

## Justice and Circumstances: Theodicy as Universal Religion

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**ABSTRACT:** One of Leibniz's main tasks in the *Theodicy* is to demonstrate that the correct interpretation of the doctrine of grace is consistent with his overarching conception of divine justice. I show how Leibniz argues for this conclusion by highlighting the importance of "circumstances" in determining whether or not a human being ultimately achieves salvation. One of the main points for which I argue is that although Leibniz is centrally concerned in the *Theodicy* with presenting a rational defense of revealed religion—in particular, that the tenets of Christian faith are in no way contrary to reason—the requirement of grace can be motivated from within the perspective of natural theology alone. In brief, Leibniz believes that the attainment of the highest human happiness presupposes, in addition to the excellence of an agent's natural powers, a kind of good fortune, manifested in the particular place the agent occupies within the order of nature.

**KEYWORDS:** justice, grace, blessedness, salvation, faith, circumstances

The *Theodicy* was published late in Leibniz's life. The circumstances of its composition, Leibniz's concern to have it reviewed favorably by Roman Catholic authorities, and the contents of the book itself point to its significance as a contribution to on-going theological debates. As its subtitle indicates, it is a work that concerns "the goodness of God, the freedom of man, and the origins of evil." Throughout the work, Leibniz responds to the conflicting views of contemporaries and predecessors on these topics, particularly those of Pierre Bayle, and attempts to show how such debates can be settled. His approach, as always, is irenic, but it marks out clear boundaries in the central disputes, especially concerning the defense of divine justice and God's lack of culpability in the existence of evil.

This much we can say about the book itself. If we move beyond the letter of the text, however, we may see the *Theodicy* in a different light. In my view, one of the principal points of interest of the book is as the expression of a distinctive theological outlook and a particular

conception of universal religion which Leibniz cultivated throughout his career. In the opening section of this paper I discuss the foundations of Leibniz's theodicy, emphasizing the significant ethical dimension he gives to it. In brief, it is Leibniz's view that the attainment of the highest human happiness, or blessedness, presupposes knowledge of the justice God exercises in the creation and government of the world and the emulation of that justice in our dealings with other rational beings.

In earlier writings, I have related the substance of Leibniz's theodicy, and of the ethics he bases on it, to analogous ancient views, especially those of the Stoics.<sup>1</sup> Here I approach the topic from the perspective of Leibniz's interpretation of Christianity, and in particular his recognition of the central role that divine grace plays in defining a theology that breaks with Stoicism. One of Leibniz's primary tasks in the *Theodicy* is to demonstrate that the correct interpretation of the doctrine of grace is consistent with his understanding of divine justice. In the second section of the paper I show how Leibniz argues for this conclusion by highlighting the importance of "circumstances" (*les circonstances*) in determining whether or not a human being ultimately achieves blessedness, or salvation. One of the main points I hope to bring out is that although Leibniz is centrally concerned in the *Theodicy* with presenting a rational defense of revealed religion—in particular, that the tenets of Christian faith are in no way contrary to reason—the requirement of grace can be motivated from within the perspective of natural theology alone. In brief, Leibniz believes that the attainment of the highest human happiness presupposes, in addition to the excellence of an agent's natural powers, a kind of good fortune, manifested in the particular place the agent occupies within the order of nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Rutherford, "Leibniz and the Stoics: The Consolations of Theodicy," in *The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Elmer Kremer and Michael Latzer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 138-164; "Patience sans Espérance: Leibniz's Critique of Stoicism," in *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Jon Miller and Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 62-89.

In the paper's final section, I make the case that while Leibniz's theodicy is distinct from Stoicism in emphasizing the dependence of human beings on fortune, identified with the particular grace God exercises with respect to each of them, in its outlook it is fundamentally universalistic and only secondarily Christian. Although Leibniz believes that his conception of divine justice is consistent with orthodox Christianity, and that its conclusions offer the best way of overcoming the schisms that have divided that religion, Leibniz's own religious sensibility extends the hope for salvation to all rational beings, pagan as well as Christian. What I can say about this will be brief, but I believe it is the deepest and most lasting lesson of his theodicy, even if it remains only a subtext of the *Theodicy* itself.

## I

The core tenet of Leibniz's theodicy is that the actual world has been conceived and created by a supremely just God, who chose it as the best from among an infinity of possible worlds. This choice is explained by the combination of God's supreme goodness and wisdom. God's goodness inclines him to all ends in proportion to their goodness, and his wisdom is his infallible knowledge of the goodness of all things. Together these attributes entail that God acts for the best. If he chooses to create at all, he chooses to create that possible world which has the greatest claim to existence, that is, the world which contains in itself the greatest goodness, reality or perfection.<sup>2</sup>

To this core tenet Leibniz adds a second claim about the special place of rational beings within creation. All created beings contribute to the perfection of the world through their

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<sup>2</sup> For representative statements, see T 22-23, 25, 225, 230. For a comprehensive study of the development and structure of Leibniz's theodicy, see Paul Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz: Fondements et élaboration de la Théodicée* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008). For a defense of its importance in relation to Leibniz's metaphysics, see Donald Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

intrinsic goodness or perfection, and through the harmonious relations in which they stand to one another. Individually, rational beings contribute far more perfection than any other kind of being (Leibniz sometimes says “infinitely” more), but they also contribute perfection in a fundamentally different way, insofar as they mirror in understanding God’s own understanding of the perfection and order of all things. In short, while other beings contribute to the goodness of the universe merely by being parts of it, rational beings contribute by being parts that are capable of understanding how all the parts, including themselves, are ordered in the universe. More than this, based on their understanding of order, rational beings are able to replicate that order through additions they make to the perfection of the universe. Thus, they understand, they plan, they construct—with all of this order-creating activity being conceived by God as part of what makes this the best of all possible worlds.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, and most importantly, rational beings have the capacity to understand the special place they occupy in creation and how their role replicates the role that God plays with respect to creation as a whole. That is, they are able to grasp reflectively that they are beings who understand order and have the capacity to produce order in the universe, just as God has brought into existence the world in which the greatest diversity of things is ordered in the simplest and most fitting manner.

Having understood this, rational beings are close to understanding a central feature of divine justice. As Leibniz construes it, justice is a disposition to bring about that outcome, with respect to the distribution of goodness, for which there is the greatest objective reason. Rational

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<sup>3</sup> See PNG 14: “As for the rational soul, or *mind*... it is not only a mirror of the universe of created things, but also an image of the divinity. The mind not only has a perception of God’s works, but it is even capable of producing something that resembles them, although on a small scale.... [O]ur soul is also like an architect in its voluntary actions; and in discovering the sciences according to which God has regulated things (“by weight, measure, number,” etc.), it imitates in its realm and in the small world in which it is allowed to work, what God does in the large world” (G VI 604-5/AG 211-12).

beings are able to understand that this standard of justice guides the actions of the most perfect intelligence, God, and they can infer from this that the same standard of justice should apply to their own actions as well. Hence, justice is a norm governing the conduct of all finite rational beings: to act rightly is to act for the sake of the best, or the greatest objective good. Consistent with this, rational beings treat cases differently only if there is an objective ground in goodness for this difference.

The capacity of rational beings to conceive of their moral personality on analogy with the moral personality of God underwrites what Leibniz calls the “city of God.” From this perspective, we are to think of ourselves as subjects who live under the rule of God as a perfect sovereign. As Leibniz writes in the “Monadology”:

the collection of all minds must make up the city of God, that is, the most perfect possible state under the most perfect of monarchs. This city of God, this truly universal monarchy, is a moral world within the natural world, and the highest and most divine of God’s works. The glory of God truly consists in this city, for he would have none if his greatness and goodness were not known and admired by minds. It is also in relation to this divine city that God has goodness, properly speaking, whereas his wisdom and power are evident everywhere. (Mon 85-86; G VI 621-2/AG 224)<sup>4</sup>

Leibniz’s conception of the city of God includes two ideas that are essential for understanding the moral dimension of his theodicy. First, as he indicates in this passage, it is only in relation to minds that God manifests his goodness, properly speaking. This statement must be taken with some qualification. The goodness of God’s will is evidenced in his disposition to produce good in whatever form it takes: metaphysical good, physical good, or moral good. However, the status of rational minds as subjects of the city of God, a status secured for them by their unique capacity to will as God does for the sake of the best, means that God has a special concern for the *well-being* of minds. Whereas God produces other beings for the sake of realizing a certain

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<sup>4</sup> Compare DM 35-37; T 146; PNG 15.

fixed degree of perfection within the universe, God creates minds so that they may do as well as possible, both morally and physically. God creates minds with the intention that they increase in perfection and that they find delight in their progress, which they do, because “all pleasure is a feeling [*sentiment*] of some perfection” (T 278; G VI 282), and happiness is just “a lasting state of pleasure” (Grua 579). Thus, God’s will to create rational beings includes an intention that those beings attain the greatest possible perfection and enjoy the greatest possible happiness. Given this, we can say that God’s goodness is manifested in the universal love, or charity, he shows toward rational beings—and this is why Leibniz says that God has goodness “properly speaking” only in relation to his “divine city.”<sup>5</sup>

The goodness of God’s intention toward rational beings is one dimension of Leibniz’s conception of divine justice as the “charity of the wise.” A second dimension involves God’s knowledge of the intrinsic merit of the individuals he creates and conserves. God’s will that rational beings do as well as possible—that they continue to progress in perfection and pleasure—is not absolute. It is conditioned both by the goal of creating the world of greatest total perfection, which entails tradeoffs among competing goods, and by considerations of desert.<sup>6</sup> As subjects of the city of God who live under the rule of divine justice, rational beings

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<sup>5</sup> “[God’s] supreme wisdom, together with the greatest goodness, make him observe most fully the laws of justice, equity, and virtue, and to have care for all his creatures, but especially those endowed with intelligence, whom he has made in his image; and to produce as much happiness and virtue as the idea of the best world can contain, and to admit no vice or misery except that which had to be admitted in the best series” (T cd120; G VI 456-7). See also T cd116, 123, 127; DM 5 and DM 36: “God, who always aims for the greatest perfection in general, will pay the greatest attention to minds and will give them the greatest perfection that universal harmony can allow, not only in general, but to each of them in particular.... And if the first principle of the existence of the physical world is the decree to give it the greatest perfection possible, the first intent of the moral world or the City of God, which is the noblest part of the universe, must be to diffuse in it the greatest possible happiness” (A VI.4, 1586-7/AG 67-8).

<sup>6</sup> On the former, see T 222: “Finally, I have already observed that [God’s] love of virtue and hatred of vice, which tend in an indeterminate way [*indéfiniment*] to bring virtue into existence and to prevent the existence of vice, are only antecedent acts of will, such as is the will to bring about the happiness of all men and to prevent their misery. These acts of antecedent will make up only a portion of all the antecedent wills of God taken together, whose result forms the consequent will, or the decree to create the best. Through this decree it is that love for virtue and for the happiness of rational creatures, which is indeterminate in itself and goes as far as is possible, receives

can expect to enjoy happiness in proportion to how well they emulate in their actions the goodness of the divine will. As Leibniz comments in the *Monadology*, “under this perfect government, there will be no good action that is unrewarded, no bad action that goes unpunished, and everything must result in the well-being of the good” (Mon 90; G VI 622/AG 224).<sup>7</sup> Thus, the culmination of Leibniz’s conception of divine justice is that there is a perfect balance between virtue and happiness. Rational beings do well in proportion to the virtue they exhibit, or the contribution they make to the overall perfection of the world. And God’s justice is expressed in his will to preserve this balance: no virtuous action is left unrewarded, and no wicked action is left unpunished.<sup>8</sup>

Leibniz is explicit in emphasizing the ethical implications of his theodicy. No one can be fully happy without understanding her existence in relation to God’s justice. This point is highlighted in the opening sentence of the Latin summary of the *Theodicy*, the *Causa Dei*: “The apologetic examination of God’s case concerns not only divine glory but also our advantage [*nostram utilitatem*], with the result that we may honor God’s greatness, that is, his power and wisdom, and love both his goodness and the justice and holiness which derive from it, and imitate these as much as is in our power” (G VI 439). In T 177, Leibniz identifies three “dogmas” that contradict the fundamental principles of his theodicy: that the nature of justice is

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some slight limitations, on account of the heed that must be paid to good in general. Thus one must understand that God loves virtue supremely and hates vice supremely, and that nevertheless some vice is to be permitted” (G VI 250-1).

<sup>7</sup> See also “On the Ultimate Origination of Things”: “Just as in the best constituted republic, care is taken that each individual gets what is good for him, as much as possible, similarly, the universe would be insufficiently perfect unless it took individuals into account as much as could be done consistently with preserving the harmony of the universe. It is impossible in this matter to find a better standard than the very law of justice, which dictates that everyone should take part in the perfection of the universe and in his own happiness in proportion to his own virtue and to the extent that his will has thus contributed to the common good” (G VII 307/AG 154).

<sup>8</sup> In T 74, Leibniz further suggests that this justice is effected through natural means: “There is good reason to believe, following the parallelism of the two realms, that of final causes and that of efficient causes, that God has established in the universe a connexion between punishment or reward and bad or good action, in accordance wherewith the first should always be attracted by the second, and virtue and vice obtain their reward and their punishment in consequence of the natural sequence of things, which contains still another kind of pre-established harmony than that which appears in the communication between the soul and the body” (G VI 142).

arbitrary; that it is fixed, but it is not certain that God observes it; and that the justice we know is not that which God observes. These false dogmas are pernicious, he says, because they “destroy the confidence in God that gives us tranquility, and the love of God that makes for our happiness” (G VI 220).

Extrapolating from the last statement, we may see Leibniz as ascribing two types of ethical benefits to theodicy. First, in understanding God’s justice, we acquire confidence in the rightness of all his actions. With this confidence, we are insulated from the disturbing effects of worldly evil; or if we are disturbed, we have the means of recovering our tranquility through reflection on the nature of divine justice. Of special importance are perceived imbalances between virtue and happiness: crimes that appear to go unpunished and good deeds that appear to go unrewarded. This aspect of theodicy, its capacity to support tranquility of mind, is the one most closely associated with the ancient idea of *consolatio*. In understanding the larger context in which God exercises his justice, we are aided in dealing with loss, grief and perceived injustice—circumstances that reflect our limited power and vulnerability to fortune.

Theodicy, though, also contributes in a more profound way to the attainment of the highest happiness. In comprehending the justice of God’s action, we acquire our fullest knowledge of the unity of the divine perfections of power, knowledge and goodness, and this knowledge itself and our consequent love of God is the source of our greatest pleasure.<sup>10</sup> The path to the highest happiness leads through the pursuit of intellectual knowledge and the practice of justice. Both of these forms of activity add to our own perfection and that of the world, and so

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<sup>10</sup> “All *pleasure* is a feeling of some perfection: one loves an object in proportion as one feels its perfections: nothing surpasses the divine perfections: it follows from this that the charity and love of God give the greatest pleasure that could be conceived, to the extent that one is penetrated by these feelings, which are not common among men, because they are occupied and taken up with objects to which their passions are related” (T 278; G VI 282). See also the Preface to the *Theodicy* (G VI 27-8).



they are immediately pleasing to us and sources of our happiness.<sup>11</sup> Yet these activities by themselves cannot suffice for our highest happiness. That, according to Leibniz, presupposes the knowledge and love of God, which is both the basis of our confidence, or expectation (*spes*, *espérance*), that our present happiness will continue in the future and the source of our “supreme happiness” (*le suprême bonheur, la suprême félicité*), identified with a “perpetual progress” in perfection and pleasure:

For the love of God also fulfills our hopes, and leads us down the road of supreme happiness, because by virtue of the perfect order established in the universe, everything is done in the best possible way, both for the general good and for the greatest individual good of those who are convinced of this, and who are content with divine government, which cannot fail to be found in those who know how to love the source of all good. It is true that supreme felicity (with whatever “beatific vision” or knowledge of God it may be accompanied) can never be complete, because, since God is infinite, he can never be entirely known. Thus our happiness will never consist, and must not consist, in complete joy, in which nothing is left to desire, and which would dull our mind, but must consist in a perpetual progress to new pleasures and new perfections. (PNG 18; G VI 606/AG 212-3)

Drawing together these threads, we can again distinguish two claims Leibniz makes about the ethical significance of his theodicy. One, stemming from God’s guarantee of a balance between virtue and happiness, involves our confidence that all good action is ultimately rewarded and all wickedness punished. Knowing this, we can (if we are virtuous) maintain hope for our future happiness, whatever fortune might bring. The second claim makes a more fundamental point, linked to the possibility of “supreme happiness.” To the extent that we

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<sup>11</sup> As Leibniz writes to Sophie Charlotte, “[Our reason] makes us resemble God in a small way, as much through our knowledge of order as through the order we ourselves can give to things within our grasp, in imitation of the order God gives to the universe. It is also in this that our *virtue* and perfection consists, just as our *happiness* [*félicité*] consists in the pleasure we take in it” (G VI 507/AG 192).

advance in the knowledge and love of God, we come closer to enjoying a “perpetual progress to new pleasures and new perfections.”<sup>12</sup>

Leibniz’s description of the latter end supports its identification with the supernatural happiness, or blessedness, that Christian theology represents as our salvation. A defining feature of this blessedness is that it is an unimpeded progress in perfection and pleasure: a continual ascent to greater goods that is not interrupted by states of pain or sin.<sup>13</sup> Leibniz believes that such an ascent can be achieved only by a mind devoted to the knowledge and love of God. However, he has little to say about exactly when one might attain such a state in the course of a created existence. It is consistent with his account that in our present life we are always “wayfarers,” on our way to an uninterrupted progress in pleasure, which we are able to enjoy only in another life. This would render his view consonant with Christian doctrine. Yet Leibniz’s conception of an eternal life beyond death remains obscure. It is not implausible to think that for him the created existence of a human being is nothing more than a succession of natural lives, within which we grow or wane in perfection; hence if anyone attains blessedness it must be within the course of a natural life – though not necessarily this life.<sup>14</sup>

Setting this difficult issue aside, I turn in the next section to a different question, central to the understanding of Leibniz’s ethics. This is the question not of *when* anyone can hope to

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<sup>12</sup> The possibility of this progress is explained by the fact that the object of our knowledge and love is God’s infinite perfections. According to Leibniz, we come to love God by developing an ever greater understanding of his “emanations,” through knowledge of eternal truths and knowledge of the harmony of the universe. The latter includes a comprehension of our own role as minds with the capacity to perfect ourselves and the world through the acquisition of ever more knowledge and the practice of justice. Thus, Leibniz writes, “progress never comes to an end” (G VII 308/AG 154). See the essay “Felicity” (Grua 580/R 84), and the discussion in Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*, chap. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Compare his letter to Christian Wolff of 21 February 1705: “I do not think that there can be a blessedness in creatures that would be the satisfaction of every sort of desire, but rather that the true blessedness of a created mind consists in the unimpeded progress to greater goods. It is not enough to enjoy a contented and tranquil mind, for that also belongs to those in a stupor.” *Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Christian Wolf*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt (Halle: Schmidt, 1860), 18.

<sup>14</sup> See Rutherford, “Leibniz and the Stoics,” 159, n.27.

attain supreme happiness, but rather *which* human beings can achieve this goal and under what conditions. Is intellectual enlightenment, through the progressive deepening of our understanding of God and his works, sufficient to bring us to this point, or is something more than this required?

## II

Whatever virtue we might now possess or might come to possess through the exercise of our natural powers of intellect and will, there is no guarantee on Leibniz's theodicy that this virtue by itself will be sufficient for blessedness, or a "perpetual progress to new pleasures and new perfections." Two considerations support this conclusion. First, for Leibniz, in contrast to the Stoics, virtue is not an absolute perfection, but a degree of perfection, whose perception is a source of pleasure. Second, for Leibniz, again in contrast to the Stoics, pain is a real (physical) evil to which the virtuous person always remains vulnerable. His psychology does not support the Stoics' image of the sage on the rack, happy and invulnerable, despite the physical torments inflicted on him. A person whose pleasure derives from moral virtue and intellectual activity will be less vulnerable than a person preoccupied with pleasures of the flesh. But any pleasure can be interrupted by sufficient pain, and we have no antecedent reason to believe that this might not happen to us, however much progress in virtue we have made.<sup>15</sup>

It might be thought that a principle of Leibniz's own metaphysics rules against this conclusion: God has created an infinity of degrees of perfection, a consequence of the principle of plenitude, so there must be some minds that are naturally endowed with powers of intellect and will that would allow them to achieve the highest happiness. This assumption, however, is

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<sup>15</sup> Leibniz sounds a more optimistic note about overcoming physical pain in T 255-257. The view he expresses there, however, is consistent with the point I have just made.

unfounded. All the degrees of perfection that God creates are finite degrees of perfection, and so it is always possible that the progress of pleasure supported by a mind's perfection may be interrupted by moments of pain—pain ascribable to the residual imperfection of the mind itself or to its place in the order of the universe.

This, for Leibniz, is the metaphysical basis of the Christian doctrine of original sin: there is an imperfection, or lack of metaphysical goodness, in the nature of any finite creature, an imperfection that was responsible for the Fall and for the subsequent disposition to sin manifested in every human being.<sup>16</sup> This imperfection, compounded by Adam's sin, means that there is no guarantee, in principle, that the natural powers of an individual will be sufficient to ensure its *perpetual* progress to new pleasures and new perfections. The consequences of this idea for Leibniz's attempt to accommodate the core tenets of Christian theology are profound. In the *Theodicy*, he presents it as supporting a conception of divine grace that preserves the anti-Pelagianism at the heart of Augustinian Christianity. In particular, Leibniz affirms the following three theses: First, no created rational being can achieve blessedness, or salvation, solely through the exercise of her own natural powers of intellect and will; in addition, this requires particular aids of grace bestowed by God. Second, where this grace is effective it is the basis of a perfected love of God, which in turn is the source of "a perpetual progress to new pleasures and new

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<sup>16</sup> "But the origin of sin comes from farther away, its source is in the original imperfection of creatures: that renders them capable of sinning, and there are circumstances in the sequence of things which cause this power to evince itself in action" (T 156; G VI 203/H 221). See also T 20, and T 147, where Leibniz links sin to God's provision of freedom of the will: "Here is another particular reason for the disorder apparent in that which concerns man. It is that God, in giving him intelligence, has presented him with an image of the Divinity. He leaves him to himself, in a sense, in his small department, *ut Spartam quam nactus est ornet*. He enters there only in a secret way, for he supplies being, force, life, reason, without showing himself. It is there that *free will* plays its game: and God makes game (so to speak) of these little Gods that he has thought good to produce, as we make game of children who follow pursuits which we secretly encourage or hinder according as it pleases us. Thus man is there like a little god in his own world or *Microcosm*, which he governs after his own fashion: he sometimes performs wonders therein, and his art often imitates nature.... But he also commits great errors, because he abandons himself to the passions, and because God abandons him to his own way. God punishes him also for such errors, now like a father or tutor, training or chastising children, now like a just judge, punishing those who forsake him: and evil comes to pass most frequently when these intelligences or their small worlds come into collision" (G VI 197).

perfections.” Third, God’s distribution of particular aids of grace is not tied to the intrinsic merit, or natural perfection, of the recipient. Those who are saved through grace are not necessarily those who are naturally most perfect, and it is consistent with God’s justice that of two individuals who are equally meritorious with respect to their natural goodness, one may receive the grace necessary for salvation and one not.<sup>17</sup>

The distinction between the imperfection inherent in the nature of any finite being and the imperfection (or corruption) that Christians interpret as a consequence of Adam’s “original sin” is critical for understanding the scope of Leibniz’s doctrine of grace. For Christians, the sinfulness of human nature, ascribable to the Fall, is the barrier that stands between human beings and God, which can be overcome only with the salvific grace offered through Jesus Christ. In his guise as Christian apologist, Leibniz addresses this barrier to salvation and affirms the role of divine grace as a necessary condition for it. Yet Leibniz’s account of grace also can be pitched in a metaphysical key that makes no reference to Christianity. Like all created rational beings, human beings have finite powers of intellect and will, which fall short of ensuring their “perpetual progress to new pleasures and new perfections.” Such progress will

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<sup>17</sup> In what follows I emphasize the grace necessary for salvation, that is, the divine assistance without which no human being can achieve supreme happiness. Leibniz distinguishes two senses in which God distributes grace *sufficient* for salvation: the first is the “grace sufficient for one who wills [*gratia sufficiens volenti*]”; the second, the “grace efficacious for willing [*gratia praestans ut velimus*],” or the “grace sufficient for willing [*gratia sufficiens volendi*]” (T cd109, 114; G VI 455-6). The former grace supplies whatever aid is needed for salvation over and above a good will. This grace, Leibniz says, may be dispensed either ordinarily “through the Word and the sacraments” to those who have received the Gospel, or extraordinarily, through miraculous intervention, to those who have not. Crucially, Leibniz insists that this grace is guaranteed to anyone whose will is properly oriented through a love of God above all things: “the necessary grace is never lacking in him who does what he can, and God abandons only those who abandon him” (T cd110; cd. T 95). I return to this point in section III. The second type of grace is that which is sufficient to produce a good will (thereby rendering its possessor eligible for the first sort of grace). This is the grace without which no created being can be saved and which in *some* recipients is sufficient for salvation. About this grace, Leibniz makes two main claims: first, it is a matter of election (God gives his aid to some and not others); second, the aid which is given is not sufficient *in itself* to ensure salvation: it will bring about this outcome, only in conjunction with a suitably receptive will. On this, see T cd128, and Leibniz’s letter to Des Bosses of 12 September 1708: “Nor do I see why there must be that grace that is victorious by itself [*illa gratia per se victrix*], which those who profess to follow Augustine generally insist on, or why the same measure of grace cannot be the producer of salvation in one person, though it is not in another” (LR 106-7).

occur only if in addition to the perfection proper to their natures, human beings receive additional “aids of grace.” Although I do not always make it explicit in what follows, I assume that Leibniz’s doctrine of grace has this twofold significance as a contribution to both revealed theology and natural theology. By virtue of the corruption of original sin, or merely the original imperfection inherent in the nature of any finite being, no human being is able to achieve supreme happiness solely through the exercise of her own innate powers. Beyond this some further contribution is required in the form of God’s grace.<sup>18</sup>

Leibniz stresses that the requirement of grace is fully consistent with the “true reasons of natural theology” (T 76). As we have seen, it is part of his account of divine justice that God wills the good, or well-being, of all rational beings and that God ensures that virtue is always balanced with happiness and vice with unhappiness. The Christian doctrine of election through grace is consistent, Leibniz argues, with both of these propositions. In willing, with an antecedent will, the well-being of all rational beings, God expresses the intention that all rational beings be saved; and he distributes aids of grace on behalf of this end.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, it does not follow that God ordains, with a consequent will, the salvation of all human beings. This outcome is prevented by the residual imperfection of finite beings, which leads some to resist the

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<sup>18</sup> While overcoming the effects of original sin, grace never removes entirely the imperfection inherent in the nature of a finite being. On this, see in particular T 310: “I think also that it is only God’s will which always follows the judgements of the understanding: all intelligent creatures are subject to some passions, or to perceptions at least, that are not composed entirely of what I call *adequate ideas*. And although in the blessed these passions always tend towards the true good, by virtue of the laws of nature and the system of things pre-established in relation to them, yet this does not always happen in such a way that they have a perfect knowledge of that good. It is the same with them as with us, who do not always understand the reason for our instincts. The *angels* and the *blessed* are created beings, even as we are, in whom there is always some confused perception mingled with distinct knowledge” (G VI 300).

<sup>19</sup> According to Leibniz, God does not just will the happiness of rational creatures; he wills their salvation: “I believe that God wants everyone to be saved [*salvos*] by an antecedent will, and that this will is not idle but is demonstrated through the abundant aid of grace, which is sufficient when a good will is present, and sometimes even produces one” (LR 106-7). See also T cd127, and T cd123: “Let us reject, therefore, that most odious misanthropy and rightly defend the supreme *philanthropy of God*, who earnestly wills that all attain a knowledge of the truth, that all are converted from sin to virtue, that all be saved [*salvos*], and he makes manifest this will with many aids of grace. But the fact that the things he wills do not always happen must be ascribed to the opposing ill-will of human beings” (G VI 457).

grace offered to them, and by God's goal of creating the best possible world, which entails tradeoffs among competing goods, some of which (e.g. considerations of order and harmony) inevitably have costs in terms of human happiness (T 222).

On Leibniz's theodicy, there is no requirement that any created rational being be saved, in the sense of achieving a "perpetual progress to new pleasures and new perfections." It is consistent with God's justice that *none* should be saved in this sense.<sup>20</sup> Leibniz confirms this in T 105, where he writes that, "It may be that fundamentally [*dans le fonds*] all men are equally bad, and consequently incapable of being distinguished the one from the other through their good or less bad natural qualities" (G VI 160).<sup>21</sup> If all men are equally bad, then none has a greater claim on salvation than any another, or indeed any claim on salvation, as a matter of desert. This conclusion, moreover, is consistent with the principle of proportionality. God's justice entails that no virtuous action goes unrewarded and no wicked deed unpunished, but it does not entail that any rational being, endowed with a finite degree of perfection, should enjoy perpetual bliss.

That any created being ultimately should enjoy such bliss presupposes, therefore, some additional contribution on God's part to the possibilities of its well-being over and above the natural powers with which it is endowed. This is the contribution of divine grace. Here Leibniz distinguishes with other Christian theologians general and particular aids of grace. General grace is bestowed equally on all rational beings, in the form of aids that facilitate their progress in perfection. These include their endowment with an intellect capable of comprehending God's justice; a will capable of choosing among ends on the basis of their relative degrees of goodness;

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<sup>20</sup> Crucially, it also does not follow that all should be damned to suffer an eternity of pain. Leibniz's metaphysics represent the default state for rational beings as one in which pain and pleasure are mingled throughout the span of their created existence.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. T cd138.

and, for Christians, access to the Word of God and to the sacraments by which a relation to Christ is sustained (T cd110).

In addition to general grace, however, God also bestows particular aids of grace that may suffice for salvation, and these he chooses to bestow on some individuals and not others.<sup>22</sup> Since such grace, in Leibniz's view, is necessary for salvation, while all rational beings have the nominal possibility of achieving supreme happiness through the knowledge and love of God, not all rational beings succeed in doing so. This can happen only if they receive the necessary aids of grace from God.

Leibniz's explanation of particular grace cuts through a thicket of theological controversy with one well-placed metaphysical observation. Start with the idea of rational beings as creatures endowed with finite powers of intellect and will. Those powers will give their possessor a certain capacity to act for the sake of the best: to accurately discriminate real from apparent goods, and to choose the good for its own sake. Now, suppose two relevantly similar rational beings are placed in different circumstances. The same powers that allow one individual to choose rightly in its circumstances may be insufficient to allow the other to choose rightly in its circumstances. The result is that one prospers, either directly or as a result of the operation of divine justice, and the other does not—and this not because of their intrinsic powers, or degrees of virtue, which are assumed to be the same in both cases.<sup>23</sup>

In assessing the conditions according to which some are saved and some damned, Leibniz writes, “it all often comes down to *circumstances*, which form a part of the connection of things

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<sup>22</sup> This is the “grace sufficient for willing [*gratia sufficiens volendi*]” (see above note 17). With respect to the selection of some and not others for salvation, Leibniz emphasizes the place of the individual within the order of creation as a whole. Thus the “election” is always subordinate to God's single consequent will to create the best possible world. See T 105, and T cd136: “among the reasons for selecting by the wise is a consideration of the qualities of the object. Nevertheless, the excellence of the object itself taken by itself does always constitute the reason for selecting it; often the fitness [*convenientia*] of the thing for a certain end, under a certain set of conditions [*in certa rerum hypothesi*], is given greater consideration” (G VI 459).

<sup>23</sup> This is the lesson of the example of the Polish twins which Leibniz gives in T 101.



[*l'enchaînement des choses*]. There are countless examples of small circumstances serving to convert or pervert” (T 100; G VI 158). By choosing to place one individual in one set of circumstances and another in different circumstances, God may ensure that the first makes choices that lead to greater virtue, while the second makes choices that lead to ruin. The circumstances may have this effect either directly, by presenting the one individual with trials that the other avoids, or indirectly, by shaping the soul in its responsiveness to the appearance of good or evil. In explaining how the latter can happen, Leibniz emphasizes that we are not to think that “God inspires men extraordinarily with a kind of anti-grace, that is, a repugnance to good, or even an inclination towards evil, just as the grace he gives is an inclination to good.” Rather, it is that “God, having considered the sequence of things that he established, found it fitting for superior reasons, to permit that Pharoah, for example, should be in such *circumstances* as should increase his wickedness, and divine wisdom willed to derive a good from this evil” (T 99; G VI 158).

The last sentence suggests a difference in the role that circumstances may play in precluding salvation (or ensuring damnation) and the role they play in facilitating salvation. In the former case, Leibniz implies that circumstances by themselves, in conjunction with an individual’s innate tendencies of willing, may be sufficient to ensure his downfall. Pharoah, placed in particular circumstances, will act in ways that increase his wickedness (or “harden his heart”), guaranteeing his damnation. By contrast, with respect to the conditions required for salvation, Leibniz distinguishes God’s choice of the circumstance in which to place an individual from God’s bestowing of “inward aids” (*des secours internes*) of grace:

God considers what a man would do in such and such circumstances, and it always remains true that God could have placed him in other, more salutary [*plus salutaires*] circumstances, and given him inward or outward aids capable of

vanquishing the most abysmal wickedness existing in any soul. (T 103; G VI 159)<sup>24</sup>

Although a fortunate choice of circumstances can clearly help an individual toward a “perpetual progress to new pleasures and new perfections,” Leibniz seems to suggest here that when God imparts grace to human beings this may also involve some further contribution he makes to the soul’s ability to overcome the temptation of sin.

Leibniz says little about the nature of this “inward grace” (*la grâce interne, gratia interna*). An initial question is whether it is a species of general grace, offered to all human beings, or a particular grace, which allows some but not others to be saved. Leibniz certainly recognizes an aspect of grace that is universal, in that it is offered to all, though not all accept it.<sup>26</sup> All human beings have the capacity to know God as a supremely just creator and Jesus Christ as the redeemer of mankind, so for them there is at least the possibility of loving God above all things and of being moved to act by this love. The opportunity for this love is a general grace offered to all human beings.<sup>27</sup> Inward grace can be seen as an effect of this general grace, in those whose knowledge of God is transformed into a “living faith” (*la foy vive*). Such individuals do not simply know God as a supremely just creator; they also *feel* God as their greatest good:

But man is delivered up to the Devil by his covetous desire: the pleasure he finds in evil is the bait that hooks him.... Grace sets over against it a greater pleasure, as St. Augustine observed. All *pleasure* is a feeling [*sentiment*] of some perfection; one *loves* an object in proportion as one feels its perfections; nothing surpasses the divine perfections. Whence it follows that charity and love of God give the greatest pleasure that can be conceived, in that proportion in which one is penetrated by these feelings, which are not common among men, busied and taken

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<sup>24</sup> See also T 105 and 134.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., T preface (G VI 36); T cd 139.

<sup>27</sup> I return in the next section to the question of whether a specifically Christian revelation is a precondition for this grace.

up as men are with the objects that are concerned with their passions. (T 278; G VI 282)<sup>28</sup>

As Leibniz describes it, inward grace manifests itself in an individual's affective responsiveness to God's supreme perfection: she loves God above all else and loves other things in relation to God. On this account, inward grace produces a set of psychological dispositions that incline their possessor to ever greater perfection and pleasure, and this clearly advantages some individuals over others.<sup>29</sup>

So far, however, we have no explanation of how such an election occurs. What accounts for the fact that in only some human beings the knowledge of God is transformed into a "living faith"? Two hypotheses can be rejected. The first is that there are natural distinctions in perfection that account for this difference. Leibniz believes that God creates rational minds with many different degrees of perfection; hence, some will be better suited by nature to accept the general grace offered to them by God. Yet this is of no help in explaining the origin of that grace which is by definition an aid God gives to some human beings and not others *over and above* their natural powers of intellection and volition. To say that some individuals are better equipped by nature to benefit from God's general grace is not to have explained the distinctive character of the particular grace by which some are elected for salvation. Equally, it is unsatisfactory to interpret instances of inward grace, in general, as effects of God's miraculous (i.e. non-natural) elevation of a soul's power to resist the temptation of sin. This goes against a fundamental tendency in Leibniz's thought, summed up in his postulation of a "harmony

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. T preface: "true piety and even true felicity consist in the love of God, but a love so enlightened that its fervour is attended by insight. This kind of love begets that pleasure in good actions which gives relief to virtue, and, relating all to God as to the centre, transports the human to the divine" (G VI 27). On "living faith," see T preface (G VI 36, 38); T 4, 83; LR 107.

<sup>29</sup> "Grace does no more than give impressions which are conducive to making will operate through fitting motives, much as would be an attention, a moment of reflection [*dic cur hic*], a prevenient pleasure" (T 298; G VI 293).

between the physical kingdom of nature and the moral kingdom of grace, that is, between God considered as the architect of the mechanism of the universe, and God considered as the monarch of the divine city of minds” (Mon 87). This harmony, Leibniz asserts, “leads things to grace through the very paths of nature” (Mon 88).<sup>30</sup>

I submit that it is, in fact, Leibniz’s view that both internal and external aids of grace are ultimately explained in terms of the different circumstances in which created beings are placed. Although internal aids are manifested in advantageous psychological dispositions that some human beings bring to any situation in which they find themselves, an individual’s possession of these dispositions is accounted for by the way in which her natural powers are expanded under the influence of the general grace given to all human beings and the unique set of circumstances in which she is placed by God.<sup>31</sup>

Consistent with what Leibniz takes to be the orthodox Christian position, inborn merit by itself is insufficient to guarantee salvation, and the most recalcitrant sinner can be saved through God’s grace. Granting this, it is plausible to think that God’s choice of circumstances plays a dominant role for Leibniz in explaining the operation of divine grace. As he writes in T 101, “the chances to which we are subject, in spite of ourselves, play only too large a part in what brings salvation to men, or removes it from them” (G VI 159). We must acknowledge that grace is an aid God gives to individuals over and above their intrinsic powers of willing. Furthermore, we must not think that God’s grace is limited to those who, by virtue of their intrinsic powers, would make good use of it in the circumstances in which they are placed. But grace might

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. T cd 126.

<sup>31</sup> I take this to be in line with Leibniz’s statement in the preface to the *Theodicy*: “conversion is purely the work of God’s grace, wherein man co-operates only by resisting it; but human resistance is more or less great according to the persons and the occasions. Circumstances also contribute more or less to our attention and to the motions that arise in the soul; and the co-operation of all these things, together with the strength of the impression and the condition of the will, determines the operation of grace, although not rendering it necessary” (G VI 45-6).

nonetheless be understood primarily as God's choice of circumstances that allow an individual's intrinsic powers to grow or atrophy in ways that assist or hinder their progress in perfection.<sup>32</sup>

On this account, it is not just the circumstances themselves, but the way in which they are united with the "inward grace" received by an individual, that determine their salutary power. These effects, we may suppose, are foreseen by God, but they cannot be explained solely in terms of the powers that define an individual's nature. The crucial idea is that, however much perfection an individual is created as having, she can become more or less perfect—and hence more or less meritorious—through circumstances that are outside of her control. As Leibniz writes in T 105:

[S]ince the general plan of the universe, chosen by God for superior reasons, causes men to be in different circumstances, those who meet with such as are more favourable to their nature will become more readily the least wicked, the most virtuous, the most happy; yet it will be always by aid of the influence of that inward grace which God unites with the circumstances. Sometimes it even comes to pass, in the progress of human life, that a more excellent nature succeeds less, for lack of cultivation or opportunities. One may say that men are chosen and ranged not so much according to their excellence as according to their conformity with God's plan. (G VI 160-1)<sup>35</sup>

From the perspective of Leibniz's theodicy, election through grace is consistent with

God's justice, provided it is conceived as part of God's plan for the best of all possible worlds. It

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. T 286: "the same degree of inward grace is victorious in the one, where it is aided by outward circumstances, but not in the other"; and T preface: "And it is not enough (so it seems) to say with some that inward grace is universal and equal for all. For these same authors are obliged to resort to the exclamations of St. Paul, and to say: 'O the depth!' when they consider how men are distinguished by what we may call outward graces [*les Graces externes*], that is, by graces appearing in the diversity of circumstances which God calls forth, whereof men are not the masters, and which have nevertheless so great an influence upon all that concerns their salvation" (G VI 36).

<sup>35</sup> This feature of Leibniz's position parallels a thesis of Spinoza's metaphysics: individuals can increase in perfection or virtue either through their own power or through the effects of external things on them. Spinoza identifies the latter with the traditional idea of *fortuna*: "the direction of God inasmuch as he governs human affairs through external and unforeseen causes." Though Spinoza represents God as an impersonal and immanent power, he ascribes to God an "election" of individuals through internal and external "assistances" [*auxilia*]: "no one chooses any way of life for himself nor brings anything about, except via the particular summons of God, who chose this man in preference to others for this task or that way of life." See Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 3 [3], ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 45. The idea that individuals are morally accountable for the effects of circumstances outside of their control has been discussed by Bernard Williams and others under the heading of "moral luck." Williams notes the similarity of this phenomenon to "the incomprehensible Grace of a non-Pelagian God" ("Moral Luck," in Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 20-39, at 21.)

lies within God's power to create individuals in circumstances that abet or hinder their progress in perfection. And to the extent that God creates circumstances that allow some individuals to enjoy a "perpetual progress to new pleasures and new perfections," he confers salvific grace on them. On Leibniz's account, the circumstances that underwrite God's grace form part of his comprehensive plan for the best of all possible worlds. By their very nature as *particular* circumstances, they are a part of the plan that finite minds cannot comprehend in detail. Nevertheless, the choice of circumstances, or distribution of grace, is supported by reason, insofar as God has the greatest reason to create this world, one of maximal perfection and harmony, rather than any other possible world.<sup>37</sup> More than this, on the reading I have offered, the requirement of particular grace and its seemingly arbitrary distribution can be seen as integral components of Leibniz's theodicy, understood as a doctrine of *natural* theology. In conceiving of a world, God conceives of individuals with intrinsic powers of knowing and willing; but he also conceives of the circumstances in which those powers are exercised and of how their exercise is affected by the exercise of the powers of other members of that world. All of these circumstances will be unforeseen on the basis of an understanding of the intrinsic goodness or badness of an individual's will, and they will have the consequence of affecting equally meritorious individuals in different ways that are not correlated with their intrinsic merit. Such, however, is the logic of divine grace.

### III

The virtue that suffices for salvation, and which is effected through God's grace, is the perfected love of God: the disposition to love God above all things and to do all things because God wills

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<sup>37</sup> See T 79: "Calvin himself and some others of the greatest defenders of the absolute decree rightly maintained that God *had great and just reasons* for his election and the dispensation of his grace, although these reasons be unknown to us in detail" (G VI 145/H 165).

them done. On this point, Leibniz and his contemporaries agree. Disagreements begin to emerge when we attempt to pin down more precisely the range of individuals for whom salvation is a real possibility.

Leibniz appears to reject the view, espoused by many Christians, that salvation is open only to those who “know Jesus Christ according to the flesh,” or affirm through faith the divinity of Christ as the redeemer of mankind. He takes special exception to the idea that human beings can be precluded from salvation through no fault of their own, as some (going back to Augustine) claim is the case with unbaptized infants, or with pagans whose births preceded that of Jesus.<sup>38</sup> In such cases, Leibniz objects, there is no reason to suppose that God cannot find ways of producing the requisite justifying faith through miraculous means:

Supposing that today a knowledge of Jesus Christ according to the flesh is absolutely necessary for salvation, as indeed it is safest [*le plus sûr*] to teach, it will be possible to say that God will give that knowledge to all those who do, humanly speaking, that which in them lies, even though God must give it by a miracle. Moreover, we cannot know what passes in souls at the point of death; and if sundry learned and serious theologians claim that children receive in baptism a kind of faith, although they do not remember it afterwards when they are questioned about it, why should one maintain that nothing of a like nature, or even more definite, could come about in the dying, whom we cannot interrogate after their death? Thus there are countless paths open to God, giving him means of satisfying his justice and his goodness: and the only thing one may allege against this is that we know not what way he employs; which is far from being a valid objection. (T 98; G VI 157/H 177)<sup>39</sup>

Based on passages like this, we might take Leibniz’s position to be that a knowledge of Jesus Christ “according to the flesh” *is* necessary for salvation, but that his opponents have unjustifiably excluded the possibility that God has granted this knowledge miraculously to those

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<sup>38</sup> See T 92-93, 283; and Elmer Kremer, “Leibniz and the ‘Disciples of Saint Augustine’ on the Fate of Infants Who Die Unbaptized,” in *The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Elmer Kremer and Michael Latzer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 119-137.

<sup>39</sup> See also T 95, and note 17 above. This would be an example of the “grace sufficient for one who wills,” which God denies to no one whose will is rightly ordered. As I go on to suggest, though this grace may take the form of a revealed knowledge of Jesus Christ “according to the flesh,” Leibniz’s doctrine of *gratia sufficiens volenti* does not seem to require this. It entails only that if one is of a good will – defined by the intention to love God above all things – one will receive whatever additional aids are necessary to persist in a state of blessedness.

whom we would not otherwise expect to have it (e.g. pagans who died before the birth of Jesus). Yet Leibniz's comment about what it is "safest to teach" should alert us to the possibility that he may here be holding back to some extent his own position. This, I suggest, is in fact the case. Although Leibniz believes that a certain type of faith is required for salvation—a faith that in some measure moderates his rationalism—it is not a faith that need involve explicit reference to the divinity of Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup>

The faith that Leibniz believes is necessary for salvation is the faith required for a perfected love of God. To love God wholeheartedly as a just ruler, it is necessary to believe that everything God does is for the best. This includes believing not just that the world as a whole is ordered for the best, but also that God has a particular concern for one's own happiness within this world. On this rests the distinction Leibniz draws between the *fatum Stoicum* and the *fatum Christianum*. Where the Stoic is limited to assenting to the order of nature as right and necessary whatever hardships it may bring, the Christian can live with the assurance that she will be taken care of by God: that God's intention toward her is that the balance of virtue and happiness always be maintained, and that she prosper to the greatest extent possible, insofar as she loves God above all else.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Larry Jorgensen has suggested (in his commentary on my paper) that Leibniz's claim about what it is "safest to teach" should be understood epistemologically. The point is not that teaching salvation through knowledge of Jesus Christ "according to the flesh" is "safest" in the sense that it is least likely to incur censure from the authorities; rather it is that Christianity is the firmest basis on which to rest a hope for salvation, since it is an element of that faith that at least some receive the needed grace through Jesus Christ. Support for this idea can be found in T cd140 (G VI 459). However, as Jorgensen acknowledges, there are other passages in which Leibniz indicates that the way to salvation is open to anyone, provided they are committed to the "clemency and justice of the Creator" (*Causa Dei*, sec. 113; G VI 456). See also *New Essays* IV.xx.3: "One hears stories, which are acclaimed in the Roman Church, of people who have been brought back to life just so that they should not be without aids to salvation. But God can save souls by the inward workings of the Holy Spirit, with no need of such a great miracle. What is so good and comforting for mankind is the fact that to be in the state of God's grace one needs only to have, sincerely and seriously, a good will. I acknowledge that this good will itself does not occur without the grace of God, in that every good—natural or supernatural—comes from him; but, still, all that matters is that one only needs such a will" (RB 510).

<sup>41</sup> On the distinction between the *fatum Stoicum* and his *fatum Christianum*, see T preface (G VI 30-1), and the discussion in Rutherford, "Leibniz and the Stoics," 143-8. In DM 37, Leibniz locates the principal truths on



Integral to this belief is a recognition of the supreme justice, or “wise charity,” that God exhibits toward all rational beings. Recognition of this justice should prompt in any created mind a reciprocal love of God above all things (PNG 16-17). Any hesitation one has on this count, any doubt about the justice of God’s action, amounts to a turning away from God, an admission that one’s love of God is less than total. Yet Leibniz concedes that we cannot know *a priori* that everything that happens—all the suffering and evil in the world, including our own—is for the best:

[I]f we were capable of understanding the universal harmony, we should see that what we are tempted to find fault with is connected with the plan most worthy of being chosen; in a word, we *should see*, and should not *believe* only, that what God has done is the best. I call ‘seeing’ here what one knows *a priori* by the causes; and ‘believing’ what one only judges by the effects, even though the one be as certainly known as the other. And one can apply here too the saying of St. Paul (2 Cor. v. 7), that we walk by *faith* and not by *sight*. (T pd44; G VI 75)<sup>42</sup>

Thus, there is an ineliminable element of faith, or belief unsupported by reason, on which our confidence in the government of God, and hence our love of God, depends. We must believe that all things happen for the best, when we cannot be certain of this based on the effects we observe, and we must preserve the hope that God has seen fit to give us the assistance we need in our pursuit of happiness:

What we have been able to see so far of the government of God is not a large enough part to recognize the beauty and the order of the whole. Thus the very nature of things implies that this order of the divine city, which we do not see yet here on earth, should be an object of our faith, of our hope, of our confidence in God. If there are any who think otherwise, so much the worse for them, they are malcontents in the state of the greatest and the best of all monarchs; and they are wrong not to take advantage of the examples he has given them of his wisdom

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which this distinction rests in the gospel of Jesus Christ, who has expressed them “in a manner so clear and familiar that the coarsest of minds have grasped them” (A VI.4, 1588/AG 68).

<sup>42</sup> See also T pd35. I take Leibniz’s qualification at the end of the quoted passage (“even though the one be as certainly known as the other”) to mean that we know with certainty both that God has acted for the best and what the effects he has produced are. What we lack is a demonstration leading from God’s will as cause to the production of those effects. Here we are limited to believing, without further rational support, that the effects are ones a supremely just creator would produce.

and his infinite goodness, whereby he reveals himself as being not only wonderful, but also worthy of love beyond all things. (T 134; G VI 188/H 207)

Those who harbor doubts about God's justice will fail to love him in the way that is necessary to enjoy the fruits of salvation: the "perpetual progress to new pleasures and new perfections." They will be "malcontents" in the city of God (T 15). By contrast, to place one's faith wholly in God, and to love him above all else and for all he does, is just to be in the state that Leibniz identifies with "supreme happiness," or blessedness.<sup>44</sup> Of course, this is not a state we can simply choose for ourselves. Our being able to attain such a condition, in which we rise above the self-interested and passionate drives that mark our bodily existence, can only be explained through an element of fortune, or grace, whose source lies outside the scope of our power. It is a function of where God has placed us in the order of nature.

This admission of our total dependence on God for whatever chance we have of supreme happiness points to the religious moment at the heart of Leibniz's theodicy. Our highest happiness is identified with the knowledge and love of God, who alone controls the means that grant us access to that happiness. That we have been chosen for this reward is something we cannot, in principle, know on rational grounds; yet we must believe it, have faith in it, if we are to have any hope of achieving the desired end. For Leibniz, this combination of faith and hope define a theological outlook that is fundamentally different from that of ancient Stoicism. Whereas for the Stoics rational assent to the order of the cosmos is sufficient for happiness—a happiness which can be attained, albeit rarely, through the exercise of the natural power of reason—for Leibniz the attainment of the highest happiness lies outside our power altogether. It will happen only if we possess the faith in God that is required for a perfected love of him, and

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<sup>44</sup> See T preface (G VI 27-9), and T 217: "One good thing among others in the universe is that the general good becomes in reality the individual good of those who love the author of all good" (G VI 248). This conveys the core idea of Leibniz's ethics.

that will happen only if we receive the grace (in the form of fortuitous circumstances) that allows us to overcome the volitional tendencies denominated by “original sin.”<sup>45</sup>

Leibniz regards this faith in the rightness of all God’s actions as consonant with Christianity; however, it is a faith that makes no demand for the explicit recognition of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Fundamentally, Leibniz writes to Sophie Charlotte in 1702, it is a faith of *natural* religion that can be shared by all rational beings and hence is the true universal (or “catholic”) religion:

to trust in [God’s] goodness, his wisdom and his power is the faith that reason and natural religion already teach us, and that Jesus Christ himself has taught again with such force, in recommending to us the love of God above all things and charity toward others in order to imitate him as well as possible,<sup>46</sup> and assuring us in turn of his grace and infinite goodness. (G VI 497-8)

On Leibniz’s account, the revelation of Jesus Christ may have been necessary to open the way to salvation for ordinary people, but it is not absolutely necessary as a condition on salvation.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> We can distinguish two aspects of the faith Leibniz ascribes to the person who loves God in the requisite manner. The first is manifest in the belief that God’s antecedent will to make human beings as happy as possible (i.e. to deliver salvation to them) is actualized in a world in which all are not “wayfarers,” subject to the flux of pleasure and pain, but some at least attain a state of blessedness, or uninterrupted pleasure. Believing this is necessary if one is to preserve the hope that such a state is possible for a created being. The second aspect is manifest in the inner conviction that a life of blessedness is, in fact, promised to one. The possibility of this (subjective) certainty of one’s own salvation reflects Leibniz’s agreement with a central point of Lutheran theology. It is tempting to think that the belief that some are saved, and moreover that *I* am saved, presupposes an acceptance of the essentials of Christian doctrine, especially faith in Christ as the redeemer of mankind. While Leibniz himself affirms this doctrine, I deny that his account of salvation requires it. Instead, a perfected love of God is sufficient for blessedness; in principle, it is possible to have such a love independently of any knowledge of Jesus Christ; and whether one can, in fact, acquire such a love is partly outside of one’s control, reflecting the circumstances in which one has been placed by God. My thanks to Larry Jorgenson for pressing me on this point.

<sup>46</sup> Paraphrasing Matthew 22: “(35) Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, (36) Master, which is the great commandment in the law? (37) Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. (38) This is the first and great commandment. (39) And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (40) On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

<sup>47</sup> See Leibniz’s letter to Sophie of April 1709: “Missionaries are sent to China in order to preach the Christian religion, and it is done well, but (as I have already said publicly several years ago), we need missionaries of reason in Europe, in order to preach natural religion, on which revelation itself is founded, and without which revelation will always be badly understood. The religion of reason is eternal, and God has engraved it in our hearts, our corruptions have obscured it, and the aim of Jesus Christ has been to return its luster to it, to bring human beings back to the true knowledge of God and of the soul, and to make them practice virtue, which makes for true happiness. One must admit that revelation has been necessary: reason by itself without authority will never move ordinary human beings; but it is not necessary that revelation lose its purpose and that it be turned against the eternal

That requires simply that one love God above all things as the source of all goodness and as the just ruler of the “city” of all rational beings. Such a love of God presupposes a faith that is given and not earned, but it is not a faith that is the exclusive property of Christians.

#### IV

Let me sum up briefly the conclusions of this essay. Theodicy, according to Leibniz, is the doctrine of the justice of God. Among the tenets of this doctrine is the belief that God is responsible for choosing, as part of his plan for the best of all possible worlds, the circumstances which determine whether or not a given individual is able to achieve the highest happiness: a “perpetual progress to new pleasures and new perfections.” I have suggested that God’s choice of these circumstances, which affect both the formation of an individual’s character and the outcome of his actions, can be identified with his distribution of the particular grace necessary for salvation. Without the provision of such grace, no finite creature, limited by an original imperfection, can expect to achieve a lasting state of pleasure.

For Leibniz, the foundation of supreme happiness is the perfected love of God. Hence, to claim that grace is necessary for salvation is to claim that grace is necessary for a love of God that will issue in an unending succession of pleasures. For a person to have such a love of God, it is necessary to love God completely, believing that his actions are without exception for the best (in general and with regard to one’s own happiness). Since we cannot know this *a priori*, it must be the product of faith: one must *believe* without proof that God always acts for the best and that one’s happiness is assured by God’s wise charity. Herein lies the religious moment at the heart of Leibniz’s thought: to partake in the love of God that is the basis of the highest

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truths, against solid virtue, and against the true idea of God” (*Die Werke von Leibniz. Reihe I: Historisch-politische und staatswissenschaftliche Schriften*, ed O. Klopp [Hanover: Klindworth. 1864-84], vol. 9, 300-1). Concerning the significance of Jesus Christ, see also the Preface to the *Theodicy* (G VI 26).

happiness, one must have unwavering faith in God's goodness and providential concern for rational beings. Yet whether or not one achieves this faith is ultimately outside one's control. It is a faith that depends upon receiving, or being chosen for, God's particular grace.

Leibniz sees this aspect of his theodicy as capturing the essence of Christianity. However, he is clear in denying that Christians alone—those who profess a belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ as the redeemer of mankind—have access to the salvation that God reserves for his elect. The faith that is the basis of our highest happiness is a faith of natural religion, which is accessible to anyone who forms a proper conception of God's justice.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> I am grateful to Larry Jorgensen, my commentator at the Notre Dame conference, for his generous and perspicuous remarks; to Maria Rosa Antognazza, for valuable discussion of a key point in the paper; and to an anonymous reviewer, who made a number of helpful suggestions for improvements. Needless to say, any errors that remain are my own.

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