THE IDEA OF GOD
LOVEJOY VERSUS LEIBNIZ

(one of my earliest papers, last time revised 2022.05)

i.   In *The Great Chain of Being* (1936), the renowned American historian of ideas *A.O. Lovejoy* claims to have shown how the Idea of God that has determined Christian thought for nearly two millenia - viz., the idea of an infinite and infinitely perfect Being, incapable of change, the Creator of an imperfect world populated by an evil mankind - is marred by an immanent schism of a logical nature, a contradiction.

The idea of God is not a *unit idea*, but rather an immensely diversified complex consisting of a number of highly diverging components or ingredients, whose core is the antagonism between life temporal or eternal, life here on Earth or life in Heaven beyond. It is true that numerous attempts have been made to conceal the immanent conflict of this conceptualization by verbal sophistry and subtle dialectics. According to Lovejoy, however, these attempts were doomed to failure from the very outset.

Historically, the outcome of all the subterfuges has been that moral norms, which were legitimized by reference to the Divine Being, became the object of incessant strife, whereby they were deprived of their authority. These norms can be implemented merely in two different attitudes towards existence, attitudes which cannot be reconciled in a single human person. Lovejoy names these attitudes, which we find amply represented throughout the history of Christianity, "thisworldliness" and "otherworldliness".

Lovejoy's book, in many ways well-written and captivating, was accepted with enthusiasm upon its release; and its viewpoints, which have become the foundation of an entire school of thought, seem convincing, i.e., at least after a first superficial reading. Lovejoy is still hailed as the founder and "grand old man" of American History of Ideas.

His method still meets with approval in some scholarly circles, and his conclusions, presented as matters of fact, are even today accepted uncritically by his many admirers. Lovejoy's own standard reservations with regard to possible errors apparently do not apply to the central theses of his book, as these are stated with a self-assurance that aims at eliminating any possibility of doubt on the part of his reader.

Most disturbing is not so much the fact that his theses are presented as the basis of a critique of viewpoints and reasonings which strike Lovejoy as obtuse - this might easily be forgiven - but, on the contrary, that they, in their presumed self-evidence, are taken to substantiate the arrogant conclusion that no other thinker, however cunning, can diverge from his opinion without exposing his motives and moral integrity to mistrust.

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ii.   This is comes to the fore in his maltreatment of the philosophic genius of Leibniz. One might certainly wish to confer more justice on Lovejoy than he himself is willing to bestow on one of the greatest thinkers in the history of philosophy, even though it might indeed be difficult to achieve that goal in this brief sketch of his views. Probably the most positive evaluation which can be made of Lovejoy's book is that it is thought-provoking. Here I shall restrict my comments to his discussion of Leibnizian metaphysics.

One might count several reasons for regarding this discussion as representative. Firstly, Leibniz's metaphysics distinguishes itself from those of other philosophers in so far as it incorporates a multitude of extremely divergent ideas and conjoins them into a totality of admirable consistency: an extremely rich, but nevertheless coherent system. Secondly, the chapters dealing with Leibnizian metaphysics and its relation to Spinozian philosophy seem to be the central chapters in the whole book.

It appears that all of Lovejoy's threads are bound together in these few chapters; here they are gathered together and from here they are dispersed anew and run forward. By discussing these chapters, we can elucidate essential aspects of the problem areas of his whole work without focusing on its actual theme, namely, the idea of the world as *scala naturalis* and *plenum formarum*. At the same time we can perhaps hope to shed some new light on the *method* proper to the *history of ideas*.

Lovejoy begins by making a comparison between the method of a chemical analyst and the practice of a historian of ideas. Precisely as the chemist attempts to dissolve an unknown substance into its original components, so - he opines - does the historian try to divide a complex of ideas, or notions, into its basic constituents, its individual ideas. In accordance with this method, a philosophical system can be viewed as an aggregate of independently existing components, or 'unit ideas'.

In Lovejoy's opinion, the task of the historian of ideas is fairly simple, namely, to isolate and identify certain timeless atomic ideas and to classify their type in analogy to the periodical table of chemical elements. When the problem at hand is the investigation of a philosophical system like that of Leibniz, such a methodology will obviously have devastating consequences for our conceptualization of the subject-matter of that inquiry. Moreover, meant as an example illustrating the history of ideas, an analysis that is purely atomistic must be unscientific simply because it is not historical.

The question must likewise be raised as to whether the analogy referred to is postulated as a guiding principle of the inquiry, or whether it be regarded as the actual result of an independent examination. Justified doubts on this issue would appear to be pertinent in judging the validity of the purportedly empirical character of his criticism. Lovejoy does not seem to distinguish clearly at this point, nor does he refer to other investigations. The way in which his presentation is shaped tends to give the reader a feeling that the result is given in advance on the strength of the guiding principle.

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iii.   It is thus not particularly surprising that Lovejoy, the historian, meant himself able to pin-point logical inconsistencies in the philosophical system of Leibniz, the logician. A similar belief has been held by other and more acute thinkers before him: B. Russell, for instance. What *is* surprising, however, is the self-confident way in which he exposes the alleged inconsistencies as simple commonplaces and then proceeds to exploit them as the safe foundation of his own perfidious insinuations.

After Voltaire, it has been the pastime of anyone who sees himself as belonging to the enlightened *intelligentsia* to squander his liberty by haughtily dismissing Leibniz. However, is it not the obligation of a serious historian to ignore that kind of prejudice? Lovejoy's attitude towards Leibniz might, of course, also follow from a rational motive. If he had felt himself compelled to take the Leibnizian metaphysics seriously he could not possibly have believed his own far-reaching conclusions.

However, before we can proceed with this discussion of Lovejoy's objections against Leibniz, we must attempt to present some of the background for his criticism. Lovejoy traces the essence of Leibnizian metaphysics back to Plato. Like Whitehead, he is prone to see the whole of Western philosophy as a series of "footnotes to Plato". The contents of these so-called footnotes emerge in their most complex form in Leibniz, whereas their most consistent expression, allegedly, is to be found in Spinoza.

Just as the Christian notion of God can be viewed as a conglomerate dissolvable into a variety elements, so the Leibnizian concept of God appears to be divided in its core between two conflicting ideas. The first is the idea of the divine as something which is perfect, immutable, and eternal, wholly self-sufficient and independent of everything else. The second is the idea of the divine as something that transcends itself, being motivated by its own goodness to create something different from itself, namely, the world.

It is now obvious that the opposition between these two ideas can be construed as a logical contradiction and, as such, it should cease to be of interest to philosophers. Nevertheless, it is a conspicuous fact that, in the course of history, the two ideas in question seem to have been immensely attractive to some of mankind's greatest thinkers and that, presumably, because they have *not* found it incumbent to construe them as contradictory in any direct sense. They have *not* viewed the contradiction as inevitable, since they have found it possible to evade them by way of making distinctions.

Hence, when a historian of ideas after more than two thousand years claims that there must be some misunderstanding, because the Platonic solution to the question of the origin of ideas in the One results in contradiction, it may seem sensational to some. But if one is not disposed to be affected by this kind of proclamation, it is natural to consider whether, or not, the ideas presented above can be united on the basis of a logic somewhat more sophisticated and delicately variegated than that exercised by Lovejoy. The prevailing tendency of the age of positivism to dismantle metaphysical questions as pseudo-problems appears today not only unsatisfactory, but also trite.

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iv.   Plato, who distinguished sharply between the atemporal existence of *ideas* as objects of intellectual *reflection* and the temporal appearance of *phenomena* as objects of sensory *perception*, explained the latter by means of the former.

The difference between ideas and phenomena may be expressed thus: whereas ideas are what they are on their own merits, phenomena manifest themselves as the mimicry of something else, inasmuch as they participate in the ideas. Phenomena have no separate, or independent, existence, but simulate eternity temporally by being associated to, and participating in, the timeless existence of their forms, or ideas.

The expression 'participation' remains undefined, and that for a very good reason. In Plato, to explain something (*explanatio*) means to refer to the participation of the conditioned (*explanandum*) in the unconditional (*explanans*). So the attempt to explain the concept of participation by something else would be equivalent to trying to explain the concept of explanation by something different - i.e., by a non-explanation.

According to the Myth of the Demiourge, as it is presented in Plato's *Timaios*, it was the *demioúrgos* (God as master, or craftsman) who created *kósmos* from *cháos*. And God did this because, in his goodness, he did not know of envy. Since he wanted everything to resemble himself as much as possible, he made *becoming* similar to *being*, and by the very same act he formed *time* as a 'moving image' of *eternity*. For that reason *kósmos* (world) and *chrónos* (time) were created simultaneously.

Plotinus later adopted Plato's theory of ideas and modified it by changing it into a doctrine of the emanation of the world from a divine principle. From the original One (*hén*) radiates first the divine reason (*noūs*) and, subsequently, the world soul (*psyché*), containing the eternal paradigms of everything; finally, the world of natural phenomena stems from the paradigmatic ideas. Plotinus held that the universe manifests itself as a natural order of value, the lowest levels fading away in the twilight of multiplicity.

Here, following Lovejoy, we see how the answer to the *question of the cause* of existence of itself generates an answer to the *question of the structure* of the universe. The universe makes up a *hierarchy* of things having an absolute order of precedence. It is like a *chain* wherein nothing is omitted and where each individual link is structured by its particular function. The same law of thought which forced the universe to emerge from the source of goodness does not permit the divine love to leave anything undone. Thus everything possible must, in the end, be realized. The universe, as a mirror of God, must necessarily possess a structure that imitates the divine perfection.

Lovejoy saw this argument as a proof that the universe could not possibly have been different from what it is and, accordingly, his central philosophical point is that Platonic *essentialism* necessarily leads to Spinozian *determinism*. I flatly reject that.

Following Lovejoy, a consequence that can be construed as entirely deterministic is inherently absurd. All existence is temporally conditioned and, accordingly, contingent. Determinism is simply irrational. I wholeheartedly agree with him on this latter issue.

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v.   The hypothesis of the divine emanation appears of necessity to presuppose that a created world of living beings was in itself desirable and that, in spite of its inevitable imperfection, its creation was an exercise in virtue. How could we else explain that an absolutely perfect, self-sufficient and self-absorbed divine being could suddenly change itself into a self-transgressing source of life? Reason demands an explanation.

But then we must admit that the absolute has become dependent upon the relative, that the world of ideas, when imagined without the world of phenomena, is deficient, and, accordingly, that the Divine Being would be unable to express its own exalted existence except by creating what is profane. Further, since the perfect is thereby determined to be the origin of the imperfect, so goodness is also determined to be the source of evilness. In this way imperfection, originally conceived of as deficiency, i.e., something innocent, gradually develops into an independent reality: evil incarnate.

Lovejoy's persistent attempt to make nonsense of the Platonic tradition confronts its adherents with a quandary that aims precisely at its most vulnerable point: the liaison between *ideas* and *phenomena*, or between *rationality* and *factuality*. The quandary is now expressible as a dilemma: rationality must be related to factuality either as something transcending it or as something immanent within it: *tertium non datur*. But if the rational level transcends the factual level, then factual existence is irrational. And if rationality penetrates existing facts, factuality ought to show itself much more rational than it does. Both alternatives seem equally unpleasant and, indeed, unacceptable.

Platonic thought was clearly dialectic and, in modern analytical philosophy, it is customary to equate dialectics to sophistry. However, it was clearly a matter of urgency for Plato to distinguish his dialectics apart from arguments of a more sophistic character. In the important dialogue *Sophistes*, he therefore demonstrated how the sophist's inmost essence of being precisely manifests itself as non-being! But Plato was fully cognizant of the fact that his dialectics was an art that ought to be exercised judiciously.

Thus, in his pivotal work *Parmenides*, he visualizes how a shrewd dialectician is able to prove anything if he is being allowed, unopposed, to avail himself of sophisms. His reservations are stated in the introductory dialogue of the *Parmenides* where he lets the young untrained Socrates, after having realized that he is unable to defeat the older more cunning Parmenides, professes his belief in reason: after all, there *must* be *some* sort of connection between phenomena (factuality) and ideas (rationality)!

Nevertheless, in the main body of the very same work, Plato allows Parmenides, the dialectician, to formulate a vision of the mutual intertwinement of concepts and their common origin from the unutterable One. In this vision, Parmenides anticipates the entire Neo-Platonic system, together with its doctrine of emanation. Plato, however, was very much aware that the idea of emanation had to be interpreted dynamically, not statically. Thus he first presented, and then retracted, this idea in a way anticipating the *retractio* made over 2000 years later by Kierkegaard in the epilogue to his *Postscript*.

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Any philosophically trained person who is an analyst without concurrently being a dialectician will probably disapprove of this trick, being inclined to quote Wittgenstein: *"Wovon mann nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen"*. However, as his famous seventh epistle bears witness to, Plato was acutely aware of precisely this maxim. So, in the first hypothesis of his *Parmenides*, he thus refers to the One as unutterable. By contrast, in the second hypothesis of the work he shows how everything, including its contradictorily opposite, can be predicated of it. However, one can not conclude from this that Plato excels in contradictions and misuses his talents to suspend logic.

On the contrary, he attempts to deduce, as it were, the basic principles of logic. Now this should not be interpreted too literally. What he tries to deduce, or demonstrate, is simply the need for a proviso to their formulation. Nothing can be expressed about the One, unless it is presumed to be identical to itself. Thus the One is unspeakable until the same (*idem*) hypothesis is repeated. Everything can be expressed about the One, as long as we do not utter the same, together with its denial, at the same (*simul*) time. Seen that way, the One can be spoken of as being subject to temporal evolution.

From this Plato concluded that the principle of *identity* should contain a proviso relating to the timeless *repetition* of the same, just as the principle of *non-contradiction* should contain a proviso relating to the *simultaneity* of contradictories. This is why he, in an interlude on *time*, separating the second hypothesis from the third, demonstrates both how the concept of change is conditioned by the mediation of contradictions in the course of time and, further, how this same mediation presupposes the introduction of the concept of suddenness, or "an eye's twinkle", as a logical category.

vi.   We now proceed from the teachings of Plato to the doctrines of St. Augustine, i.e., we move from Greek philosophy to Christian theology. Within the Christian tradition, it is common to speak of God as 'trinitarian': Father, Son and Spirit form a Holy Trinity. How did this idea of a Divine Triad emerge? There cannot be any serious doubt that the notion of a 'triune' God stems from a Greek source: Pythagoreanism. But its path from Pythagoreanism to Christianity was mediated by Neo-Platonism.

St. Augustine played a major rôle in the formation of the Christian Idea of God. The transplantation to Christian soil of the philosophical Idea of God, albeit a God with triune attributes, resulted in two novelties: the concept of *Creation* and the doctrine of *Atonement*. That the ultimate outcome of the syncretistic currents in the ancient Church, a development in which Augustine was one of the most prominent figures, was a mixture of rather heterogeneous ideas, cannot be explained away.

Some features, however, should be emphasized as being of crucial importance. The Idea of God as a concrete individual person, and not just an abstract concept, is an indispensable notion distinctive of Christianity. Consequently, it must admitted that both the Hebrew and the Christian concepts of Divinity have always been anthropomorphic. Now the Idea of a personal God, namely, a divine Creator, is obviously incompatible with a metaphysical system wholly determined by its own immanent logic.

In contradistinction to the Neo-Platonic concept of emanation, *Creation*, in the Christian context, cannot be interpreted as an automatic genesis. Unless God can be thought of as a person who, by virtue of his infinite *Power*, utilizes his infinite *Wisdom* to display his infinite *Goodness*, the word 'God' is reduced to idle noise (*flatus vocis*). To Augustine, at least, it was clear that the Christian concept of Creation could not be adapted to the pattern established by the Neo-Platonic form of ontology.

His, and the early Church's, solution to this problem was a doctrine of faith stating that God Almighty (the "Father"), by His Word, or Wisdom (the "Son"), of pure Love, or Goodness (the "Spirit"), created the universe from nothing: *ex nihilo*. So the instant of Creation becomes synonymous with the origin of Time. Hence, prior to the creation of the world, nothing existed: i.e., there was no 'prior'. But God himself is eternally present, i.e., his "time" is a forever standing, or unchanging, "now" (*nunc stans*).

In the aftermath, Augustine displayed a new view on the issue of the origin of evil. An infinite God cannot possibly duplicate himself in his work of creation for the reason that two infinite and co-eternal gods would mutually limit each other. From this it follows that the perfection of the created world must necessarily be limited.

Now God's perfection consists in the fact that he is incapable of committing sin: *non potest peccare*. God considers sin simply as the opposite to his own divine essence. Sin is an offense to God. God could not bestow his own perfection upon his creatures. The most a created being can ever aspire to, as regards perfection, is: *posse non peccare*. It can desist from sin, and this freedom to defy sin was a sign of its being created in the image of God. Likewise, an inevitable consequence of man's limited freedom as a created being is: *posse peccare*, man is capable of sinning if he decides to abuse his freedom. Following a "Darwinian" logic, it was then only a question of time when the Fall of Man would occur: the Fall was probable and predictable, albeit not inevitable.

God's righteousness manifests itself in the fact that the sinner is punished in exact proportion to his sin, and justice is done when God leaves a sinner to his vice. From the beginning, sin was man's abuse of freedom in submitting to his desires (*concupiscentia*); so he was punished by loosing his freedom and by being enslaved to his own desires. The actual punishment is therefore lust itself, the fact that the sinner cannot abstain from his desires: lust has overtaken him and transformed his being; and thus sin has sullied the divine image in his inmost nature. From this follows his need for salvation.

God's mercy is an infinite divine love which ensures the possibility of salvation in spite of human sinfulness. Now, how was this work of salvation to be carried into effect? In only one way: God assumed human form and submitted himself to those conditions of humanity which imply that man may freely choose to be enslaved by his desires.

God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, took upon himself the burden of man's sin. By living his life free from sin, he provided man with a lofty ideal: *posse non peccare*. By dying as an innocent, he demonstrated definitively his own claim to the divine mark of distinction: *non posse peccare*. In dying the death of a sinner, he vanquished, once and for all, the dominion of death which is: *non posse non peccare*.

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vii.   According to Lovejoy, however, both the concept of Creation and the concepts of Providence, Freedom, and Salvation, present difficulties left unsolved by Augustine. If God was perfect, even without the Creation, why then did he create the world at all? The principles of reason require an explanation, but the divine act of creation seems to be a fact of the utmost irrationality. If God did not need his creatures to celebrate his own divinity, what reason could have motivated him to create a world?

In the event that he knew a reason so important that it could convince his wisdom, his act of creation would have been forced, and so he could be neither almighty, nor free. The creator must necessarily be superior to his own creatures, and his decision to create can hardly be explained rationally with reference to something that did not yet exist. But, if he acted without any good reason, then his creation is not founded in goodness. And if his act occurred rashly, or by accident, the wisdom of the creator is obliterated. All these difficulties he left over to Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas, distinguishing a creation at the beginning of time (*creatio in principio*) and a creation from eternity (*creatio ab aeterno*), dismissed the latter, as he felt himself obliged to defend the truth, or validity, of the former by reference to the book of *Genesis*. At the same time, he found it urgent to provide a reason for the creation of the world. According to Thomas, God always acts spontaneously, but never without a good reason. God's own goodness constitutes the original and true motivation for His act of creation. Unmoved, and at rest in Himself, He animates all living beings through infinite love.

Thus Thomas conjoined the Christian concept of God with Aristotelian attributes: God is 'the first cause', 'the unmoved mover', etc. One may feel that this incorporation of Aristotelian elements in the Christian tradition contributed to accentuate the difficulties emphasized by Lovejoy. Aristotle identified God with Being in a way that obliterates the distinction between *transcendence* and *immanence*. However, we have to discern the two if we are to keep apart the doctrine of creation from that of emanation.

In this context, one must remember that Neo-Platonism originated as an attempt to unify the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. But most such attempts might seem to be doomed to result in a static and not dialectically conceived system. The pivotal idea of Aristotelian scholasticism, that of the *hierarchy*, is static, and the Aristotelian idea of God as ultimate Being, unmoved Mover, and first Cause, just multiply the difficulties. Leibniz later clarified the issue by pointing out that the divine cause must transcend its effects in the same way in which goodness transcends being, according to Plato.

In order to justify God's freedom in his act of creation, Thomas made an important distinction between two forms of *necessity*: a relative, *hypothetical*, one, and an absolute *metaphysical*, one. This distinction can be traced back at least to Anselm, and is the same distinction Leibniz adopted. Armed with this distinction, Leibniz tried to justify that God, in his wisdom, surveys all possibilities by *absolute necessity*, and that he, in his goodness, freely selects one of these to be created in time, and thus to develop, by *relative necessity*. It is precisely this distinction Lovejoy condemns.

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Now, according to Thomas, as well as to most other philosophers educated in logic - with the exception of Kierkegaard, who constructed an exceedingly original alternative - the *actual* is always *possible*, whereas the *possible* is not always *actual*. It is this point that Lovejoy simply does not, or will not, or can not, understand.

According to him, there can be merely one kind of necessity: namely, the absolute, or metaphysical, one. In Lovejoy's inflexible opinion, Thomas and Leibniz ought to have inferred the absolute necessity of the creation from the goodness of its creator.

So Lovejoy concludes categorically that it is impossible to ascribe freedom to God. Spinozian determinism is simply the inevitable consequence of Leibnizian rationalism. The Idea of Creation is reducible to that of a necessary emanation in time.

Anselm, Thomas, and Leibniz, all confessed that the infinite wisdom of God must encompass every conceivable possibility; whatever is possible participates in the divine being and is therefore aimed at by the divine goodness, albeit to a varying degree.

Now all graduation is outright rejected by Lovejoy: God wills his own being with absolute necessity, and every possibility is actualized by virtue of a similar necessity.

This position entails a denial of all modal distinctions: the possible, the factual, and the necessary, simply coincide, thereby eliminating all need for rational discrimination. Such *modal collapse* has absurd consequences for the traditional idea of God.

The only alternative to theistic *determinism* seems to be a theistic *voluntarism*. Duns Scotus, Thomas' antagonist, was an exponent of voluntarism. Duns developed his position by exalting the primacy of the sovereign will in God. God's will is not compelled to follow his reason; rather his reason is subordained to his will, that is, to his goodness. So it still holds that God is supreme goodness. This divine goodness, however, depends ultimately upon the divine omnipotence. God does not will something because reason has shown it to be good. No, what God decides to do is good because God has decided it. This, of course, ensures God's freedom and omnipotence, but hardly his goodness.

The problems relating to will and reason, and the primacy of the one or the other, are at the heart of the philosophical controversy between Leibniz and Bayle. Kierkegaard comments on this famous debate in his papers: *"The very conflict between Leibniz and Bayle is important, and when one compares it to the polemics of our own times one must be astonished, for we have truly regressed"*. The Scotian doctrine of the primacy of the will was firmly rejected by Leibniz. In this dispute he sided with Thomas, against Duns, while but admitting some inadequacies of the Thomist solution to the difficulties.

viii. To defend rationalism against the united assault of voluntarism and determinism God's goodness and freedom would have to be asserted in unison.

A new philosophy, combining dialectical sensitivity and acumen with a solid basis in a refined logical theory of necessity and contingence, was urgently called for.

The philosophy of Leibniz got its most pregnant expression in the monadology with its doctrine of the pre-established harmony of the monads. An informative sample of its contents is conveyed by some of the first sections in the *Theodicée* (P.i, §§7-8):

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God is the primary source of all things. Like everything else we experience, limited things are contingent and possess nothing that necessitates their existence. Obviously, time, space and matter, being themselves uniform, similar, and inactive, might have assumed wholly different shapes and motions in a very different order.

Therefore, a reason for the existence of the world, as the ultimate totality of all contingent things, must be sought for, and this reason must be found in an essence which in itself has the reason for its own existence, being both necessary and eternal. This cause must be rational, for the world is contingent, and an infinity of other worlds are equally possible, each one tending of itself to existence, just like the real world. Hence, the cause of this world must have compared each of these possible worlds to all the other in order to be able to select a specific one for actual existence.

But a real being's relation to, or consideration of, pure possibilities cannot be other than imaginative thought, just as the realization of a single possibility cannot be other than selective will. The power of this being provides the will with the ability to accomplish its intention. Hence power is directed towards being, just as wisdom, or intelligence, is directed towards truth, and will towards goodness. This intelligent cause must further be infinite in every way, and its power, wisdom, and goodness, must also be absolute as regards perfection, since it embraces every imaginable possibility ...

What I refer to as 'the world' is the sum total of all existing things with reference to time and space; this obviates the possibility of saying that it is possible that there be other worlds at different times and places; one would have to consider them all to be one single universe. But even though one imagines all of time and space to be filled up, it remains nevertheless true that this could be done in infinitely many ways. So there is an infinite number of possible worlds, from among which God must needs have chosen the best one, since He never acts in a way that is at variance with supreme reason.

ix.   It is now befitting to consider the arguments of his opponent, Lovejoy:

Thus far Leibniz's argument seems to place him on the side of Spinoza ... The primary being exists by a logical necessity; it is also necessary that all the things .. should have 'reasons' for existence lying in its nature and in their own; and this might seem to mean that all things follow ex necessitate divinae naturae, *and that the existent universe is .. logically inevitable in its least detail, so that no alternative could ever have been so much as conceived by an infinite intellect. From this consequence, however, Leibniz professed to have found a way of escape.*

Spinoza had, Leibniz observes, failed to see that existence must be limited not only to the possible, in the logical sense, but also to the compossible .. In maintaining that the divine will must necessarily be determined by the most sufficient reason and must therefore infallibly choose the one best out of the many possible worlds, he is not ... asserting the 'brutal metaphysical necessity' of Spinoza, but a 'moral necessity'.

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The opposite, i.e., *the choice of one of the other worlds, would not be impossible in the metaphysical sense; it would not imply contradiction. The will, according to the principle of sufficient reason, is 'always more inclined' to the alternative which it takes, but it is not under necessity .. Thus a residuum of contingency is left ..*

The distinction which Leibniz here attempts to set up is manifestly without logical substance; the fact is so apparent that it is impossible to believe that a thinker of his power can have been altogether unaware of it himself. Without abandoning all that is most essential to the principle of sufficient reason he could not possibly admit that a sufficient reason 'inclines' the will without necessitating its choice, and least of all in the case of a will supposed to be enlightened with an infinite intelligence ..

The mere concept of the existence of any of the inferior and non-existent worlds is, by hypothesis, free from contradiction; but it was absolutely impossible that it could be selected for existence, since this would contradict both the perfection of God and the very notion of voluntary choice of which the principle of sufficient reason is an expression ...

The worth of an object is involved in its idea in precisely the same way in which divisibility by other whole numbers without a remainder is involved in the idea of certain whole numbers. If God had pronounced any other world best he would have contradicted himself as absolutely as if he had asserted that four is not a multiple of two.

An absolute logical determinism, then, is as characteristic of the metaphysics of Leibniz as of that of Spinoza .. although Leibniz lacked the candor and courage to express the certain, and almost obvious, outcome of his reasonings in his more popular writings without obscuring it by edifying phraseology .. especially the verbal distinction, absolutely meaningless in the light of his other doctrines, between 'necessitating' and 'infallibly inclining' reasons.   *'The Great Chain of Being, p.169f.*

x.   It is indeed fortunate that Leibniz has discussed the foundation of this distinction in several places, anticipating all the points of Lovejoy's subsequent criticism. For the sake of clarity, his points should be collated with his entire philosophical system and the way it treats the harmony of monads and, in particular, his doctrine of 'possible worlds'.

Everything that is true about one or another world is founded in the very nature of that world and can, accordingly, be deduced from its concept through logical analysis. In this manner, all truth is analytically anchored in the essence of the divine intellect. Whereas the possible is that which is true in a single possible world, the necessary is that which cannot be denied without contradiction and which is therefore true in all and every possible world. However, not everything which is actual is also necessary.

Clearly, according to Leibniz, some statements are true without being necessary. Likewise, some purportedly true statements are false without therefore being impossible. This shows that there are some truths which are contingent; for example, true statements concerning the facts of experience are just contingently true. Nevertheless, it is always possible to view all contingent truths as being relatively necessary, granted that their truth is assessed in relation to a freedom of a higher order.

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The set of all possible worlds can be divided into subsets, and subsets of subsets, with a progressively finer designation of their characteristics:

a)   If we consider the entire set without any restriction, we refer to the modalities as absolute, metaphysical, or *logical*.

b)   If we now limit ourselves to consider the set of all worlds having their laws in common with that world we know and call real, our concepts of possibility and necessity are defined relative to these laws and accordingly, we describe the modalities as *physical*. The laws of nature are ordained by God, and he might have chosen other laws.

c)   If we then proceed to a further limitation, confining ourselves to the set of worlds having their past in common with the real world until midnight on the *ides martii 44 b.C.*, e.g., everything pertaining to the life and death of Caesar is complete and inevitable with *historical* necessity, while the necessity compelling his successors to avenge the murder may be termed *political*, or (maybe?) *ethical*, necessity.

Now the question of whether some true statement is necessary or contingent and, if necessary, whether this necessity is absolute or relative, is decidable by logical analysis attempting to reduce the statement to a self-evident statement of identity. The difference between the two kinds of necessity is dependent on the number of operations necessary to accomplish the logical analysis. If the reduction can be made with a finite number of operations, the necessity is termed absolute. If the reduction can be completed only with an infinite number of operations, the necessity is termed relative, implying that the truth of the statement, from another viewpoint, is more or less contingent.

The divine freedom is the freedom to realize one of the set of possible worlds. God, in choosing, is bound only by the need of consistency, or freedom of contradiction. The act being a free commitment to the principle of choosing a world *sub specie boni*, the creation of a world is an expression of the fact that God acts freely out of goodness. But it is nonsense that God had contradicted himself, had he not acted out of goodness. Since there was nothing good before the act of creation, there was nothing to contradict. God's choice to be good and his choice of the best are *simultaneous choices*.

Leibniz's reasoning now provides us with the crucial argument against Lovejoy. Let us assume, contrary to better judgment, that God's goodness was not chosen in freedom, but that it obliged him to choose the best of worlds with absolute necessity. From this it does not follow that the world selected by God with absolute necessity was necessarily the best of worlds. Lovejoy's error is to confuse the necessity of the inference, *necessitas consequentiae*, with the necessity of the conclusion, *necessitas consequentis*. In order to emphasize the significance of this distinction, we can even make do with a single concept of necessity, viz., the absolute, metaphysical, or logical, one.

xi.   Nowadays we have learned to express logical problems by means of formulas that employ symbols, and it is generally accepted that the Leibnizian logic is identical to *S5*, a system devised by C.I. Lewis. This system contains the axiom $L(p \Rightarrow q) \Rightarrow (Lp \Rightarrow Lq)$, which, granted the premisses $L(p \Rightarrow q)$ and Lp, allows us to infer the conclusion Lq. Lovejoy's blunder is that he claims to infer the conclusion Lq solely from the premiss $L(p \Rightarrow q)$, without applying the premiss Lp - which, however, is *not* granted.

Let p stand for the statement '*(God realizes that) world W_1 is the best one*', and let q stand for the statement '*(God decides that) world W_1 is to be realized*'. Let us further, contrary to better judgment, suppose that God's goodness obliges him absolutely, prior to his own choice; thus the assumption $L(p \Rightarrow q)$ applies. From this alone it does not follow that Lq: '*It is necessary that (God decides that) the world W_1 is to be realized*'.

We still need to demonstrate the other assumption, that is, Lp: '*It is necessary that (God realizes that) the world W_1 is the best*', but this assumption does *not* follow directly from God's infinite wisdom alone. Let us provisionally grant that the wisdom of God is of absolute necessity infinite; from this it does *not* follow that God necessarily knows that world W_1 is the best one. Let us also grant that if the world W_1 is *in fact* best, then God *necessarily* knows it; does it then follow that the world W_1 is necessarily the best one? *No*, not if the fact that W_1 is the best one is itself not necessary, but contingent!

Of course, the infinite wisdom of God must know what is necessary as necessary and what is contingent as contingent! How can one believe it to be otherwise?

The assumption Lp is fulfilled only inasmuch as it is not a contingent but, rather, a necessary truth that world W_1 is in fact the best of all possible worlds. This might be the case if this necessity were hidden in the very concept of world W_1 in such a way that a denial of the primacy of world W_1 would be a flat contradiction.

However, it is precisely the characteristic of absolutely necessary truths that they pertain to all the possible worlds without exception, whereas it characterizes contingent truths that they merely apply to some possible worlds, or to groups of such worlds.

Since a verification of the primacy of W_1 must imply an infinite comparison, it is hard to see how the primacy of W_1 can be hidden in the concept of any particular world, whether that of itself or of another. Such a fact could only be hidden in the nature of God. Now, if it were, and if it was also necessarily true that world W_1 is the best of all worlds, the consequence would be that only one world is possible and necessary: viz., W_1.

It is nevertheless obvious that the ultimate evaluation of W_1 must emerge from a comparison encompassing the entire infinity of possible worlds, of which infinitely many may be infinite not only with respect to space, but with respect to time. Such comparison, infinite to an exponential power, can never be closed. But why should it ever be?

Can we not imagine creation to be an experiment made by God? God might have wanted to make an experiment in *real time* whose result is unpredictable, even to himself. Such a conjecture, however, would be foreign to Leibniz and an anachronism.

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xii.   Lovejoy's erroneous conclusions are, however, both exceedingly simple and trivial. The innocent: *'This is necessarily true: God sees that world W_1 is the best one'* is mixed up with the obnoxious: *'God sees that this is necessarily true: world W_1 is the best one'*. Let, e.g., p represent that *'God is good'*, and let q represent that *'God wills what is best'*. Now grant $L(p \Rightarrow q)$, *'This is necessarily true: if God is good then he wills what is best'*. But can we not, then, infer that *'This is necessarily true: God wills what is best'*? No! That follows only if it also applies that Lp, *'This is necessarily true: God is good'*.

Let us provisionally assume that this is indeed the case: *'God is necessarily good'*. Let us furthermore, contrary to Leibniz, assume that world W_1 is necessarily the best. Does it then follow that *'God could not have created any other world, for example W_2, without departing from His own goodness and contradicting His own being'*? Yes! Does it not, then, follow that *'God was compelled to create the best world, W_1'*? No!

Of course, God still had the freedom to abstain from creating anything whatsoever. Furthermore, at any instant, he might let the entire universe sink back into nothingness. Precisely for that reason the Creator was, and still is, free, hence also good!

xiii.   Therefore, in full agreement with Leibniz, I shall reach the following conclusion, which is *not* the outcome of a logical demonstration, but a free option of belief:
 1) God created the best of all worlds - a world as perfect as a world could ever be.
 2) The natural perfection of the world is rooted in its laws which are fixed forever.
 3) The moral perfection of its intelligent creatures may increase without any limit.
From this it follows that even the best of all worlds will always remain imperfect.

In what sense, then, can we possibly maintain to have vindicated the Idea of God? Can we claim to have shown that the God Idea is a 'unit idea' in the sense of Lovejoy? No, not at all. In fact, we shall have to reject the Lovejoyean methodology alltogether!

Can we claim to have demonstrated that the Idea of God has a legitimate function in human language which is that of being an ultimate referent, an absolute *signifié*? No! The rationality of monotheism ultimately hinges on faith and cannot be demonstrated.

xiv.   For the Christian believer, this saying of Jesus from Nazareth still remains valid: *'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me!'*

The philosophical Idea of God, therefore, is *never* in itself a passable way to God. *But if the Idea of God were logically inconsistent, there would be no way to God!*

What the preceding discussion has shown is that pseudo-philosophical criticism, pretending to prove the Idea of God to be pure nonsense, cannot count as evidence that Christian believers are unable to reason clearly about the focal point of their faith!

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