cartesianism. His ontology is incomplete because there is a gap left in the unity of substantial form as well as between universal harmony and natural laws.

\(^{492}\) A VI 4, 1550; AG 47.

\(^{493}\) A VI 4, 1553; AG 48.
The Place for Revelations

“It is good to think God does nothing which is not orderly,” Leibniz commends. When we expect phenomena to be regular and ordered, science is secure, and so is our happiness. Leibniz justifies this expectation by identifying the principle of science with divine perfection: “the simplicity of the means is balanced with the richness of the effects,” which expresses the deity because “reason requires that we avoid multiplying hypotheses or principles.” And God acts most reasonably. The principle of more with less is not a method for analyzing phenomena, but disposes us to expect and seek perfection within phenomena. In each body, for example, there is an infinite complex of other bodies, so we should expect an investigation of even the smallest, mundane body to express infinite richness. The sciences assume and look for a most rigorous and perfect order. They formalize how God acts.

Although the reasons for some natural phenomena remain hidden, Leibniz tells us the reason for revelations: they express how God wants intelligent beings to act. If the universe’s harmony is perfect, we may wonder why revelations are needed. Whether they violate, suspend, or conform to natural laws, revelations detract from the general order by calling attention to specific, at least seemingly irregular phenomena. To fit into Leibniz’s world, they must contribute to the overall perfection. And this brings us back to my claim: the conformity required between revelations, miracles, and natural laws goes beyond metaphysical consistency; apparently irregular phenomena must have a certain nature and effect.

1. Defining Revelation. First, revelations are a specific kind of phenomena, and so have a place in nature. Like other phenomena, they prompt a certain disposition and are received by those of a certain disposition. I suggested at the outset that someone who is disposed toward

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494 A VI 4, 1537; AG 39.
495 Garber, Leibniz, 82-83.
absolute perfection, is inclined and affected toward the divine, is someone who loves God. And, for Leibniz, love of God is consonant with right reason. “God is the sun and light of souls,” he affirms, and realizing this elevates “the soul to knowledge of its goodness,” or perfection. Our discovery and formulation of natural laws express the universe's harmony. Revelations express the divine plan for our particular lives. Leibniz believes natural and revealed phenomena are mutually complementary and rational.

Revelations are conspicuously absent from Leibniz's discussion of miracles in “Discourse.” He introduces them in Examen as follows:

Thus, God not only acts by that general and secret will that governs the mechanism of the universe by certain rules and that concurs with every mental action, but also declares his specific and public will concerning the governance of mental conduct like a legislator of his city, and ratifies his will by rewards and punishments. For this purpose, he introduced revelations.

God’s “general and secret will” fixes rules that compose the universe's harmony, which natural laws approximate. Revelations, on the other hand, express how the Creator wishes rational beings to act. They guide us in living the good life as phenomena of the deity’s particular will. Scripture is such a revelation; so are miracles. So there is an important difference between natural phenomena and revelations. Nature’s order can be accessed through intellectual acts, such as generalizing from a set of occurrences. A revelation is not regular and frequent, though it is susceptible to rational examination. A revelation expresses God’s moral quality.

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496 A VI 4, 1573-1574; AG 60.
497 Itaque Deus non tantum agit generali illa atque occulta voluntate que totam universi machinam certis regulis gubernat et cum quibuslicet mentium actionibus concurrit, sed et voluntatem suam particularem et apertam circa mentium actus gubernationemque civitatis suae tanquam legislator declarat, ac praemiis poenisque sancit, eumque in usum revelationes insituit (A VI 4, 2361).
Just as he sets up his discussion of natural laws with a definition of God in “Discourse,” Leibniz returns to the divine nature before speaking of revelations. “To recall, then, God is not only the first substance of all other things as their author and preserver,” which is his metaphysical nature, “but also the most perfect Intelligence, which is why he has a moral quality.”\footnote{Considerandum est itaque Deum non tantum esse substantiam primam omnium aliarum autorem et conservatorem, sed et esse Mentem perfectissimum, eaque ratione induere qualitatem moralem (A VI 4, 2361).} Due to the same organization underlying natural laws and revelations, it is fitting to begin with a definition of God for both. They are mutual effects of the most perfect divine economy. In his definition, Leibniz stresses that God “enters a certain relation with other minds” as their governor.\footnote{...in quandam cum caeteris mentibus societatem venire (A VI 4, 2361).} As such, there must be a contrast between natural laws and revelations for the deity to participate with individuals.

Leibniz does not describe revelation as an expression in Examen, but their relation to the divine will, to one another, and to rational beings suggest as much.\footnote{See (A VI 4, 2361).} For example, revelations are not superstition because “it is worthy of divine wisdom that nothing needed for prudent legislation be neglected.”\footnote{Divina enim sapientia dignum est quod nullus legislatorum prudentium negligit (A VI 4, 2362).} Unlike superstition, revelations guide our actions in a rational way as conforms to the divine character. “Right reason,” he goes on, “is the natural interpreter of God.”\footnote{...rectam rationem tanquam interpretem Dei naturalem (A VI 4, 2362).} Revelations are regular and ordered with respect to universal harmony, though contrasted with natural laws. They express divine perfection, and so can be handled rationally.

Revelations are occasional and singular, which is why there is the risk of superstition. Leibniz cautions, “A revelation must be distinguished by certain marks (that the vulgar call motives of belief), from which it may be established that its apparent content is the will of God,
not the illusion of an evil genii or a wrong interpretation of ours.»\textsuperscript{503} When formulating natural laws, a phenomenon’s repeatability conform to guiding principles. With revelations, something of particular phenomena must lend them credence.

The marks that prompt us to believe a revelation are called (by the vulgar) “motives of belief.” The positive proportion between our understanding of nature and perceived perfection explains how they compel us to believe. “The more enlightened and informed we are of the works of God,” Leibniz writes, “the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and in complete conformity with what we may have desired.”\textsuperscript{504} The more we realize universal harmony, in other words, the less we desire anything else and our love of God grows. Similarly, the more someone loves God, the more they perceive the marks of his perfection in specific phenomena. We are disposed to find the outliers contributing to the divine plan and our own perfection. Love of God increases our access to universal harmony as well as to the divine marks throughout creation.

Sometimes revelations lack the marks needed to confidently trust that they express the divine will. In Examen, Leibniz offers three criteria for accepting a revelation.

…if any lack such marks, then a revelation cannot be safely obeyed while in doubt, except when the command itself does not conflict with reason, nor another revelation, and aided by probable reasons, it is better to obey it than expose oneself to the danger of sin.\textsuperscript{505}

\textsuperscript{503} Porro revelatio notis quibusdam insignita esse debet (quas vulgo motiva credibilitatis vocant) ex quibus constet id quod in ea continetur nobisque ostenditur Dei esse voluntatem non illusionem mali genii neque nostram sinistram interpretationem (A VI 4, 2361).

\textsuperscript{504} A VI 4, 1531; AG 35.

\textsuperscript{505} …si qua vero talibus notis destituitur revelatio huic impune non paretur, nisi quod interdum in dubio, cum mandatum ipsum neque cum ratione neque cum alia revelatione pugnat, et probabilibus rationibus adjuvatur, melius est parerer, quam sese peccandi periculo exponere (A VI 4, 2361-2362).
A revelation must be consistent internally, consistent with other, past revelations, and obeyed when the probability of its truth outweighs the risk of sinning. Leibniz is less concerned with the revelation itself than the command it expresses. What the revelation is, whether a prophet, a divine sign, and so on, is less concerning than how we are to act in light of it. The command aligns with reason when it aligns with the presumed will of God. Past revelations, such as scripture and tradition, express what the divine will has been, which we can assume is consistent with his future will. And, as a minimum, if the command is innocuous, it is better to obey than risk sinning.

Reasoning over revelations accords with our nature. At base, we are disposed toward the perfection within phenomena because the deity has so inclined us. So, in paragraph thirty of “Discourse,” Leibniz notes that God “determines our will to choose what seems better without, however, necessitating it.” Revelations enhance our natural tendency. We are inclined to what seems best, though we know the best in specific circumstances confusedly. Revelations direct our action as a result of God’s moral quality by revealing perfection in given instances, which our natural tendency receives and acts on. Not superstitious trust, revelations are received rationally and thereby enhance our reasoning. Someone who accepts revelations perceives a broader harmony. Their love of God increases as they realize their own good and happiness.

God’s Particular and General Will

Behind Leibniz’s discussion of revelations is a distinction between God’s particular and general will. Revelations are expressions of God’s particular will while natural laws are

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506 A VI 4, 1575; AG 61.
expressions of his general will. Though Leibniz appeals to this distinction in *Examen*, a more extended discussion appears in “Discourse,” paragraph seven. He writes,

> As for general or particular volitions [or wills], depending on how the matter is understood, we can say that God does everything following his most general will, which is in conformity to the most perfect order he has chosen; but we can also say that he has particular volitions, which are exceptions to these aforementioned subaltern maxims [i.e., natural laws], because the most general laws of God that regulate the whole course of the universe are without exception.  

The earlier parallel is deepened: God’s general and particular will stand over and above our essence and nature, and harmony and phenomenal regularity. Suspending natural laws cannot present unqualified irregularity, especially since revelations express God’s particular will. Yet they suspend natural laws, which also express the divine will, generally. Phenomena are exempt from natural laws, Leibniz claims, when there is a stronger reason to intervene than to uphold them.  

Given the reasons for introducing revelations, we can suppose that that “stronger reason” is to enter into commune with rational beings, and so express the moral quality of God. Revelations are directives peculiar to rational individuals that would not otherwise be known. Part of Leibniz’s answer to the conformity question, then, is that the deity’s particular and general will (and so, universal harmony and natural laws) conform in his reason, which essentially contains a moral quality.  

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507 A VI 4, 1539; AG 40.  
508 See (A VI 4, 1538-1539; AG 40).  
509 Stevenson, Cox, and Adam do not use the divine will (or revelations) to answer the conformity problem, exclusively focusing on Leibniz’s notion of substance.
Later on in “Discourse,” Leibniz suggests that God’s general and particular will coalesce in his choice to create this world. Like the geometer’s line, the godhead has chosen what is simplest in hypotheses, richest in phenomena. Leibniz explains,

I use these comparisons to sketch an imperfect likeness of divine wisdom and to point at something that can at least elevate our mind to conceive in some way what cannot be sufficiently expressed. But I do not claim to explain in this way the great mystery on which the whole universe depends.⁵¹⁰

God’s choice of this world and his reasons for it unite his general and particular will. That unity is a “mystery.” Distinguishing God’s general and particular will is relative to our imperfect perception. Nonetheless, attempting to conceive the reasons for God’s choice “elevate[s] our minds.” Those reasons are expressed in the perfection of all things—they are the perfection of all things. So the “stronger reason” that suspends natural laws results from God’s choice of this world, or his unified will. The conformity of natural laws with revelations (and miracles) also results from that choice. Finally, love of God is our disposition toward the Creator’s most perfect choice and his reasons for it. The unity of God’s general and particular will is the mystery expressed throughout creation, which natural laws and revelations express in distinct, but complementary, ways.

By manifesting his specific and public will, God enters a relation with persons. His commune is rational since his marks are judged and acted on with respect to their consistency. And miracles are judged likewise. But revelations, generally, need not violate or suspend natural laws as miracles do. Scripture and tradition, for example, do not contest our sciences. Revelations express God’s particular will for rational beings’ action. Miracles, on the other hand,

⁵¹⁰ A VI 4, 1538; AG 39.
set apart divine truth and reason from imaginary phenomena so that we are not deceived. They are a subset of motives of belief. Of course, we can act against the divine will and refuse the miraculous, but conforming to it expresses perfection, our own and God’s. And to will what God wills—the perfection of creation and the happiness of persons—is to love him.

The Prophet

The mark of a revelation “is confirmed by a miracle or specific circumstance, an astonishing and unrepeatable event or coincidence, for which a cause cannot be ascribed.” Miracles are coupled to a revelation and are outside known causal laws. Whether they are distinctive simply because of their unknown origin or if something more is involved has yet to be decided. Two limits can be set, though, given what has been said.

First, miracles reveal universal harmony by being an expression of God’s particular will. They are part of the divine plan and conform to the general harmony in such a way that God relates to individuals. Miracles occur as a result of God’s moral quality. This means that miracles are not only effects without evident causes, but phenomena that uniquely express the divine will. There are specific effects that are achieved despite our ignorance.

To achieve these effects, miracles set revelations apart from other phenomena. The contrast increases the perfection of those that perceive it. This is a second limit to what remains of my study. Miracles suspend the usual order, which no doubt expresses the deity, to present a “stronger reason.” God’s particular and general will unite in his reasons and choice of this world, and universal and natural laws harmonize as do persons’ substantial form. Miracles effect the overall harmony in a way that could not happen without them.

511 …miraculo seu circumstantia, eventuve aut consensu admirabili et inimitabili quem casui ascribere non licet confirmetur (A VI 4, 2362-2363).
“How the prophet in fact makes out the [divine] marks, predicts the future accurately and in a given situation, goes beyond not only human powers, but those of every creature,” Leibniz remarks, and so an act of prophecy is miraculous.\footnote{Quam in rem inprimis facit prophetia, futura enim accurate ac singulatim praedicere, supra vires est non humanas tantum sed et creatas omnes (A VI 4, 2363).} Since prophecy goes beyond the “powers” of a substance’s nature, it serves as a case study for how the three-fold unity mentioned above comes together. Leibniz’s conception of reason spans science and prophecy and, as a result, natural laws and universal harmony conform within reasoning. A consequence of such a link is that science and prophecy stem from divine love. The most perfect form of reasoning is grounded in, motivated and guided by, love of God.

Revelations and miracles join in the prophet, who offers a specific directive for a group of people to obey and often performs a miracle, such as predicting the future in detail. Daniel J. Cook notes that Leibniz fell into the trends of his time by treating prophecy as an act of prediction instead of an exhortation to righteousness.\footnote{See Daniel J. Cook, “Leibniz on ‘Prophets’, Prophecy, and Revelation,” Religious Studies 45:3 (2009, September): 271-273.} But the role allotted to a revelation implies that Leibniz did include an admonitory role for the prophet: miracles accompany revelations (maybe exclusively), and revelations are moral directives. A revelation follows from God’s moral quality and is often supported by a miracle. When its divine source is shown by a miracle, such as when a prophet’s prediction comes true, a revelation should be obeyed.

But a prophet’s message should not be accepted by faith apart from reason.\footnote{Cook emphasizes Leibniz’s rational approach to prophecy, too. See (Cook, “Prophets,” 277-280).} The criteria for accepting a revelation applies: internal consistency, consistency with other revelations, and the probability of its truth outweighing the risk of sinning. When a prophet predicts the future in great detail, a miracle is performed, which weighs heavily in favor of the revelation’s truth.
Fulfilled prediction, in fact, may be one of the only genuine miracles within the world, and so is a privileged miracle of the second rank (or eludes that distinction altogether). 515

With a successful prediction, the future contained within a prophet’s substance is expressed clearly and distinctly enough to describe the future in detail. Leibniz tells us that prophecy is certainly an act of God. Now, there is a revelation to the prophet and a prophet’s revelation to the people. When a divine message is accompanied with a prediction, one miracle confirms another—namely, the prophet’s access to God’s particular will is confirmed by a successful prediction. For the hearer, a miracle confirms the prophet’s revelation.

Although everything that will occur is contained in a prophet’s complete concept, to perceive details of the future surpasses one’s power or nature. This brings us back to the miracle problem, with which I began. If the revelation of the future to the prophet is a divine intervention, an act outside of a substance occurs. Yet Leibniz holds that nothing outside a substance can occur to it. On the other hand, if a prophet perceives the future from their own substance, this violates the miraculous nature of the prediction. As I said up front, I do not think Leibniz resolved the miracle problem in 1686. What he did say, however, confirms the role of divine love for reasoning.

Soul and Body

The union of soul and body, “which has been held as inexplicable or miraculous,” is explained in paragraph 33 of “Discourse.” Leibniz writes,

We have said that everything that happens to the soul and to each substance follows from its notion and, therefore, the very idea or essence of the soul carries

515 Again in agreement with Cook; see (Cook, “Prophets,” 279-283).
with it the fact that all its appearances or perceptions must arise (sponte) from its own nature, and precisely in such a way that they correspond by themselves to what happens in the whole universe. But they correspond more particularly and more perfectly to what happens in the body that is assigned to it because the soul expresses the state of the universe in some way and for a time, following the relation of other bodies to it. This also allows us to know how our body belongs to us without, however, being attached to our essence.\textsuperscript{516}

The union of soul and body depends on perfection. Perceptions and appearances arise from a substance’s essence or idea. They are organized in such a way that some are more particular and more perfect, but everyone has a share in perfection. They are real to the extent they are perfect, that is. We have an infinite number of perceptions, but because perceptions have varying strengths, one’s own body stands apart as a locus from which a substance perceives the whole universe.

Love for God concerns the union of soul and body. The disposition and tendency toward perfection describe the correspondence between perceptions resulting from an essence, or idea, and the universe at large. But if love of God were only this, every substance would love God. There would be no difference between the one who loves and rebels. The universe’s rigorous harmony entails that each substance already corresponds with the universe as a whole. A rational substance, however, acts to increase or conform to that harmony, it wills the same as God and shares his good. Due to our will and intention, our substances approximate the harmony more or less. Similar to how perceptions of the body are more particular and perfect, the divine lover perceives more of the universal harmony. But what it means to perceive more harmony through

\textsuperscript{516} A VI 4, 1582; AG 64-65.
love, as well as how a prophet can perceive what is confused, depend on an interpretation of essence and idea, nature and power.

1. Substantial Form Excluded. In paragraph 16 of “Discourse,” Leibniz separates our infinite essence or idea from our finite nature or power. The interpretive issue, noted earlier, was whether to include substantial form in the essence or nature, or to interpret form as their unity. The question is whether substantial form includes universal laws besides natural ones. If essence includes form, our substance contains universal harmony; if essence does not, universal harmony is not contained in a substance. Instead, substantial form may unify harmony and scientific laws, and then the problem changes and there is an apparent paradox. Divine perfection is expressed through phenomenal regularity proceeding from our essence, yet conforms to the perfection expressed through phenomenal irregularity, which also proceeds from our essence.  

Robert Adams gives two reasons to suspect that Leibniz excluded substantial form from a substance’s essence or idea. First, in paragraph 13 of “Discourse,” Leibniz holds that a substance’s earlier states are contingently connected to its later ones. Supposing the universal harmony is contained in substantial form—so the argument goes—the relation between states would be stronger. Said differently, universal harmony requires necessary connections between the phenomena proceeding from a substance. But Adams does away with this interpretation, writing, “There is no reason why free actions could not flow contingently from an infinitely complex law of the general order incorporated in the substantial form of the agent.”

In comments to Arnauld, Leibniz also suggests a difference between the ordinary concurrence of God, which conserves substances, and extraordinary concurrence. The laws

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517 The conformity question, mentioned by Stevenson, changes into a conformity problem.
518 And Cox relies heavily on Adams’ interpretation; see (Cox, “Leibniz,” 204-207).
519 Adams, Leibniz, 87.
guiding a substance are maintained until God enacts a miracle.\textsuperscript{520} What these comments show is that Leibniz believed the deity sometimes acted beyond a creature's natural capacities, and so miraculously, though this violates his other commitments. Further, little is said of what an extraordinary act consists of and how it relates to creatures. For these reasons, Adams believes Leibniz is disingenuous in his remark. Better to think that substantial form includes the universal laws that produce all of its states.

2. Substantial Form Included. Adams then gives three reasons to include substantial form in a substance’s essence.\textsuperscript{521} In paragraph 16—the problematic passage—Leibniz speaks of our nature as an effect of the Creator’s act. As an effect, our nature is not only a divine idea, but also a concrete structure; that is, our nature expresses the whole universe. As a result, our nature expresses the miraculous: our nature is the same as our essence, both of which include everything a substance expresses. So substantial form should be identified with our nature.

Adams second observation weighs in on divine love. The power of our nature consists in what our nature expresses more perfectly. Substances do not act on one another; rather, our power consists in a more perfect expression. The reason for a miracle, then, is less known, perceived, or expressed by a substance than natural events. A miracle is an imperfect expression relative to a substance’s power. Although a miracle coheres with universal harmony, its reason exceeds our nature.

So far, the second reason for including them in substances is illuminating. As Adams observes, Leibniz often stresses the inability of created minds to foresee miracles since the order on which they depend is too complex, and so there is significant textual support as well. This

\textsuperscript{520} Adams, \textit{Leibniz}, 87-88.
\textsuperscript{521} See Adams, \textit{Leibniz}, 89-90.
observation “plays a central role in this interpretation,” Adams remarks. The miraculous is distinguished by lacking a simple explanation; its reason cannot be clearly and distinctly perceived by a substance. On Adams’ reading, miracles are distinct phenomena because they surpass our epistemic capacity.

Supposing Adams’ is right, this cannot be the whole picture for why Leibniz retained miracles in 1686. Speaking of prophecy, miracles happen to affirm that a revelation comes from God. A revelation is a moral directive to specific persons in certain circumstances, and prophets embody a miraculous revelation joined with a miracle. In Examen, Leibniz claims that a revelation and its accompanying miracle bring God in commune with individuals: through them, he reveals his “specific and public will.” His moral quality prompts him to reveal our good to us, which inclines our will without necessitating it, and, consequently, prompts us to reasoning. In short, a miracle is not simply a phenomenon that surpasses our epistemic capacities—it also has positive moral effects. A miracle increases our own perfection and the perfection of the world, and so complements natural laws.

Leibniz comments in 1686 and thereabouts support both of Adams’ two proposals. What lacks an explanation is the moral quality within substances, or how individuals commune with their creator. Daniel Garber has a third way to interpret the unity of substances, which I think has a place for love of God. On his reading, substantial form is the unity of the infinite essence with the finite nature. It is the force or activity individualizing a substance. When seen as encompassing our essence and our nature, love of God becomes as pervasive. What is at stake is more than a mental attitude. Love is a disposition or tendency characterizing the way our essence

522 Adams, Leibniz, 90.
523 Later, in his New Essays, Leibniz claims that genuine revelations do not need accompanying miracles (see Cook, “Prophets,” 280). On my reading, there must be a change in the role of the miraculous, then, between 1686 and his later writings.
and its phenomena correspond. There is a richer, more perfect correspondence for the divine lover than the rebel. For that reason, the person who loves God sees each event in their life as the most perfect and desirable—their good is the same as God’s. If right, Leibniz confronts a paradox: divine perfect is expressed through regularity and irregularity without evident reconciliation. But this paradox, or gap, is required for the Creator’s moral quality and a person’s relation to God.

3. Miracles as Revelations to those who Love. The prophet sees a revelation that could only come from a divine act; God brings forward what otherwise surpasses the prophet’s nature. To avoid a divine intervention, something else is required to make what is contained confusedly in a substance clear and distinct. My proposal is that divine love makes one receptive to what would otherwise surpass our natural capacities. If right, Leibniz confronts a paradox: divine perfect is expressed through regularity and irregularity without evident reconciliation. But this paradox, or gap, is required for the Creator’s moral quality and a person’s relation to God.

Adams notes a metaphysical problem that Leibniz faces if he allows miracles to be direct interventions of God. Although I am less concerned with solving the issues with respect to Leibniz’s notion of substance, I will mention it to set off my interpretation and its consequences. To start, there is a modal question of whether one possible individual can be the same as another until a certain point of time. If a miracle directly intervenes and changes the natural course, presumably there can be two individuals that are the same before the miracle and then are different afterwards. The problem concerns the harmony across substances: if a miracle occurs,

524 A similar interpretation can be given for Leibniz’s account of salvation in Examen (see A VI 4, 2369-2372). For an interpretation of salvation more in line with Adams, see Daniel Fouke, “Dynamics and Transubstantiation in Leibniz’s ‘Systema Theologicum’,” Journal of the History of Philosophy 32 (1994): 50 ft.
525 Adams’ treatment of miracles is from the perspective of modality (Adams, Leibniz, Chapter 3).
every substance must be made consistent with it since a substance relates to the universe, past, present, and future. If miracles change an individual, every other substance changes, too.

Now my approach to the question of miracles has been different than Adams’. Love of God closes the gap between regular and irregular phenomena as a disposition and tendency toward perfection. Adams is right when he says that a change in a substance entails a change in every substance, but that does not preclude various dispositions and varying strengths of substantial tendencies. Substances may be more or less perfect as long as they contribute to the highest perfection of the whole. For the divine lover, apparent irregularity prompts one to search for a reason and to praise God. The rebel, too, must contribute to the universe’s perfection. And a miracle *qua* revelation is an expression of God’s particular will that the lover may respond to in one way and the hater in another. So a miracle need not result from divine intervention, except insofar as an expression occurs that suspends natural laws and stands apart from God’s general will. But this happens within the divine plan and harmony as a result of his choice of this world.

In sum, a miracle may not be received as such. Charity, pleasure, and hope are ways someone is receptive to God’s particular will. To recall, charity and pleasure are an identification of our own good with God’s. Since everything that happens in the universe results from the divine will, everything is found to be good and most desirable. Where order and regularity are perceived, the lover praises God; where order and regularity are suspended, she praises divine wisdom. Underlying and informing the sciences is a moral quality.

Just as there are criteria for ascertaining a revelation’s validity, there are criteria for determining when a phenomenon should be ascribed to the divine will. When an event is good in itself “we can say that God willed and, sometimes, commanded it.”526 Hope is finding the effects

526 A VI 4, 1539; AG 40.
of a cause good so that events that are bad in themselves engender hope from an external effect, which justifies them. Bad events are already perceived in light of their contribution to perfection by the one who is charitable. Catastrophes and the like are not willed by God for themselves, but for the sake of their perfect effects. So phenomenal inconsistencies are levelled in our reception to perfection, which charity, pleasure, and hope embody.

But love is not only receptive, it is also active. Besides being responsive to the divine perfection in all things, love is a tendency toward that perfection. The past is received for what it is, but love acts for the future on the basis of God’s presumed will. A prophet guides us in this respect. The prophet receives God’s particular volition by proclaiming it to the people. For the people to receive the message, they must obey. Receiving a revelation is coupled with an action. The criteria for judging a true revelation is both consistent with the divine nature and exemplifies what the divine perfection expressed throughout the world prompts us to do—reason. The past is affirmed, the prophet heard, the scriptures read in order to act according to the divine will. All of this is within the scope of reason.

If God’s “stronger reason” for suspending natural laws does not resonate with divine love, imperfection enters the divine nature and the world at large. That resonance occurs in our substantial form, as the unity of persons. Love, a disposition and tendency of substantial form, unifies our perception of harmony through natural laws. By interpreting miracles as revelations that result from the moral quality of God, miracles do not detract from the perfection of the world. Instead, miracles are brought within the agency of persons. Those who love better perceive God’s particular will, which draws them further into their own perfection, while those in rebellion are repulsed. Lastly, the reception of revelations set persons apart since higher
perfections are only perceived by those who embody more perfection than others. The prophet is
on a higher plane, coming as if from a strange land, an exile on the earth.
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