

The *Theodicy*

Paul Lodge

C8.S1

8.1 General background

C8.P1 *Essays of Theodicy on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* appeared anonymously in 1710 when Leibniz was 64 years old (Leibniz 1710a). The term *Theodicée* was Leibniz's invention, from the Greek *theos* and *dike*, and some readers—such as Jacques Bernard, who reviewed the book for the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*—mistook it for a pseudonym.¹ However, 'Par M. Leibnitz' was added in the second edition of 1712. Over time Leibniz's neologism caught on, and has come to mean "The, or a, vindication of the divine attributes, esp. justice and holiness, in respect to the existence of evil; a writing, doctrine, or theory intended to justify the ways of God to men" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). However, it is important to notice the differences between this and Leibniz's original intent. As he made clear in a letter to Des Bosses, for Leibniz, "Theodicy" is simply "the doctrine of the right and justice of God" (GP II 428). As we shall see, the book contains almost no attempt to explain *why* created the world contains particular evils.

C8.P2 Leibniz wrote the *Theodicy* in French and seems to have wanted it to be accessible. Indeed, he tried to have it translated into English.² It is nonetheless a very challenging read due to its complex structure, which includes numerous discussions of debates that seem rather arcane. And this is compounded by the fact that much of the book engages directly with the writings of Pierre Bayle (1647–1706). Bayle was one of the most prominent philosophers at the turn of the eighteenth century due to his *Critical and Historical Dictionary* (Bayle 1740). However, his work is relatively unknown today.³

C8.P3 According to Leibniz, the *Theodicy* began with conversations with his patron, Sophie Charlotte, queen of Prussia (1668–1705), concerning the ways in which Leibniz thought that Bayle had made "religion and reason appear as adversaries" (GP VI 39/H 63).⁴ During these conversations Leibniz mentioned that he had

¹ See Strickland (2016b: 76 n. 40). ² See Brown (2016a).

³ For helpful accounts of Bayle, see Lennon (1999) and van der Lugt (2016).

⁴ Translations are mine throughout. However, they are based on H; I include a reference to H in all cases, and there is substantial overlap between my translations and those of Huggard. References to the original language or the *Theodicy* are given in several forms. In the case of the "Preliminary

“sometimes been minded to publish upon this matter some reflexions whose chief aim should be knowledge of God such as is needed to stimulate piety and to nourish virtue” (GP VI 39/H 63). And, with encouragement from the queen and “some friends”, Leibniz “stitched together” the “numerous scraps” he had written down for Sophie Charlotte or as personal notes to make a single work” (to Von Greiffenrantz, GP VI 12/Antognazza 2009: 421).⁵

C8.P4 Leibniz was happy with the *Theodicy*'s reception, reporting that it had “pleased theologians of all three main confessions [i.e., Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed]” (to Von Greiffenratz. GP VI 12–13/Antognazza 2009: 483), and it was indeed published in Latin at the behest of the Jesuits. However, things changed as the eighteenth century progressed. David Hume (1711–76) claimed that Leibniz had made “essential” to his philosophy the “bold and paradoxical position” of the denial of “the sense of human misery” (Hume 1998: 174–5). And Leibniz was identified with Dr Pangloss from Voltaire's *Candide*, whose claim that this is the best of all possible worlds is famously ridiculed.⁶ And by 1791, Kant was doing little more than expressing a commonplace when he titled his famous essay “On the Failure of All Philosophical Attempts at Theodicy”.⁷ The twentieth century saw a burgeoning interest in the study of Leibniz's work. But in the English-speaking world the *Theodicy* was largely eclipsed by interest in his philosophy of logic and language and metaphysics. However, there has been a renewal of interest in Leibniz's philosophical theology recently, and this intensified during the 300th anniversary of the *Theodicy* in 2010.⁸

C8.P5 The *Theodicy* comprises a preface, the “Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason” (hereafter PD), three “Essays on the Justice of God and the Freedom of Man in the Origin of Evil”, and an appendix. The preface contains introductory material and a sketch of the main arguments and positions found in Part 1. Parts 2 and 3 return to these, often in the form of responses to lengthy quotes from Bayle. PD is free-standing, although its claims are methodologically crucial for the rest of the book.

C8.P6 Leibniz's appendix initially consisted of three pieces. “Summary Of The Controversy, Reduced To Formal Argument, Reflexions On The Work That Mr. Hobbes Published In English,” and “On ‘Freedom, Necessity And Change, Observations On The Book Concerning The Origin Of Evil,’ Published Recently

Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason” (PD) the citation is by section and in the case of the three “Essays” by part and section. In the case of the “Preface” and other pieces in the book, I use the pagination in GP, given that there are no section numbers. Bayle discussed the problem of evil at length in his *Dictionary* (see Irwin 2014: 43), and elaborated his views in *Response to the Questions of a Provincial* (1704–7) (RQP). Leibniz quotes liberally from these and other works by Bayle.

⁵ But see LTS 25 n. 104 and LGR 287, which cast doubt on Leibniz's account.

⁶ Voltaire (1759). ⁷ See Strickland (2019).

⁸ A wealth of papers can be found in the following three volumes: Rateau (2011); Jorgensen and Newlands (2014); and Camposampiero, Geretto, and Perissinotto (2016).

In London.” In the second edition a Latin résumé, generally referred to as the “*Causa Dei*”, was added.⁹ The English-language translation by Huggard also includes “Excursus on Theodicy §392”, which Leibniz published in the *Mémoires de Trévoux* in 1712. Given space constraints, I shall restrict my discussion to the main body of the *Theodicy*. However, the other pieces are well worth reading, especially the *Causa Dei*.

C8.S2

8.2 The preface

C8.P7 The preface, and thus the *Theodicy* itself, begins:

C8.P8 It has always seemed that the common man has clothed devotion in formalities: sound piety, that is to say, light and virtue, has never been shared among the greater number. (GP VI 25/H 49)

C8.P9 This claim is mitigated by the observation that “true piety”, which consists in “sentiments and practice”, is “imitated” in the “formalities of worship” which comprise “formularies of belief” and “ceremonies”. And Leibniz adds: “Moses and . . . other good law givers . . . and above all of Jesus Christ, divine founder of the purest and most enlightened religion” (GP VI 25/H 49) initiated religions with appropriate doctrines and ceremonies. However, he also suggests that “only too often . . . worship is stifled by its manner, and . . . the divine light is obscured by the opinions of men”.

C8.P10 Next Leibniz offers a brief history of western religion, highlighting beliefs that he believes “natural religion” should feature, and which he claims Jewish and Christian traditions were able to “convert . . . into law” such that they “gained . . . the authority of a public dogma” (GP VI 26–7/H 51). Abraham and Moses are credited with introducing “the belief in one God, source of all good, author of all things” (GP VI 26/H 50). But another crucial doctrine is said to have remained esoteric in Judaism and only “proclaimed for popular acceptance” when “Jesus Christ . . . taught . . . that immortal souls pass into another life, where they must receive the wages for their actions” (GP VI 26/H 51). Thus Jesus “made men happy by anticipation, and gave them here on earth a foretaste of future felicity”, and provided the means by which “the Divinity was the object not only of our fear and veneration but also of our love and devotion” (GP VI 27/H 51).¹⁰

⁹ *Causa Dei Asserta Per Justitiam Ejus, Cum Caeteris Ejus Perfectionibus, Cunctisque Actionibus Conciliatam*, translated as *A Vindication of God's Justice Reconciled with His Other Perfections and All His Actions*. See Leibniz (1965: 114–47).

¹⁰ There is a brief discussion of Islam whose significance is reduced to establishing the dogmas of natural religion in places unreachable by Christians (GP VI 27/H 51).

- C8.P11 By “natural religion,” Leibniz means religiosity due to natural endowments, and he claims that we can “consider [the] perfections” of the God of Abraham and Moses “because we find the ideas of these within ourselves” (GP VI 27/H 51).¹¹ Elsewhere Leibniz commits himself to the innateness of the doctrine of immortality.¹² Perhaps surprisingly, his natural religion includes very few doctrines. Furthermore, he says nothing to suggest that Jesus was more than a gifted popularizer of religious ideas that we all possess innately. Thus, the text opens up room for a deflated reading of Leibniz’s views on Jesus’s divinity.¹³
- C8.P12 Although Leibniz focuses on natural religion, we should not infer that he is primarily interested in what people believe. He characterizes sound or true piety as “light and virtue” and then “sentiments and practice,” neither of which seem to require explicit affirmation of doctrines. And he offers a third account of true piety after the historical excursus, as “love of God, but an enlightened love whose fervour is accompanied by light . . . [which] gives birth to pleasure in good actions which highlights virtue, and returning all to God as to the centre, transports the human to the divine” (GP VI 27/H 51).
- C8.P13 The link between piety and doctrine is found in Leibniz’s account of love as “that affection which makes us take pleasure in the perfections of the object of our love” (GP VI 27/H 51). Since the innate idea of God enables us to “consider his perfections” (GP VI 27/H 51), the enlightenment provided by this idea makes something that warrants our love cognitively available. The doctrines concerning God are not identical with the ideas which acquaint us with the divine perfections. However, they are an articulation of the content of those ideas. And the thought seems to be that considering those doctrines may serve to draw our attention to, and enliven, the ideas themselves, the consequence of which will be a better acquaintance with God.
- C8.P14 Nonetheless, something crucial is missing from the picture. Even if doctrine can help present us with a God who is worthy of our love, it does not follow that we will love God. However, it seems implicit in these passages that the enlivening of the idea of God and God’s perfections will bring the positive affect along with it.¹⁴ Indeed, it is plausible to think that Leibniz considers ideas and affects as inseparable features of our awareness of things. And this is supported by his account of pleasure as “the sensation of perfection” (Leibniz 1860: 171–2/PE 233) or “perception of perfection” (GP VII 291).
- C8.P15 At this point it is important to notice that Leibniz is not just offering us theoretical claims. Indeed, he draws explicit attention to their existential significance:

¹¹ Also see NE 74, 76. ¹² See NE 96.

¹³ Leibniz also observes that “wise men of other nations may have said the same” but failed to “convert dogma into law” because they did not attract followers (GP VI 26/H 50).

¹⁴ See “On the True Mystical Theology” (LGR 80–84).

- C8.P16 This kind of love gives birth to that pleasure in good actions which highlights virtue, and, returning all to God as to the centre, transports the human to the divine. For in doing one's duty, in obeying reason, one carries out the orders of the Supreme Reason. One directs all one's intentions to the common good, which is no different to the glory of God; one finds that there is no greater individual interest than to take up the common interest, and one gains satisfaction for oneself by taking pleasure in the acquisition of true benefits for men. Whether one succeeds or not, one is content with what happens, being resigned to the will of God and knowing that what he wills is best.
(GP VI 27–8/H 51–2)
- C8.P17 Leibniz associates love of God with the emergence of a certain mode of being, conditioned by an alignment of individual and common interest and the motivation to pursue them. Furthermore, he suggests that this mode of being involves being resigned to the will of God, but happily so, given that we know that what has been willed is the best. This is the first allusion to the claim made infamous by Voltaire, namely that this is the best of all possible worlds. But it is also important to pay attention to what comes next.
- C8.P18 But before he [God] declares his will by the event, one endeavours to find it out by doing that which appears most in accord with his commands. When we are in this state of mind, we are not discouraged by lack of success, we regret only our faults; and the ingratitude of men causes no relaxation in the exercise of our kindly mood. Our charity is humble and full of moderation, it does not feign to domineer; equally attentive to our faults and to the talents of others, we are inclined to criticize our own actions and to excuse and put right those of others. It is for us to perfect ourselves and do wrong to no one. There is no piety where there is no charity; and without being informal and kindly one cannot show sincere devotion. (GP VI 28/H 52)
- C8.P19 Although Leibniz speaks of "resignation", this does not imply passivity. It is a resignation that occurs after our active pursuit of the apparent good fails to come to fruition. Furthermore, true piety is accompanied by other attitudes that condition the pious way of living. Unfortunately, Leibniz leaves opaque the connections between true piety and acting for the common good. There is no space here to fill in the details, but I suggest we regard the passage as an expression of the way in which Leibniz's conception of the good life, and our ability to live it, is enmeshed with his sense of how the relation between God and creation plays itself out in the lives of virtuous individual human beings. Furthermore, it seems to me to have a phenomenological flavour that suggests it is an expression of Leibniz's own sense of self.

- C8.P20 We have seen that Leibniz begins the *Theodicy* by emphasizing his concern with the inculcation and maintenance of true piety. The rest of the book is best seen as a response to then-contemporary ways of thinking that he regards as threats to this. One threat arises from the fact that some who “speak much of piety, of devotion, of religion”, including those “busied with the teaching of them” (GP VI 29/H 53), have a poor understanding of “the goodness and justice of the Sovereign of the universe”. Here Leibniz is concerned with those who have “appealed to the irresistible power of God when it was a question rather of presenting his supreme goodness” and “have assumed a despotic power when they should rather have conceived of a power regulated by the most perfect wisdom”. As a result they characterize God as one “who deserves neither to be imitated nor loved”. However true piety is threatened by other “confused notions” (GP VI 29/H 53). Some concern the other key doctrine of natural religion, immortality. But Leibniz also suggests that problems arise from the way people understand “freedom, [and] necessity”.
- C8.P21 Leibniz explains how he will deal with these threats. However, the discussion is very condensed and superseded by the main text. But some other elements from the remainder of the preface are worth highlighting at this point. With the main themes are introduced, Leibniz turns to Bayle. As he reports, the two men had been publicly engaged in a series of journal articles following Bayle’s discussion of Leibniz’s “New System” (1695) in his *Dictionary* article “Rorarius”.¹⁵ The main thing at issue was Leibniz’s account of the relation between the soul and the body, his “pre-established harmony”, and here Leibniz draws attention to the contrast between his view and Bayle’s “occasionalism”.¹⁶
- C8.P22 Leibniz is also interested in Bayle’s challenges to those “who try to make reason and faith agree with regard to the existence of evil” (GP VI 43/H 66–7). Bayle presented these in the *Dictionary* articles “Manicheans”, “Marcionites”, “Paulicians”, and the subsequent clarification on the first of these.¹⁷ Furthermore, the issue was revisited in his *Response to the Questions of a Provincial* (1704–7). Leibniz does not make direct reference to these works until later. However, the preface offers a preview of his concerns.
- C8.P23 Leibniz suggests that Bayle’s occasionalism led him to believe that Manicheanism—i.e. the view that there are “two principles, or two gods, the one good, the other evil” (GP VI 34/H 58)—is the rational response to the existence of evil and yet clashes with rational belief in monotheism. Bayle is said to have resolved this by claiming “our reason confounds itself” and that “one should disregard” its deliverances and “hold fast to the revealed dogmas”, in particular the

¹⁵ See Bayle (1740: iv.76–87)/POP 213–54. For discussion of the “New System”, see Ch. 5 by Julia Borcharding in this volume.

¹⁶ See GP VI 42/H 66. For a helpful discussion of occasionalism, see Lee (2008).

¹⁷ See Bayle (1740 iii.302–7)/POP 144–53; Bayle (1740: iii.314–19; iii.624–36; iv.166–93)/POP 409–13.

conception of God as “perfectly good, perfectly powerful and perfectly wise”. Leibniz worries that “many readers [of Bayle]... would draw injurious conclusions” (GP VI 34/H 58). Presumably the concern is that they would either embrace cosmic dualism or abandon natural religion.

- C8.P24 The remainder of the preface is a miscellany. First Leibniz presents his credentials for undertaking his task. Next he outlines some of his metaphysical notions that will be central to the accounts of human and divine activity later on. Finally, after a short advertisement for the appendices, there is a “conjecture on the primitive history of peoples” (GP VI 47/H 71). Here Leibniz suggests that the view that Zoroastrianism is committed to cosmic dualism is undermined by “accounts of Arab authors” (GP VI 48/H 71). Rather, the two principles are “dependent upon one supreme and single principle” (GP VI 48/H 72), which, like the God of Moses, “separated light from the darkness”, but only in the sense that “the darkness... is nothing but privation” (GP VI 48/H 72). Whilst there is no direct link made here, Leibniz appears to be undermining the thought that Manicheism has tradition-based support that warrants the seriousness Bayle accords it.¹⁸ But it also allows him to introduce the conception of grounds for the existence of evil that he himself favours.

C8.S3

8.3 *Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason*

- C8.P25 Leibniz’s concern that Bayle might lead people to abandon the idea of natural religion is reflected in the fact that the *Theodicy* begins with a *Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason* of around 20,000 words.¹⁹ It can be divided into three parts: §§1–5 contain Leibniz’s account of faith and reason and their relationship; §§6–23 discuss several ways the relationship has been understood historically; and §24–87 consider and respond to Bayle, with excursions into the views of others. Here Bayle’s comments on the Incarnation and Trinity are the focus, rather than evil.
- C8.P26 Leibniz’s initial account of faith, reason, and their relationship comprises a small number of dense paragraphs. It begins with an explicit commitment to the “principle of contradiction” (PC): “I suppose that two truths cannot contradict each other” (PD §1/H 73).
- C8.P27 Next Leibniz observes: “the object of faith is the truth God has revealed in an extraordinary way” (PD §1/H 73). Faith is true cognition, the content of which is made available by God in a way that defies the natural order. Later in PD §1, Leibniz turns to the relation between faith and experience, claiming that, insofar

¹⁸ Later Leibniz offers an even more deflationary genealogy (see Pt 2 §§136–43/H 136–43).

¹⁹ For a more detailed discussion of this section, see Lodge and Crowe (2002).

as one “regards the motives that bring it to life”, faith can be said to “depend on the experience of those who saw the miracles whereon revelation is founded, and upon the trustworthy tradition which has handed them down to us, whether through the scriptures or by the account of those who have preserved them” (PD § 1/H 734). But Leibniz finishes the section:

- C8.P28 Unless one were speaking of the inward motion of the Holy Spirit, who seizes souls and persuades them and directs them to good, that is to say, to faith and love, without always needing motives. (PD §1/H 74)
- C8.P29 Elsewhere, Leibniz refers to this as “divine faith” (A VI 4: 2362/SLT 12; see also NE 497). It obviates the worry that “true faith” is available only “the most enlightened people” (NE 497). But even the enlightened need it, since “no one can always remember his reasons for believing”. An additional claim that those with divine faith “have no further need to think of reasons or to pause over the difficulties in reasoning which the mind may envisage” (PD §29/H 91) raises the possibility of faith where there are only external reasons for the truth cognized. However, in the *Theodicy* Leibniz’s concern is with people familiar with the motives of Christianity, and it does not play a role.
- C8.P30 Leibniz defines “reason”, or rather “strict and true reason” (PD §1/H 73), as “the linking together of truths”. He contrasts this with “the habit...of judging things according to the usual course of nature” in that it is “inviolable” (PD §23/H 88). Thus, reason is not a faculty that delivers truths *de novo* but one that operates on those already possessed. Leibniz recognizes this account has surprised some, but only those who “have never conferred with people who expressed themselves distinctly on these subjects” (PD §23/H 88).
- C8.P31 Leibniz also observes that reason is “especially (when it is compared with faith) [the linking] of those [truths] which the human mind can attain naturally without being aided by the light of faith” (PD §1/H 73), and he speaks of “reason pure and simple” which is “distinct from experience, and only has to do with truths independent of the senses”. Although he does not allow that the faculty of reason can generate true beliefs independently of sensory experience, he seems to allow that the mind can. However, there is an important caveat. Leibniz does not rule out there being beliefs derived through *non-sensory* experience.²⁰ And, as he makes clear elsewhere, our minds have a faculty of reflection, through which we are “aware of what is within us”, including “knowledge (or truths)” (NE 86) .
- C8.P32 Next Leibniz distinguishes two kinds of “truths of reason” (PD §2/H 74), i.e. truths established through inviolable reasoning, “eternal truths”, and positive [truths]”. Eternal truths “are absolutely necessary, in that the opposite implies

²⁰ In NE Leibniz suggests that experience of our own nature yields our notions of “being, substance, one, same, cause, perception, reasoning and many others” (NE 111).

contradiction”, and one cannot deny them “without being led into absurdities”. Their necessity is “logical, metaphysical or geometrical”. “Positive truths” are “the laws which it has pleased God to give to nature, or [truths which] depend upon them”. They follow from “the free choice of God” and are not “geometrically necessary”. However, they are subject to necessity of sorts. The wise choice of God producing the laws is obligatory and said to have “moral necessity”, and what follows from this choice has “physical necessity” (PD §2/H 74) insofar as it is in accordance with the laws of nature.²¹ In addition, a crucial feature of Leibniz’s conception of the natural order emerges here: “God can exempt creatures from the laws he has prescribed for them, and produce in them that which their nature does not bring by performing a miracle” (PD §3/H 74). Thus, there is no obstacle to positive truths that transgress the laws of nature.

C8.P33 The conception of necessity on which these distinctions draw is a formal one. From the early 1680s onward, Leibniz came to hold his “infinite analysis” account of modality. According to this, a proposition is absolutely necessary if and only if it can be shown to be an “identity” (i.e. the predicate term can be shown to appear in the subject term) through an analysis of the subject term that consists of a finite number of definitional substitutions.²² Given the infinite complexity of the content of God’s choice, Leibniz takes it to be the case that the grounds for the choice and the choice itself are not subject to such an analysis, and hence not absolutely necessary. On occasions Leibniz will call all such propositions contingent, but as we can see, he is sometimes willing to speak of “physical necessity”, since there are conceptions of the natural world, albeit abstract ones, that admit analysis in principle.

C8.P34 Given Leibniz’s commitment to PC, his account of truths of reason has significant ramifications. Two kinds of considerations might be offered against truths of faith: (1) Those based on eternal truths; (2) those based on truths that hold as a matter of physical necessity. Given PC, no item of faith can be upheld if there is an objection to it that can be obtained by reason from eternal truths, since in such cases the negation implies a contradiction. However, objections which follow from positive truths, although expressing propositions that are physically necessary, cannot be shown to contradict anything. As Leibniz observes, such an objection can “only form a probable argument”, which “has no force against faith, since it is agreed that the mysteries of religion are contrary to appearances” (PD §3/H 75), i.e. truths that defy “that which usually takes place” (PD §4/H 76).

C8.P35 Leibniz’s response to Bayle in PD also requires attention to other terms, namely “explain,” “comprehend,” “prove,” “uphold” (PD §5/H 76). He claims that there are truths that can be explained but not comprehended. Furthermore, truths that have been established need not be proved in order to be maintained. Upholding

²¹ For more on these notions and their relationship, see Adams (2005).

²² See Adams (1994: 25–30).

truths in the face of demonstrations to the contrary suffices for legitimately believing them. Whilst Leibniz does not provide an account, he seems to hold that comprehension obtains only where one is in possession of a completely adequate grasp of that which is under consideration. By contrast, explanations of truths involve an understanding that falls short of comprehension, but suffices “for believing them”. Here Leibniz offers the example of “sensible qualities” (PD §5/H 76). Although we do not have a completely adequate grasp of what redness is, say, this does not preclude a legitimate commitment to the existence of red things.

C8.P36 The Mysteries are somewhat different, of course. Leibniz suggests it is enough to have “some analogical understanding of a Mystery such as the Trinity or the Incarnation, to the end that in accepting them we do not pronounce words altogether devoid of meaning” (PD § 54/H 103). Thus, the Incarnation can be understood as analogous to “the union of one body with another or of a substance with its accident, of a subject with its adjunct, of the place with the moving body, of the act with the potency” or “the union of the soul with the body to make thereof one single person” (PD §55/H 104). Furthermore, the move from understanding the Mysteries to having a legitimate belief that they are true is more complex than the case of sensible qualities. Leibniz admits there are “motives of credibility” (PD §5/H 76) in such cases, and also suggests “it is a matter of no difficulty” to “theologians who are expert in their profession” to provide them (PD §29/H 91). However, the Mysteries are not absolutely certain and would be “outweighed by...objections...if they were convincing and altogether conclusive” (PD §5/H 76). Thus, it is incumbent on believers “to uphold [their beliefs] against objections” (PD §5/H 76), i.e. to engage with objections in ways that show they are not both absolutely necessary and inconsistent with revealed beliefs.

C8.P37 With these distinctions in place, Leibniz devotes PD §§6–23 to apparent tensions between faith and reason in medieval theology. The take-home message is twofold. First, all theologians “fanatics alone excepted” (PD §22/H 87) accept Leibniz’s claim that “an article of faith must not imply a contradiction or contravene proofs... where the opposite of the conclusion can be reduced... to contradiction” (PD §22/H 87); second, various challenges can be resolved if one employs the traditional distinction between truths that are “against reason” and those which can be shown to be “above reason” (PD §23/H 88).

C8.P38 The remainder of PD is supposed to show that Bayle is confused when he claims faith and reason conflict (§§24–87). Leibniz is concerned that Bayle wants to uphold truths of faith, which “can prove to be subject to insoluble objections” (PD §24/H 88). He responds by equating Bayle’s notion of an insoluble objection with “an argument whose conclusion contradicts [a] thesis” (PD §24/H 88–9) and insisting that Bayle can only maintain there are such objections to faith on pain of violating PC, since “we must say that the falsity of this thesis is demonstrated” (PD § 25/H 89). But Leibniz offers a more charitable reading based on Bayle’s

Reply to M. Clerc, suggesting he was thinking of objections that are insoluble “only in respect of our present knowledge” (PD §27/H 90).

- C8.P39 Leibniz also considers Bayle’s reliance on particular doctrines. The arguments are said to be of two kinds: those that concern our inability to defend the Mysteries²³ and those that are supposed to present insoluble difficulties for those who would maintain that a just God exists, such as the doctrine of predestination.²⁴
- C8.P40 With the Mysteries, Leibniz insists that Bayle has confused the needs to comprehend and understand. He concedes that the Mysteries are incomprehensible, but does not accept that commitment to them requires pitching faith against reason. Leibniz reminds us that “‘reason’ here is the linking together of the truths that we know by the natural light” (PD §63/H 109) then observes that, whilst the Mysteries “surpass our reason”, they do not contradict any truths that can be known in this way. We do not have a “reasonable explanation of how” the Mysteries fit with truths of reason. But, given their incomprehensibility, nor do we have evidence of “any non-conformity or any opposition” (PD §63/H 109).
- C8.P41 Leibniz’s main critique of Bayle’s challenges to divine justice is to suggest that Bayle draws too close a parallel between the actions of God and humans. Bayle accepts that the existence of a just God can be demonstrated. But he also thinks that reason shows God is responsible for the existence of evil in various ways, and hence unjust. Leibniz accepts that “probability would be against a man who happened to be in circumstances comparable in our eyes” (PD §32/H 92–3). But the case of God is different. Since Bayle has only offered probable reasons against divine justice and the existence of a just God is demonstrable, “we can judge by the event (or a posteriori) that the permission [of evil] was indispensable although it may not be possible for us to show it (a priori) through the detailed reasons that God can have had” (PD §35/H 94).

C8.S4

8.4 The Essays

- C8.P42 The heart of the *Theodicy* comprises three parts totalling around 110,000 words. Part 1 (c.25,000 words) is an account of Leibniz’s response to the threats to true piety and contains the central arguments of the book. Parts 2 and 3 (c.42,000 words each) mainly comprise a return to the same themes via explicit dialogue with Bayle. Due to space constraints, and the fact that most of Leibniz’s views are laid out there, I will therefore restrict myself largely to Part 1.²⁵

²³ See PD §71–87/H 113–21.

²⁴ See PD §24/H 88–9.

²⁵ Among the features of the *Theodicy* I cannot discuss, perhaps most notable is the dialogue with which the book ends, which is presented as a continuation of Lorenzo Valla’s (c.1407–57) *Dialogue on Free Will* (Valla 1948). See Cameron (2007) and Keum (forthcoming).

- C8.P43 Leibniz begins by noting that he will employ his account of faith and reason “to support and bring together what the natural light and the light of revelation teach us of God and of man in relation to evil” (Pt 1 §1/H 123). Insofar as claims about God and creation are taken to have independent justification, they may be maintained unless shown to be necessarily false in Leibniz’s sense. This places the burden of proof squarely on his opponents.
- C8.P44 Leibniz divides the threats to the conception of God he favours into “two classes” (Pt 1 §1/H 123): First, those that arise since “man’s freedom... appears incompatible with the divine nature” whilst freedom seems to be a necessary condition for being “judged guilty and punishable” by God or otherwise; second, those that turn on the fact that God “seems to... participate too much in the existence of evil”. Leibniz elaborates on the second of these by noting that God “co-operates in evil, both physical and moral” and “co-operates in each of [these] both morally and physically” (Pt 1 §1/H 123). Moral and physical evil are two of three kinds of evil that Leibniz recognizes: “Metaphysical evil consists in mere imperfection, physical evil in suffering, and moral evil in sin” (Pt 1 §21/H 136). God cooperates physically insofar as “all creatures and all their actions derive the reality they have from him” (Pt 1 §3/H 124), and God’s moral cooperation consists in the fact that “he acts very freely and does nothing without a complete knowledge of the thing and the consequences that it may have”.
- C8.P45 With all this in mind, Leibniz sets himself three tasks. The first is to establish that the world was created by a just God; the second is to show that God has produced the best of all possible worlds; and the third, which comprises the remainder of the book, is to show that the difficulties mentioned above do not contradict these claims.

C8.S5 8.4.1 The proof that God is the first reason of things

C8.P46 Immediately before he tries to establish that a just God exists, Leibniz observes:

C8.P47 Our end is to banish from men the false ideas that represent God to them as an absolute prince employing a despotic power, unfitted to be loved and unworthy of being loved. These notions are the more evil in relation to God since the essence of piety is not only to fear him but also to love him above all things. This cannot come about unless one knows the perfections capable of arousing the love which he deserves, and which makes the felicity of those that love him.

(Pt 1 §6/H 127)

C8.P48 If read in isolation, it might appear that the aim of the next section is simply to establish God’s existence. However, Leibniz characterizes it differently. It is an attempt to defend the existence of a single God who is primarily loveable (though

also fearsome at times) against those who have, or encourage, “false ideas” that represent God as despotic.

C8.P49 Leibniz’s dispute is not with atheists, but with those who belong to the “voluntarist” tradition following on from John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) and William of Ockham (c.1280–c.1349). Voluntarists are committed to God’s existence but, to Leibniz’s mind, incorrectly conceive the divine nature. As Leibniz represents the view, it emphasizes the absolute power of God over his wisdom and goodness. Such a God is one who determines what is good in an inscrutable way, rendering him fearsome but not loveable. Indeed, as Leibniz insists in his famous correspondence with Samuel Clarke, the activity of such a God activity violates the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) given its absolute spontaneity. Indeed, the “choice” of such a God’s would not be a reason for the existence of the world at all.²⁶

C8.P50 §7 is an exercise in the natural religion valorized in the preface. Leibniz describes it as “the proof of one unique God with his perfections, and through him of the origin of things” (Pt 1 §7/H 128), or that “God is the first reason of things” (Pt 1 §7/H 127). Four stages can be distinguished.

C8.P51 First, Leibniz uses the PSR to establish that there is a necessary, eternally existing substance that is “the reason for the existence of the world”, where the world is “the whole collection of contingent things” (Pt 1 §7/H 127). The claim that there are contingent things is based on the observation that it “is plain that time, space and matter, united and uniform in themselves and indifferent to everything, could have received entirely other motions and shapes, and in another order”. Implicit here is a commitment to the PSR with respect to the existence of the world as a whole rather than each of the contingent existents individually.

C8.P52 In the second step, Leibniz argues that “it is necessary that this cause be intelligent” (Pt 1 §7/H 127), i.e. have understanding and will. In other words, it must be a rational agent. Here the key premise, again based on the indifference of space, time and matter, is that there was “an infinity of other worlds... equally possible, and holding, so to say, equal claim to existence with [the actual world]”. Given this, as well as the requisite “power”, the cause must have “had regard for, or contact with, all these possible worlds” in order to “determine one of them”. Furthermore, this determining required “understanding” which related to the possibilities through “ideas of them” and an “act of the will which chooses”. It is also important for Leibniz that “Power relates to being, wisdom or understanding to truth, and will to good” (Pt 1 §7/H 127). Here Leibniz rejects two theses that he associates with voluntarism: first, that choice can occur where the agent is presented with alternatives that are indifferent with regard to goodness; second,

²⁶ See Lodge (2018).

that the goodness of God's choice is something that follows simply from the fact that it was God's choice.

C8.P53 The third step moves from the observation that the cause is related to infinite possibilities to the conclusion that it “must be infinite in all ways, and absolutely perfect in power, in wisdom and in goodness”. Fourth, and finally, Leibniz argues that “since all is connected”, there is “no need to admit more than one” (Pt 1 §7/H 128).

C8.S6 8.4.2 The best of all possible worlds thesis

C8.P54 Having “proved” that the world was produced by God through rational activity, Leibniz proceeds to argue that it is the best of all possible worlds:

C8.P55 Now this supreme wisdom, united to a goodness that is no less infinite, could not but have chosen the best. For since a lesser evil is a kind of good, so a lesser good is a kind of evil if it is an obstacle to a greater good; and there would be something to correct in the actions of God if it had been possible to do better.
(Pt 1 §8/H 128)

C8.P56 Here Leibniz simply draws out implications of his conception of God and the status of the world as contingent. God has infinite power, is perfectly aware of all the possibilities, and has a perfectly good will, so God will produce the best of all the possible worlds.

C8.P57 Given the structure of his arguments, Leibniz accepts that a successful challenge to the best of all possible worlds thesis would threaten his favoured conception of God. Thus he considers various objections. Leibniz begins by considering the suggestion that there might not have been a single best possible world. In response he observes that had there not been some worlds that were better than others, God would have either created all worlds or none. Thus, given that God has created, the question is whether there were many equally good possible (and hence actual) worlds. Leibniz insists that the idea that “several worlds could have existed” represents a confusion, since by ‘world’ he means “the whole collection of all existent things” (Pt 1 §8/H 128).

C8.P58 Next Leibniz moves to the most obvious rejoinder.

C8.P59 Some adversary . . . will perhaps reply to the conclusion with a counter-argument, saying that the world could have been without sin and without sufferings.
(Pt 1 §9/H 128)

C8.P60 When presented with the best of all possible worlds thesis, it is natural to think God could have produced a better world, namely one without sin and sufferings.

Leibniz's response is simple: "but I deny that then it would have been better" (Pt 1 §9/H 128). He elaborates:

- C8.P61 God has ordered all things beforehand once for all, having foreseen prayers, good and bad actions, and all the rest; and each thing has contributed ideally, before its existence, to the resolution that has been made on the existence of all things; so that nothing can be changed in the universe (any more than in a number) save its essence or, if you will, save its numerical individuality. Thus, if the least evil that comes to pass in the world were missing in it, it would no longer be this world, which, with everything counted and nothing omitted, was found the best by the creator who chose it. (Pt 1 §9/H 128–9)
- C8.P62 Leibniz's God is a perfect rational being who chose between alternate possibilities on the basis of their relative goodness. It follows that every feature of the actual world was conceived by God when he chose it. Thus, there is no way that *this* world could have been better. If God had created differently he would have had to create a numerically distinct possible world, and we already know that this world was the best of all the possible worlds available.
- C8.P63 Despite taking this hard line, Leibniz is sensitive to the pull of the objection and attempts to blunt its force further. He accepts we can "imagine possible worlds without sin and without misfortune" (Pt 1 §10/H 129). But we must remember that "creation [and] the choice of the order of the universe... depends upon... distinct knowledge of an infinity of things at once" (PD §23/H 88). This leaves the grounds for God's choice incomprehensible or "above reason". As with other Mysteries discussed in PD, we need not be able to provide a full explanation in order to accept that God chose the best world.
- C8.P64 But Leibniz does not rest here. He offers a number of considerations that are supposed to enable us to see we are inappropriately tempted to think full comprehension would count against the best possible world thesis. Two are theodicies as the term is now understood, namely explanations of why the created world contains the evil that it does. First, Leibniz suggests that there is causal dependency between evil and goodness in at least some cases, offering the examples of "a fortunate mistake which brings about the winning of a great battle" (Pt 1 §10/H 129). The second appeals to another relation between good and evil, namely that the former is "render[ed]... more sensible, that is to say, greater" (Pt 1 §12/H 130) by the latter. Whilst we are not given examples, Leibniz's offers analogies: "shadows enhance colours; and even a dissonance in the right place gives relief to harmony".
- C8.P65 The remaining considerations speak to the intuition that the evils we experience could not be part of the best possible world. The first two are aimed at those for whom the sheer amount of evil seems too great. Here Leibniz observes that, whilst it may seem that evils are "great in number in comparison with the good" (Pt 1 §13/H 130), this is because "evils are doubled by being given an attention

that ought to be diverted from them” (Pt 1 §15/H 131). Furthermore, he recommends a remedy: “attention...ought to be turned towards the good which prevails by far” (Pt 1 §15/H 131). The second consideration is to offer evidence that the appearance that evil outweighs good is misleading. Leibniz claims that “at the point of death” few would not be “content to take up life again, on condition of passing through the same amount of good and evil, provided always that it were not the same kind” (Pt 1 §13/H 130).

C8.P66 Next Leibniz turns to the worry that there are sinful people whose lives include a preponderance of happiness. Leibniz answers that “religion and reason itself teach us” that “the remedy is all prepared in the other life” (Pt 1 §17/H 132). However, this proves a double-edged sword. In relying on doctrines of post mortem existence, Leibniz opens himself to the concern that the remedy for many is eternal damnation. But, even “holding...to the established doctrine that the number of men damned eternally will be incomparably greater than that of the saved”, he insists “the evil could not but seem to be almost as nothing in comparison with the good, when one contemplates the true greatness of the city of God” (Pt 1 §19/H 134).²⁷ Initially Leibniz suggests that, given the infinity of the universe, it is possible there are many other rational creatures who must be taken into account, and that few of these additional beings are damned.²⁸ However, he ultimately relies on our general lack of comprehension, observing: “since the proportion of that part of the universe which we know is almost lost in nothingness compared with that which is unknown...it may be that all evils are almost nothingness in comparison with the good things which are in the universe” (Pt 1 §19/H 135).

C8.P67 There is clearly much that could be contested in connection with these responses. Indeed, as we shall see, Leibniz discusses eternal damnation at greater length later in the book. However, it should be remembered that any appraisal of Leibniz’s case needs to recognize he is not concerned to address atheists in the *Theodicy*, but rather those who are tempted to conceive of God in ways that render him unloveable.

C8.S7 8.4.3 Problems concerning human freedom

C8.P68 With the best of all possible worlds thesis upheld, Leibniz turns to threats to true piety from considerations of human freedom. As we consider these threats and

²⁷ Leibniz also presents the views of several defenders of the doctrine of “universal salvation”. Rather than condemning the view, he suggests we need not deviate from revealed doctrine to preserve divine justice. The doctrine of universal salvation was attributed to Leibniz later in the 18th c. by Johann August Eberhard (1739–1809). See Lodge (2017).

²⁸ See Pt 1 §19/H 134–5.

later ones, we need to keep in mind that Leibniz intends to provide grounds for upholding his conception of God according to the criteria presented in PD.

C8.P69 In the preface Leibniz suggests that difficulties arise from considering human freedom are due to the fact that many people believe “the future... is necessary” (GP VI 30/H 54) and that this “would destroy freedom of the will” (GP VI 33/H 57). He elaborates in Part 1. Given necessity, “it appears that man is forced to do the good and evil that he does, and in consequence that he deserves therefore neither recompense nor chastisement” (Pt 1 §2/H 124), and the ultimate consequence is that “the morality of actions [is] destroyed and all justice, divine and human, shaken”. Leibniz worries that those believing everything is necessary might slip into moral nihilism and find it hard to regard the universe as the creation of a just and loveable God. In response, he grants the incompatibility of freedom and necessity and tries to counter three common reasons for thinking the course of nature is necessary: First, the “dogma of our philosophers... that the truth of contingent futurities is determined”; second, “the foreknowledge of God”; and third, God’s “providence and his preordination” given that “all is perfectly connected in the order of things, since nothing can happen unless there is a cause so disposed as to produce the effect” (Pt 1 §2/H 123-4). The first can be traced back to the problem of “logical fatalism” in chapter 9 of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*, and the second and third were commonplaces in philosophical theology after the discussion in Book V of Boethius’s (c.480–524 CE) *Consolation of Philosophy*.

C8.P70 Leibniz dismisses logical fatalism with a standard response: “It was true already a hundred years ago that I should write today” (Pt 1 §36/H 143). However, this “comes from the very nature of truth” (Pt 1 §37/H 144), which is independent of the modal status of the action and “cannot injure freedom” by imposing necessity. The second worry is that God’s omniscience entails foreknowledge, and that “what is foreseen cannot fail to exist”. Leibniz is happy to concede the point, but not that what God foresees is necessary. Again following tradition, he accepts that “supposing God foresees it, it is necessary that it happens”. But this is “hypothetical necessity” (Pt 1 §37/H 144), and consistent with what comes to pass being contingent.

C8.P71 Next Leibniz turns to the suggestion that foreknowledge requires a “foundation in the nature of things... making the truth predeterminate” (Pt 1 §38/H 144), where this foundation includes God’s choice. His response is to bite the bullet by introducing his commitment to the PSR and insisting that it “holds for all events” (Pt 1 §44/H 147). Thus there is a “prevailing reason which prompts the will to its choice” (Pt 1 §45/H 148) even in God’s case. However, as we have seen, Leibniz does not equate being determined with being necessary, provided the determining ground is infinitely complex. Leibniz is committed to what is now called “compatibilism”, since he holds that freedom

- C8.P72 consist[s] in intelligence, which involves a distinct knowledge of the object of deliberation, in spontaneity, whereby we determine ourselves, and in contingency, that is to say, in the exclusion of logical or metaphysical necessity.
(Pt 1 §288/H 303)
- C8.P73 In this Leibniz is no different to other “theological determinists”. Indeed, he claims that compatibilism is “required in the theological schools” (Pt 1 §288/H 303), and is “the opinion of... Plato, of Aristotle, of St. Augustine” (Pt 1 §45/H 148).
- C8.P74 However, Leibniz knows that compatibilism is contentious. Thus he argues explicitly against the view that “our freedom consists in an indetermination or an indifference of equilibrium” (Pt 1 § 35/H 143), where he understands this to comprise situations in which “all is completely equal on both sides, without any inclination towards one” (Pt 1 §46/H 148–9). Leibniz rejects two considerations used to support the view.
- C8.P75 First he turns to the claim that it is evidenced by “an intense inward sensation” (Pt 1 §50/H 150), a view he ascribes to Descartes. Leibniz suggests such experience is irrelevant by appeal to our limited epistemic capacities, observing: “an infinity of great and small movements, internal and external, cooperate with us, most of which we are unaware of” (Pt 1 §46/H 149).
- C8.P76 Second he considers “Buridan’s Ass”, which had been presented as a paradoxical consequence of compatibilism. In this famous case, it is claimed that, given compatibilism, an ass would starve if placed “between two meadows, inclined equally towards both of them” (Pt 1 §49/H 150). Whilst acknowledging such a situation would lead to death, Leibniz suggests that (absent miraculous intervention) it could not arise. The universe never admits a perfectly symmetrical relationship between the choices presented and the chooser, since there are “always many things in the ass and outside the ass, although they be not apparent to us, which determine it to go on one side rather than the other” (Pt 1 §49/H 150).
- C8.P77 Leibniz also offers a reason against the indifferentist view, claiming that it would lead to choice being “pure chance, without determining reason” (Pt 3 §303/H 310). In other words, it would violate the PSR as Leibniz conceives it and, as such, “is a chimera which never occurs in nature”. Later Leibniz makes the point more starkly: “To claim that a determination comes from a complete indifference absolutely indeterminate is to claim that it comes naturally from nothing” (Pt 3 §320/H 319). Of course, this argument is at best as strong as Leibniz’s case for the PSR.²⁹
- C8.P78 Finally, Leibniz returns to a difficulty highlighted in the preface, the “lazy sophism” (GP VI 30/H 54). Here the worry is that determinism alone leads to “a decision to do nothing” because people think: “if what I ask is to happen it will

²⁹ See Lodge (2018) for this case.

happen even though I should do nothing; and if it is not to happen it will never happen, no matter what trouble I take to achieve it” (Pt 1 § 55/H 153). And it is a threat to true piety due to people “employ[ing] the lazy reason...to relieve [themselves] of the need to reason properly” (GP VI 31/H 55), or “to excuse [their] vices and libertinism” (GP VI 32/H 56); or, worse still, due to “bright young men” who go around saying “that it is useless to preach virtue, to censure vice, to create hopes of reward and fears of punishment” on the grounds that “what is written is written, and that our behaviour can change nothing therein”.

C8.P79 Leibniz responds that, since willing belongs to the causal order determining one’s future, the decision to do nothing will “perhaps will bring it about that you obtain nothing of what you hope for, and that you will fall into those misfortunes which you would have avoided by acting with care” (Pt 1 §55/H 153). Indeed, the “connexion of causes with effects...far from causing an unendurable fatality, provides rather a means of removing it”. It provides no excuse for people to behave as noted.

C8.P80 At this point Leibniz notes that the recent theological dispute “*De Termino Paenitentiae Peremptorio*” had opened up space for a new sophism, given that some in the debate held that “there will be a time whereafter [some] will no more approach the ways of salvation” (Pt 1 §57/H 154).³⁰ Leibniz accepts that, according to this doctrine, there will be a point beyond which the damned could contribute nothing to the causal order to alter their fate, thus circumventing his previous response. However, he observes that “we never have certain marks for recognizing this term, and we never have the right to hold that a man is utterly abandoned”. Thus, it “would be rash to pass judgement” and it is a case where our “ignorance is useful”, allowing us “the right to hope” (Pt 1 §57/H 154) and to resist the sophistical tendency to think that the determinate nature of things legitimizes behaviour of the kind Leibniz condemns.

C8.P81 Leibniz finishes his discussion of freedom-related problems on a positive note. He begins with a prescription:

C8.P82 The whole future is determined, without doubt: but since we know not what it is, nor what is foreseen or resolved, we must do our duty, according to the reason that God has given us and according to the rules that he has prescribed for us (Pt 1 § 58/H 154). This is then qualified:

C8.P83 [W]e must always presume that God is prompted towards [the good we know], until the event shows us that he had stronger reasons, although perhaps unknown to us, which have made him subordinate this good that we sought to some other greater good of his own designing, which he has not failed or will not fail to bring about. (Pt 1 §58/H 155)

³⁰ The debate raged in Germany during 1701–2, with over 100 pieces devoted to the topic. See Leibniz (1969: 470 n. 180).

C8.P84 However good our deliberation, there will be a point at which our intentions are frustrated by the course of events. But, given a commitment to the best of all possible worlds thesis, this may—indeed, should—be regarded as resulting from our failure to appreciate the reasons why our intentions are frustrated rather than as something that impugns God or creation. Far from taking the attitude of the lazy sophist:

C8.P85 thereafter we must have a quiet mind, and leave to God himself the care for the outcome. For he will never fail to do that which will be the best not only in general, but also in particular for those who have true confidence in him, that is to say, a confidence which does not differ at all from a true piety, a lively faith and an ardent charity, by virtue of which we will leave out, as far as we can, nothing appertaining to our duty and his service. (Pt 1 §58/H 154–5)

C8.P86 According to Leibniz, we should trust that the *actual* outcome is for the best even if it doesn't work out as we wanted. Moreover, though it is not made clear why, we should believe that those who have true piety will be taken particular care of. But this is not a prescription for quietism. It pertains to what has happened, and is designed to stop us dwelling on what might have been. There will be future decisions, which will again require that we try to discern what God requires of us, and these may align better with God's intent. The best of all possible worlds is a world which has an indefinitely long temporal extent, and its goodness is a function of its entire history.

C8.S8 8.4.4 Problems concerning God's participation in the existence of evil

C8.P87 The second group of difficulties concern the fact God “seems to . . . participate too much in the existence of evil” (Pt 1 §1/H 123). Leibniz worries that “this conduct appears contrary to the goodness, the holiness and the justice of God”, and might again undermine the belief that God is deserving of love. Leibniz divides the way God participates into two categories, “morally and physically”.

C8.P88 Leibniz devotes considerable effort to heading off these difficulties. However, he begins by considering the opinion of “ancients” who “attributed the cause of evil to matter, which they believed uncreated and independent of God” (Pt 1 §20/H 135). Although such a position relieves God of culpability, for Leibniz, and the vast majority of his readers, it is inadmissible. He asks rhetorically: “but we, who derive all being from God, where shall we find the source of evil?” However Leibniz's answer is not so far removed from the view he rejects, since he holds “it must be sought in the ideal nature of the creature, in so far as this nature is contained in the eternal verities which are in the understanding of God,

independently of his will” (Pt 1 §20/H 135).³¹ The limited essences of all possible creatures are present to God in a way that allows free choice and actualization of the best subset. Thus, it can be said that “there is an original imperfection in the creature”, which is equated with metaphysical evil and from which other evil arises in virtue of its mode of being in “the region of the eternal truths” (Pt 1 §20/H 135). But actual evil is said to have “no efficient cause”, given that its cause “consists in privation”, i.e. is not a being. Leibniz adds: “That is why the Scholastics are accustomed to call the cause of evil ‘deficient’” (Pt 1 §20/H 136).³²

C8.P89 Although Leibniz’s God is not the efficient cause of evil, this is cold comfort. The objections faced are not concerned with the source of evil in this sense. The problem is that divine activity supplies the activity of the creatures with its reality, and that God deliberately created the things whose essences include the imperfection from which suffering and sin follow. However, Leibniz does rise to these challenges.

C8.P90 Leibniz refers to the divine activity giving rise to the first worry as a “physical co-operation [*concoors*]”, and sometimes calls God a “physical cause” (Pt 1 §3/H 124). There is no implication here that God himself is physical. Rather the point is that problems arise from the way in which God is actively involved in changes occurring in nature. As Leibniz puts it:

C8.P91 It is objected that all the reality and what is called the substance of the act, in sin itself, is a production of God, since all creatures and all their actions derive the reality they have from him. Whence one could infer... that he is the physical cause of sin. (Pt 1 §3/H 124)

C8.P92 And this leads to the same attitudes that emerged among those who denied freedom to humans. People “wish to exculpate themselves wholly or in part at the expense of God” (Pt 1 §3/H 124).

C8.P93 In considering Leibniz’s response, we must remember that he does not think that God creates a universe, the nature of which is causally sufficient for the remainder of its history. His understanding of God’s causal relation to creation is a version of the view adopted by the majority of his interlocutors, which he follows the tradition in calling “conservation”. It is characterised most clearly in the account of physical participation from Part 3:

C8.P94 What can be said for certain on the present subject is that the creature depends continually upon divine operation, and that it depends upon that no less after the time of its beginning than when it begins. This dependence implies that it would not continue to exist if God did not continue to act. (Pt 3 §385/H 355)

³¹ See Antognazza (2014).

³² For more on the notion of a deficient cause, see Schmaltz (2014: 150–52).

- C8.P95 Here Leibniz insists the “dependence attaches not only to the substance but also to the action” (Pt 1 §27/H 139). He calls this operation “production, or even creation”, given that “the dependence [is] as great afterwards as at the beginning” (Pt 3 §385/H 356), and suggests that the relation is best captured by using what he presents as a traditional expression, “continued creation” (Pt 3 §386/H 356). Leibniz draws on this understanding of continued creation in more depth to deflect the worry that God is the physical cause of evil. First, however, he distinguishes it from two accounts of conservation that he rejects, “mere conservatism” and “occasionalism”.³³
- C8.P96 Leibniz attributes the “mere conservationist” view to Durandus of Saint-Pourain (c.1275–1332) and Petrus Aureolus (c.1280–1322), and closer to his own time Nicolas Taurel (1547–1606), Louis Bereur de Dole (d. 1636), and François Bernier (1625–88).³⁴ As he characterizes the account, “the [physical] co-operation of God with the creature... is only general and mediate... God creates substances and gives them the force they need; and... thereafter he leaves them to themselves, and only conserves them, without aiding them in their actions” (Pt 1 §27/H 139).
- C8.P97 Leibniz suggests that this view “has been refuted by most Scholastic theologians” (Pt 1 §27/H 139) and rehearses two difficulties. First, it leads to a situation where “conservation would consist only in the act of preventing and warding off some foreign cause which could destroy that which one wishes to conserve” rather than one in which the conserver “maintain[s]” that which is conserved; and second, the account leaves God’s conserving activity “general or indeterminate”, since it operates in the same way with regard to all creatures. Here, Leibniz turns to a concern found throughout his writings, namely that “[t]hese generalities are abstractions not to be found in the truth of individual things”. If God is to conserve “a man standing”, then this must be determinately directed toward that particular event “different from the conservation of a man seated” (Pt 1 §27/H 139). Occasionalism is the view of those “who go so far as to say that God is the only agent” (Pt 1 §32/H 142), including Bayle.³⁵ Leibniz has a number of criticisms of occasionalism that appear in other writings.³⁶ However, his strategy here is to provide an alternative interpretation of continued creation. In doing this, he grants the assumption made by occasionalists, who “resolve time into moments”, where the latter are “constituent parts” of extended periods of time (Pt 3 §384/H 355). This conflicts with his favoured conception of time on which “moments... as mere modalities of the continuum, that is to say, as extremities of the parts that can be assigned to it”. But we are told “this is not the place for entering into that

³³ The expression “mere conservatism” is due to Freddoso (1994: 133–4).

³⁴ See Pt 3 §381/H 353.

³⁵ See *ibid.*

³⁶ For Leibniz’s other criticisms, see Rutherford (1993) and Lodge (2015).

labyrinth”, and Leibniz offers an explanation of creaturely causation that is consistent with the view that moments are parts.³⁷

C8.P98 Leibniz’s account of continued creation emerges from an attempt to neutralize two arguments for occasionalism. Both trade on the assumption that cooperation requires creatures capable of temporally extended activity. The first argument is supposed to undermine the temporal extension of beings other than God. Leibniz identifies “The Cartesians” as its proponents, though he quotes from Bayle, who in turn presents it as an argument from *Reflexion on the Picture of Socinianism*.³⁸ The central claim is as follows:

C8.P99 [T]he moments of time having no necessary connexion with one another, it does not follow that because I am at this moment I shall live on at the moment which follows, if the same cause which gives me being for this moment does not also give it to me for the instant following.

(RQP III §141: 771; quoted by Leibniz at Pt 3 §383/H 354)

C8.P100 Leibniz accepts that there are no such necessary connections. But the relevant necessity here is absolute necessity. As we have seen, on Leibniz’s view, lack of absolute necessity does not preclude determinism. Thus, the choice determining God’s activity at one moment in time may also determine God to act in a given way at the next moment, and allow a fully determinate relationship between the objects of choice over time. Furthermore, Leibniz makes an additional distinction “between the essential and the natural” (Pt 3 §383/H 354), according to which:

C8.P101 the same activity endures naturally unless some new cause prevents it or changes it, because the reason which makes it cease at this instant, if it is not new, would have already made it cease sooner. (Pt 3 §383/H 354–5)

C8.P102 Given the PSR, there must be a reason for any change. Thus, if God’s continuing creation leads to the cessation of creaturely activity, there must be something *new* to account for this. For, were that feature already in place, then the activity would have already ceased. Whilst there are situations in which such causes arise—otherwise there would be no change at all—the simple fact that God’s activity is required to sustain creation does not prevent the created world from having naturally enduring features or individuals. Thus Leibniz can claim that the continued existence of a creature “follows naturally, nevertheless, that is to say, of itself, *per se*, if nothing prevents it” (Pt 3 §383/H 354–5).

³⁷ For a helpful introduction to Leibniz’s conception of time, see Arthur (2014: 142–65). For “The Labyrinth of the Continuum”, see the introduction to LOC.

³⁸ Leibniz speculates that Bayle may be the author of the book (see Pt 3 §383/H 354), but it is generally attributed to Isaac Jacquelot (1647–1708) (see Leibniz 1969: 490 n. 508).

- C8.P103 The second argument for occasionalism comes again from Bayle's rendition of *Reflexion on the Picture of Socinianism*, which contains the observation "when God creates me or conserves me at this instant . . . he creates me and conserves me as such, and as being all that I am in this instant, with all my attendant circumstances" (RQP III §141: 771; quoted by Leibniz at Pt 3 §386/H 356). This is taken to undermine creaturely agency on the grounds that it would require, *per impossibile*, "another instant for acting" given that "before acting one must exist".
- C8.P104 Leibniz responds by granting that "the creature is produced anew at each instant . . . [and] also that the instant excludes all priority of time, being indivisible" (Pt 3 §388/H 357). However, he suggests that this "does not exclude priority of nature", i.e. the asymmetric dependence of one thing on another, and that this is all that is needed to preserve that claim that creatures are active. Furthermore, he suggests that appeal to priority of nature is "common in philosophy" (Pt 3 §389/H 358).
- C8.P105 How does this help? According to Leibniz, at each instant, "The production, or action whereby God produces, is anterior by nature to the existence of the creature that is produced" and "the creature taken in itself, with its nature and its necessary properties, is anterior to its accidental affections and to its actions" (Pt 3 §388/H 357–8). There is a sense in which the production of a creature and its existence can be regarded as distinct; and insofar as the creature is taken to be capable of enduring, we can draw a further distinction between the existence of what is essential to it and what is accidental.
- C8.P106 Leibniz implies that many readers would have been content with his reliance on this distinction. But he also adverts to a recurrent theme in his writings: "It is well to beware, moreover, lest in confusing substances with accidents, in depriving created substances of action, one fall into Spinozism" (Pt 3 §393/H 359), holding that "God is the only substance, and that creatures are only accidents or modifications" (Pt 3 §392/H 359–60). It may be that Leibniz thinks this "*reductio ad Spinozam*" will be enough to move some people. But he also observes: "Hitherto it has been believed that the substance remains, and that the accidents change" and claims that "the arguments I remember having read do not prove the contrary" (Pt 3 §392/H 359–60). Thus, in a way that tracks his discussion of faith and reason, we see an appeal to the authority of entrenched modes of thinking, absent compelling reasons for change.
- C8.P107 One final consideration is important for Leibniz's response to the challenge that God physically cooperates in sin. Bayle argues that, were accidents distinct from that to which they belong, creatures "would possess a power of creation and annihilation" (RQP III §141: 779; quoted by Leibniz at Pt 3 §394/H 361). Leibniz's responds by noting that "the production of modifications has never been called 'creation', and it is an abuse of terms to scare the world thus" (Pt 3 §394/H 361). But, in fleshing out the way in which accidents are produced by creatures, he adds: "God produces substances from nothing, and substances produce accidents by the changes of their limits", and offers examples such as piece of wax moulded into different shapes over time.

- C8.P108 The claim that accidents are limitations enables Leibniz to give an account of the momentary existence of creatures that involves more than their reproduction, and this creates room for distinct cooperative contributions. Furthermore, he has an account of what it is for creatures and their accidents to endure, on the assumption that time is a series of independently existing moments. This is employed as he moves to augment his critique of the arguments for occasionalism with a model of how God cooperates in evil without being its proximate cause.
- C8.P109 Leibniz offers an analogy with “the natural inertia of bodies” (Pt 1 §30/H 140). Imagine a situation where “the current of one and the same river carried along with it various boats, which differ among themselves only in the cargo, some being laden with wood, others with stone, and some more, the others less”. Assuming no other cause, “the boats most heavily laden will go more slowly than the others” and the retardation of the boats will be due to the fact that “matter is originally is inclined to slowness or privation of speed” which “moderate[s] by its receptivity the effect of the impression when it must receive it”. Where “more matter is moved by the same force of current when the boat is more laden, it is necessary for it to go more slowly” (Pt 1 §30/H 140).
- C8.P110 Leibniz asks us to “compare the force which the current exercises on boats” with “the action of God”, “the inertia of matter with the natural imperfection of creatures”, and “the slowness of the laden boat” with “the defects to be found in the qualities and the action of the creature” (Pt 1 §30/H 141). Following the analogy through “[as] the current is the cause of the boat’s movement... God is the cause of the perfection in the nature and actions of the creature”, and as the degree of movement of the boat is due to the causal contribution of its weight, so “the limitation of the receptivity of the creature is the cause of the defects there are in its action” (Pt 1 §30/H 141).
- C8.P111 Crucial to the analogy is the thought that the speed of the boats is less than that of the river due to the cooperation of the current and the inertia of the matter. Similarly, the perfection of the activity of creatures is less than that of God due to the cooperation of God’s agency and the essentially imperfect nature of the creature. In cases where the activity is that of a rational agent, this allows us to understand how sinful activity may come about. It is a consequence of the limited capacities that determine the nature and outcome of decision making. God is “no more the cause of sin than the river’s current is the cause of the retardation of the boat”, since he “is the cause of the material element of evil which lies in the positive, and not of the formal element, which lies in privation” (Pt 1 §30/H 141).³⁹

³⁹ The analogy has been the cause of consternation and disagreement among Leibniz commentators who have sought an account of cooperation on which creatures are the efficient causes of sin (see Whipple 2010b). However, it is important to remember two points in the context of the *Theodicy*: firstly, Leibniz only aims to provide a bulwark against the arguments that God is the physical cause of sin which he presents; and, secondly, as noted above, the account does not draw on the full resources of his own metaphysics, given that it is predicated on a conception of time that he does not sanction.

- C8.P112 The worry about God’s moral participation is that, whatever Leibniz may have said about physical cooperation, God’s free decision to produce the best of all possible worlds remains the efficient cause of the existence of all that is evil. Leibniz attempts to defuse this worry by claiming that “God has been determined to permit evil” but that he “neither does the evil nor wills it” (Pt 1 §§21–2/H 136). Much of the work here is done by Leibniz’s explanation of “permission”. But he notes that “before that one must explain the nature of will, which has degrees” (Pt 1 §22/H 136).
- C8.P113 The will has not yet figured in our discussion of Leibniz’s views on freedom. He explains it as follows: “in the general sense, one may say that the will consists in the inclination to do something in proportion to the good it contains” (Pt 1 §22/H 136). But this presupposes the inclination is a rational one—i.e. toward something that is consciously represented *as something*. Or, as Leibniz puts it, that “There is always a prevailing reason which inclines the will to its choice” (Pt 1 §45/H 148).
- C8.P114 But the notion of permission depends on yet another distinction, between the “antecedent” and “consequent” will, which Leibniz claims accords with the views of others such as St Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.⁴⁰ Leibniz insists that choice requires alternate possibilities, and the distinction is drawn with reference to these. The “antecedent will” is the will “when it is detached, and considers each good separately as good” (Pt 1 §22/H 136); the “consequent will” or “total will” (Pt 1 §22/H 137) is that which “results from the conflict of all the antecedent wills”. By way of analogy, “in mechanics compound movement results from all the tendencies that concur in one and the same moving body, and satisfies each one equally, in so far as it is possible to do all at one time”. Thus the antecedent will is not sufficient for an effect: “Success entire and infallible belongs only to the consequent will... It is this which is complete; and in regard to it this rule obtains, that one never fails to do what one wills, when one has the power” (Pt 1 §22/H 137).
- C8.P115 In light of this, Leibniz claims, “it may be said that God tends to all good, as good... by an antecedent will” (Pt 1 §22/H 136), and there is a sense in which God wills all non-actual things whose creation would have been good. But given that, “in relation to God... nothing can be opposed to ‘the rule of the best’” (Pt 1 §25/H 138), only the objects of the antecedent will which are also the objects of God’s consequent will—i.e. those which are found in the best possible world—will be actualized. And, crucially, the actualization of this subset of possibles may bring something into existence that was not willed antecedently either as an end or as a means to ends pursued by the consequent will. Such an eventuality is “only a *conditio sine qua non*”, and as such “it is not the object of a direct will” (Pt 2 §158/H 222).

⁴⁰ See GP VI 382/H 383.

C8.P116 Imagine that I may either feed a child healthy food or force them to exercise at a given time on a given day, where the exercise will involve some pain. Whilst both are readily conceived as good and hence things that I might will antecedently, only one is possible. On the assumption that I am required to choose the better course of action and that the exercise is a better than eating the healthy food, it seems acceptable to say that my action results from willing exercise, but not willing suffering. Analogously, God may be said to permit, but not will, a given evil insofar as it is something without which a good that belongs to the best possible world that is the object of God's consequent will would not have come about. It must be remembered, however, that God's nature is playing an essential part in Leibniz's appeal to permission. In PD he notes that we should not allow human action that leads to evil to be excused in the same way.⁴¹ It *would* be legitimate to assume evil intent were a parent to deliberately put their child in harm's way, or in a position where they would do something immoral, were there no compelling evidence that it was thought to lead to a greater good. Given this apparatus, one might expect Leibniz to say that all evil is merely permitted by God. However, his view is that "God does not will moral evil at all, and he does not will physical evil or suffering absolutely" (Pt 1 §23/H 137). However, in certain circumstances, it is morally acceptable for God to will physical evil. Indeed, "God wills it often as a penalty owing to guilt, and often also as a means to an end, that is to say, to prevent greater evils or to obtain greater goods". And here Leibniz returns to the kinds of examples invoked when defending the best of all possible worlds thesis at the beginning of Part 1. Thus, he suggests, "The punishment serves also for amendment and example and evil often serves to make us savour good the more; and sometimes it contributes to a greater perfection in those who suffers it, as the seed that one sows is subject to a kind of corruption in order to germinate" (Pt 1 §23/H 137). With this in mind, we move to the final set of concerns that Leibniz considers.

C8.S9 8.4.5 Problems concerning grace, election, and reprobation

C8.P117 Leibniz finishes Part 1 with a lengthy discussion of "the election or the reprobation of men with the dispensation or use of divine grace in connexion with these acts of the mercy or the justice of God" (Pt 1 §76/H 163), and returns to them in sections 264–86 of Part 3. Unlike the previous difficulties, which "have been almost all common to natural and revealed theology", these are presented solely as "a matter of revelation". I have argued elsewhere that it is an open question whether Leibniz himself believed the "revelations" that are relevant for the

⁴¹ See PD §32/H 93.

discussion.⁴² Nonetheless, in the *Theodicy* he aims to show that apparently harsh doctrines that would have been embraced by some of his Protestant readers concerning post-mortem punishment and reward are consistent with the love of God that constitutes true piety. That said, we have seen that Leibniz does not suggest that God should not be feared at all. And his response to the worries about eternal damnation leave open the possibility that some, including the reader, will be damned eternally.

C8.P118 A canonical statement of the relevant doctrines is Article 2 of the *Augsburg Confession*:

C8.P119 It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin... Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit. (Tappert 1959: 29)

C8.P120 Humans are born sinful and can be redeemed and saved from eternal damnation only through the sacrament of baptism and the workings of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, neither of these follows from human nature, but requires the freely granted and undeserved grace of God.

C8.P121 Leibniz reveals little about how he understands original sin or damnation. Speaking of original sin in Part 2, he says of the Fall: “we must do God justice so far as to believe that it comprised something other than what painters represent us” (Pt 2 §112/H 184), adding that, whatever did transpire, “the forbidden action by itself entailed these evil results in virtue of a natural effect”. And in Part 1 he observes that the soul is “corrupted physically or on the animal side by the sin of Adam” (Pt 1 §91/H 173) and that it is “actually ready to commit sin as soon as the man is ready to exercise reason” (Pt 1 §92/H 173). Thus Leibniz maintains that, because of our human ancestry, rational activity is always liable to produce sin prior to redemption, due to the fact that reason must be executed through a body that has irrational appetites.

C8.P122 Leibniz describes damnation as “the greatest physical evil” (Pt 3 §266/H 290). But he says nothing about how to conceive it beyond observing: “the theologians usually agree that... the damned hate God and blaspheme him; and such a state cannot but be followed by continuation of misery” (Pt 3 §271/H 294). However, this account chimes with the slightly richer characterization in “*Confessio Philosophi*” (1672–3).⁴³ Here Leibniz says that Judas’s eternal punishment follows from “his burning hatred of God—the state in which he died

⁴² See Lodge (2017).

⁴³ For discussion, see Ch. 1 by Lucy Sheaf in this volume.

and in which consists the nature of despair” (A VI 3: 118/CP 35) and this “suffices for damnation”, since:

- C8.P123 [F]rom the hatred of God, that is the most happy being, the greatest sadness follows, for *to hate* is to be sad about the happiness of the one hated (just as *to love* is to take joy in the happiness of the one loved), and therefore the greatest sadness arises in the case of hatred of the greatest happiness. The greatest sadness is misery or damnation. (A VI 3: 119/CP 35–7)
- C8.P124 It is worth noting here that Leibniz does not conceptualize damnation as involving a source of suffering external to the sufferer. As with the Fall, Leibniz’s view is far removed from traditional pictorial representations.
- C8.P125 Leibniz expresses the problems arising from grace, election and reprobation succinctly in the preface: “The original corruption of the human race... appears to us to have imposed a natural necessity to sin without the succour of divine grace” (GP VI 35/H 59), a sin which will in turn yield damnation. So, given that “necessity [is] incompatible with punishment, it will be inferred that a sufficient grace ought to have been given to all men”. However, this “does not appear to conform with experience” (GP VI 35/H 59). Moreover, mainstream revealed doctrine includes a commitment to the claim that “[t]here are few saved or chosen” and “those whom he has chosen deserve it no more than the rest, and are not even fundamentally less evil” (GP VI 35–6/H 59). Thus, the distribution of grace appears to betray an extreme divine “Partiality” which “goes against justice” (GP VI 36/H 60), again rendering God unloveable.
- C8.P126 In responding, Leibniz relies again on the best of all possible worlds thesis and his observations about our epistemic limitations. Moreover, he claims that he is in agreement with “Calvin himself” who “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” (Pt 1 §79/H 165) and adds: “we must judge charitably that the most rigid predestinators have too much reason and too much piety to depart from this sentiment”. Thus, Leibniz concludes: “There will therefore be no argument to debate on that point... with people who are at all reasonable” (Pt 1 §80/H 165).
- C8.P127 Nonetheless, Leibniz recognizes associated doctrines that might leave people worried. First, he considers the debate between “universalists” who claim that God wills the salvation of all men and “particularists” who restrict this to a subset (Pt 1 §80/H 166), resolving in favour of universalism via an appeal to the distinction between the antecedent and consequent will.⁴⁴ Next he turns to disagreements over whether “destination is absolute or respective” (Pt 1 §81/H 166),

⁴⁴ “Universalism” as employed here should not be confused with the doctrine that salvation is universally attained.

where the former have their fate decided by God prior to consideration of their actions rather than after. Here Leibniz sides with those who treat destination as respective by drawing on his account of creation, according to which God creates by comparing possible worlds in their entirety. Finally, he considers the challenge posed by the “supralapsarian” doctrine—according to which God’s choice regarding destination was logically prior to the decision about the Fall—and the “infralapsarians”—who put the choice after the decision regarding the Fall. Again, Leibniz appeals to his conception of creation in order to claim that the God justly determines fates in accordance with the actions of human beings. But although this places him closer to the infralapsarians, he suggests that both views are mistaken in attributing any kind of order to the divine decisions.⁴⁵

C8.P128 Leibniz is more worried by two cases involving people who die without sinning and without being born again. The first concerns the numerous people who die “before reaching years of discretion or . . . become dull of sense before [they have] made use of [their] reason” (Pt 1, §92/H 173); the second the “infinite number of men, among civilized peoples and among barbarians, who have never had this knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ” (Pt 1 §95/H 175).

C8.P129 Leibniz notes that there is a tradition, which includes Bayle, of including the first group among the damned.⁴⁶ He firmly opposes this view, insisting that “it must be confessed that this sentiment has sufficient foundation neither in reason nor in scripture, and that it is shockingly harsh” (Pt 1 §93/H 174), especially when it comes to children. Indeed, he expresses confidence that his opinion will ultimately prevail, adding: “we do not know all the wonderful ways that God may choose to employ for the illumination of souls” (Pt 1 §93/H 175).

C8.P130 Leibniz’s response to worries about those die without sin but outside Christianity is twofold. First he reiterate the possibility of “extraordinary succour” (Pt 1 §95/H 175–6); second he invokes a positive claim, which “appears to [him] to have eternal truth” (Pt 1 §95/H 176), namely “the maxim *Quod facienti, quod in se est, non denegatur gratia necessaria*: [Who does what rests with him, to him the necessary grace will not be denied]”. These commitments allow Leibniz to defend the justice of God in connection with those whose behaviour would merit salvation were it accompanied by grace. He observes:

C8.P131 I would be rather on the side of those [theologians] who grant to all men a grace sufficient to draw them away from evil, provided they have a sufficient tendency to profit by this succour, and not to reject it voluntarily. (Pt 1 §95/H 176)

C8.P132 Here, as advertised in the preface, Leibniz appeals to a version of the doctrine of “prevenient grace” (GP VI 38/H 61–2), which has its origins in the Catholic

⁴⁵ See Pt 1 §82/H 166–8.

⁴⁶ See Pt 1 §92/H 174.

Council of Trent (1545–63), but is more commonly associated with the Arminian and Methodist traditions. Leibniz appeals St Thomas Aquinas and Thomas Bradwardine (c.1300–1349 CE) as authorities for the doctrine,⁴⁷ and suggests that there are many Catholic theologians, including the Jesuit Friedrich Spee (1591–1635), who have held that “sincere act of the love of God above all things suffices for salvation, when the grace of Jesus Christ arouses it” (Pt 1 §95/H 176). Thus, Leibniz connects the discussion with his emphasis on the importance of the mutual love of God and creatures at the beginning of the Preface. Indeed, Leibniz’s commitment to prevenient grace appears to be equivalent to the claim that all people have an innate idea of God, which suffices for the avoidance of damnation provided the love of God that flows from it is not voluntarily rejected.

C8.P133 However, perhaps recognizing that appeals to Catholic doctrines might not move Protestant readers, Leibniz offers a final defence on the assumption “that today a knowledge of Jesus Christ according to the flesh is absolutely necessary to salvation”, which he suggests is “safest to teach” (Pt 1 §98/H 177). Here a simple appeal to ignorance comes into play again. Where the sacrament of baptism is lacking, “one could say that God will give that [knowledge] to all those who do what lies in them humanly, even though God must do that miraculously”.

C8.P134 The views that Leibniz expresses in connection with this second case allow him to deal with one final issue, which twenty-first-century readers might regard as the elephant in the room—namely the question of how a God who meted out eternal damnation to anyone could deserve love. The key to Leibniz’s defence lies in his views on prevenient grace, namely that it suffices “provided [people do] not to reject it voluntarily” (Pt 1 §95/H 175). He starts by observing that “those who do not lack the power to amend, but the good will... are without doubt inexcusable” (Pt 1 §99/H 178)—i.e. that those who are aware of their sin and do not want to stop sinning warrant damnation. This invites two rejoinders: first, the complaint that an individual’s lack of good will results from God’s decision to create them that way; and second, the worry that eternal damnation seems disproportionate even if lack of good will suffices for culpability.

C8.P135 Leibniz’s response to the first is to insist that being created with a lack of good will does not involve receiving “a kind of anti-grace, that is to say, a kind of repugnance to good, or even an inclination towards evil, just as the grace that he gives is an inclination towards good” (Pt 1 §99/H 178). The thought seems to be that deliberately creating an intrinsically bad will *would* be hard to square with divine justice. But Leibniz suggests that we should understand lack of good will in terms of the relationship between receiving prevenient grace and the circumstances of individuals—e.g. God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus 7:13 was his “permit[ting] that Pharaoh...should be in such circumstances as should

⁴⁷ See Pt 1 §95/H 176.

increase his wickedness” (Pt 1 §99/H 178). This leaves God’s choice of the variable distribution of grace such that it cannot “be subjected to a rule such as we are capable of conceiving” (Pt 1 §104/H 180), setting the stage for the now familiar refrain.

- C8.P136 The general plan of the universe, which God chose for superior reasons, makes men find themselves in different circumstances. The ones who meet with those more favourable to their nature will become more readily the least wicked, the most virtuous, the most happy; but it will be always by aid of the impressions of the inward grace which God attaches there. (Pt 1 §105/H 180–81)
- C8.P137 However, Leibniz also makes a foray into theodicy, suggesting “it is necessary that we are ignorant of the reasons for God’s choice” so “that we may not have cause to glorify ourselves” (Pt 1 §105/H 180–81).
- C8.P138 Leibniz fleshes out the second worry by mentioning the *Demonstration against the Eternity of Punishment* by the Unitarian Ernst Soner (1572–1612),⁴⁸ which includes the suggestion that the infinite punishment received when eternally damned outweighs any sin that could have been committed, since “there is no proportion between an infinite punishment and a finite guilt” (Pt 3 §266/H 290). Leibniz mentions three responses that are available: “the common reason that, the one offended is infinite”; the claim that “since the sin is unending, punishment cannot end”; and the claim that God knew that the damned “would always have sinned if they had always lived upon earth” (Pt 3 §267/H 291).
- C8.P139 Leibniz rejects the last of these as “a hypothesis open to question” (Pt 3 §267/H 291). His attitude toward the first is more complex. On the one hand, he notes that in replying to Soner,⁴⁹ he had observed that it is a “thesis I had not explored enough to pass judgement on” (Pt 3 §266/H 290); on the other, he suggests that his favoured solution makes it redundant. In any event, he takes the second approach, observing:
- C8.P140 it [is] enough to say that the duration of the guilt caused the duration of the penalty. Since the damned remained vicious they could not be withdrawn from their misery. (Pt 3 §266/H 290)⁵⁰
- C8.P141 Leibniz elaborates a few sections later. After death there may still be “voluntary impenitence” (Pt 3 §269/H 292), given that the damned know they need only turn away from their hatred of God for salvation and, being rational, have “a power, albeit remote, of recovering [themselves], even though it should never

⁴⁸ See Leibniz (1969: 483 n. 394).

⁴⁹ This may refer to the preface Leibniz drafted for a reprint of Soner that he had tried to engineer (LGR 325–6).

⁵⁰ See LGR 326.

pass into action”. The eternal punishment of the damned thus turns out to be of a kind with other punishments, and the existence of individuals who undergo such suffering yet another aspect of the way that the imperfection of the best possible world manifests itself in the creative act of a just and loveable God.

C8.S10

8.5 Conclusion

C8.P142 According to the interpretation I have offered, Leibniz’s *Theodicy* is primarily concerned with defending the use of natural religion as a tool for the inculcation and maintenance of true piety. I have therefore focused on the way in which he responds to perceived challenges. Although I have tried to map the basic contours, it should be obvious that there is much more to explore, particularly in connection with Leibniz’s detailed engagement with Bayle. However, I hope that the reader will now be better placed to explore some of these untrodden paths, and enthused by the prospect.⁵¹

Suggestions for further reading

Camposampiero, M., M. Geretto, and L. Perissinotto (eds) (2016), *Theodicy and Reason: Logic, Metaphysics, and Theology in Leibniz’s Essais de Théodicée (1710)* (Venice: Ca’ Foscari).

Jorgensen, L., and S. Newlands (eds) (2014), *New Essays on Leibniz’s Theodicy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Lodge, P., and B. Crowe (2002), “Leibniz, Locke and Bayle on Faith and Reason”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76: 575–600.

Rateau, P. (2019), *Leibniz on the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Rateau, P. (ed.) (2011), *Lectures et interprétations des Essais de théodicée de G. W. Leibniz* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner).

⁵¹ I would like to thank Lloyd Strickland for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter and Mara van der Lugt for help tracking down references to Bayle’s works.