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Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy

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Philosophiegeschichte und logische Analyse



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## Philosophiegeschichte und logische Analyse

From Leibniz to Kant

Guest Editors / Gastherausgeber

Katherine Dunlop · Samuel Levey

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Printed in Germany

Einbandgestaltung: Anna Braungart, Tübingen

Wissenschaftlicher Satz: satz&sonders GmbH, Dülmen

Herstellung: Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn

ISBN 978-3-95743-■■ (Print)

ISBN 978-3-95743-■■ (E-Book)

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LOGICAL ANALYSIS AND HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY  
PHILOSOPHIEGESCHICHTE UND LOGISCHE ANALYSE

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Individual copies – Einzelbezug: EUR 58,- / Subscription – Abo: EUR 48,-  
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## From Leibniz to Kant



## Foreword

Katherine Dunlop, University of Texas, Austin  
Samuel Levey, Dartmouth College

G. W. Leibniz's legacy to philosophy is extraordinary for his vast body of work, for his prescience, and for his influence. Leibniz's advances in formal methods, almost seeing into the future, paved the way for the logical and analytical style that philosophical inquiry would take on two centuries later in the foundational works of Frege and Russell, as well as those of Cantor and Gödel – works which not only followed themes similar to Leibniz's but also regarded themselves as responding directly to his efforts. In his own time, Leibniz's revival and defense of ancient and scholastic ideas in metaphysics and philosophical theology served as a counterweight to the growing orthodoxy of materialism and mechanism in natural philosophy in the modern era – expressed in different forms in Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes, and Newton, *inter alia* – a counterweight that pressed hard for a deeper explanatory role for philosophical inquiry at the foundations of scientific theory. Here too resonances of Leibniz in the present are easy to detect in the renewal of interest in fundamental metaphysics, explanation, and the question of ontology in science. For better or worse, the 'analytical' and 'metaphysical' tendencies thriving in philosophy today descend in no small part from Leibniz's thought.

Leibniz's immediate impact in philosophy was large as well, setting the stage for academic philosophy in Germany and elsewhere in continental Europe for a generation. As scholarship has turned toward the question of Leibniz's influence on his successors, that history has shed new and often unexpected light on the era connecting them – illuminating actual links, roles of lesser-known players, and unrecognized contours of views that are otherwise lost to modern-day eyes. A case in point is the 'Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy' of the universities; while Wolff and his followers' work was a main conduit for Leibniz's influence, the extent to which their views agree with Leibniz's is a matter of contention. To avoid prejudging this question, for this volume we solicited papers on the influence of 'Leibnizian' philosophy. In any case, Leibniz and the philosophers of the Wolffian school could both be seen to pair grandiose optimism, in their claims to rational metaphysical explanation, with discomfitingly slender epistemic credentials. This contrast was certainly evident to Immanuel Kant, the next German titan of philosophy, and invited his critical rethinking of the whole philosophical enterprise. Although Kant's place in philosophy would eclipse Leibniz's for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, his thought cannot be fully understood apart from Leibniz either.

In putting together this volume, our aim is to provide a snapshot of state-of-the-art scholarship on Leibniz's philosophy and its legacy, especially in the period up to Kant. The essays collected here newly examine signature elements of Leibniz's thought – logical theory, contingent truth, anti-materialism, reflective knowledge, the principle of sufficient reason, his technical idiom in the theory of ideas, his metaphysics of substance, etc. – as well as the influence of predecessors such as Lull, Descartes, and Malebranche, the reckoning of his ideas in the works of Wolff and Kant, and the contributions of Clarke,

Baumgarten, Meier, Du Châtelet, and others to the content, transmission, and reception of the Leibnizian philosophy.

But of course much remains to be explored. Recent scholarship has begun to recognize the expansive role of women in philosophy of the modern era, and Leibniz studies offers a rich array of texts to be considered among his correspondents and early readers. Also, while it is well-observed how Leibniz's division of nature into "two kingdoms" of mechanical and teleological explanation, his distinction between the phenomena of experience and the true metaphysics of intelligible substance, his distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* justification, his concept-containment theory of truth, and so on, served to frame celebrated responses in Kant's philosophy, the significance of his ethical and political thought has received comparatively scant attention – whether for its philosophical merit in its own right or for its influence on his successors including Kant. Those are areas in which we especially hope to see future scholarship flourish.

## Legend of Abbreviations

This volume uses the following abbreviations for frequently cited texts in original language and translation editions of Baumgarten, Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff, and Kant.

### Baumgarten

*Met.* 1739. *Metaphysica*. 1982. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.

### Descartes

AT *Ouvres de Descartes*. Adam, Ch./Tannery, P. (eds.). Paris: J. Vrin, 1964–1976. Cited by volume and page.

CSM(K) *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Cottingham, J./Stoothoff, R./Murdoch, D./Kenny, A. (trs.) 1984–91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Cited by volume and page. Cited as CSM for volumes 1–2, and as CSMK for volume 3.

### Leibniz

#### Editions

A *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed.). Darmstadt/Leipzig/Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923 –. Cited by series, volume, and page.

C *Opuscules et fragments inédits de Leibniz*. Couturat, L. (ed.). Paris: Felix Alcan, 1903. Reprint Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966.

Dut. *G. W. Leibniz: Opera omnia, nunc primum collecta ... studio Ludovici Dutens*. T. 1–6. Genevae, 1768. Cited by volume and page.

GP *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*. Gerhardt, C. I. (ed.). 7 vols. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1875–1890. Repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1978. Cited by volume and page.

GM *Leibniz' Mathematische Schriften*. Gerhardt, C. I. (ed.). 7 vols. Berlin: A. Asher. Halle: H. W. Schmidt, 1840–1863. Cited by volume and page.

GLW *Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Christian Wolff*. Ed. Gerhardt, C. I. (ed.). Halle, 1860. Repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1963.

Grua *G. W. Leibniz: Textes inédits*. Grua, G. (ed.). 2 vols. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948. Cited by volume and page.

Jag. *Leibnitiana, Elementa philosophiae arcanae de Summa rerum*. Jagodinski, I. (ed.). Kasan, 1913.

LH *Die Leibniz-Handschriften der Königlichen öffentlichen Bibliothek zu Hannover*. Bodemann, E. (ed.). Hannover, 1895. Repr. Hildesheim: Olms 1966.

## Translations

- CP *Confessio Philosophi: Papers Concerning the Problem of Evil, 1671–1678.* Sleight, R. C. (tr.) 2006. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- DSR *De Summa Rerum: Metaphysical Papers, 1672–1678.* Parkinson, G. H. R. (tr.) 1992. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- LA *The Leibniz – Arnauld Correspondence.* Mason, H. T. (tr.) 1967. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- LC *The Leibniz – Clarke Correspondence: With Extracts from Newton's 'Principia' and 'Optiks'.* Alexander, H. G. (tr.) 1977. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- LDB *The Leibniz – Des Bosses Correspondence.* Look, B. C. / Rutherford, D. (trs.) 2007. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- LDV *The Leibniz – Des Volder Correspondence.* Lodge, P. (trs.) 2013. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- LoC *The Labyrinth of the Continuum: Writings on the Continuum Problem, 1672–1686.* Arthur, R. T. W. (tr.) 2001. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Log. *Leibniz: Logical Papers.* Parkinson, G. H. R. (tr.) 1966. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- NE *Leibniz: New Essays on Human Understanding.* Remnant, P. / Bennett J. (trs.) 1996. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- NS *Leibniz's 'New System' and Associated Contemporary Texts.* Woolhouse, R. S. / Francks, R. (trs.) 1997. New York: Oxford University Press.
- PE *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays.* Ariew, R. / Garber, D. (trs.) 1989. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- PPL *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters: A Selection.* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Loemker, L. E. (tr.) 1976. Dordrecht Reidel: Springer.
- PT *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Texts.* Woolhouse, R. S. / Francks, R. (trs.) 1998. New York: Oxford University Press.
- PW *Leibniz: Philosophical Writings.* Morris, M. and Parkinson, G. H. R. (trs.) 1973. London: Dent.
- PWL *The Philosophical Writings of Leibniz.* Morris, M. (tr.) 1934. London: Dent.
- Sel. *G. W. Leibniz: Selections.* Wiener, P. P. (tr.) 1951. New York: Scribner's.
- T *G. W. Leibniz: Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil.* Farrer, A. (ed.) and Huggard, E. M. (tr.) 1952. La Salle, IL: Open Court.

## Wolff

- Anf. 1750. *Anfangsgründe aller Mathematischen Wissenschaften, Erster Theil.* 1973. Hildesheim: Olms.
- CG 1731. *Cosmologia generalis, methodo scientifica pertractata.* 1964. Hildesheim: Olms.
- Mor. 1750–1753. *Philosophia moralis sive ethica.* 1973. Hildesheim: Olms.
- PD 1728. *Preliminary Discourse on Philosophy in General.* Blackwell, R. J. (tr.) 1963. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. (Original: Wolff, C. 1728. *Discursus praeliminaris de philosophia in genere.* In: *Philosophia rationalis sive logica.* Frankfurt and Leipzig: Officina Libraria Rengeriana.)

## Legend of Abbreviations

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- PP 1736. *Philosophia prima sive ontologia*. 1962. Hildesheim: Olms.  
 PR 1740. *Philosophia rationalis sive logica*. 1983. Hildesheim: Olms.  
 PS 1740. *Psychologia rationalis*. 1972. Hildesheim: Olms.  
 VGG 1751. *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen*. 1983. Hildesheim: Olms.  
 VGK 1754. *Vernünfftige Gedancken von den Kräften des menschlichen Verstandes*. 1965. Hildesheim: Olms.

**Kant**

Except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, works published during Kant's lifetime are cited according to the following scheme of abbreviation. Volume and page numbers are from the Berlin Academy edition [Ak]. Works not published during Kant's lifetime are cited without abbreviated titles, according to Ak volume and page numbers. The *Critique of Pure Reason* [KrV] is cited, following standard practice, according to page numbers of the 1781 ("A") and 1787 ("B") editions.

- Ak Kant, I. *Kants gesammelte Schriften*. Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902 –.  
 ApH 1798. *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*. 7:117–333.  
 DMS 1770. *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis* ("Inaugural Dissertation"). 2:385–419.  
 EmB 1763. *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Dasein Gottes*. 2:63–163.  
 GMS 1785. *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. 4:385–463.  
 GSK 1746–49. *Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte und Beurtheilung der Beweise, deren sich Herr von Leibniz und andere Mechaniker in dieser Streitsache bedient haben, nebst einigen vorhergehenden Betrachtungen, welche die Kraft der Körper überhaupt betreffen*. 1:1–181.  
 KpV 1788. *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*. 5:1–163.  
 KrV 1781/1787. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. 4:1–252 (A-edition) / 3:1–552 (B-edition).  
 KU 1790. *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*. 5:165–485.  
 L 1800. *Logik. Ein Handbuch zu Vorlesungen* ("Jäsche Logik"). 9:1–150.  
 MAN 1786. *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*. 4:465–565.  
 MP 1756. *Metaphysice cum geometria iunctae usus in philosophia naturali, cuius specimen I. continet monadologiam physicam* ("Physical Monadology"). 1:473–487.  
 ND 1755. *Principiorum primorum cognitionis metaphysicae nova dilucidatio* ("New Elucidation"). 1:385–416.  
 NL 1758. *Neuer Lehrbegriff der Bewegung und Ruhe und der damit verknüpften Folgerungen in den ersten Gründen der Naturwissenschaft*. 2:13–25.  
 P 1783. *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*. 4:253–383.  
 TG 1766. *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*. 2:315–73.  
 UDG 1764. *Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral*. 2:273–301.

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Legend of Abbreviations

- UGR 1768. *Von dem ersten Grunde der Unterschiedes der Gegenden im Raume.* 2:375–83.
- ÜE 1790. *Über eine Entdeckung, nach der alle neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll.* 8:185–251.
- VBnG 1763. *Versuch den Begriff der negativen Grössen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen.* 2:165–204.
- VBO 1759. *Versuch einiger Betrachtungen über den Optimismus.* 2:27–35.



# Leibniz's Justification of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (Mainly) in the Correspondence with Clarke

Paul Lodge, Mansfield College, University of Oxford

## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to shed light on Leibniz's justification of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. It approaches this issue through a close textual analysis of the correspondence with Samuel Clarke and a more abstruse and lesser-known writing, 'Leibniz's Philosophical Dream'.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to shed some light on a relatively neglected aspect of Leibniz's philosophy, namely his justification of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). I approach this issue through a close textual analysis of his correspondence with Samuel Clarke. It is well-known that in this correspondence Leibniz appeals to the PSR in connection with his arguments against the Newtonian conception of space and time. But, in addition, not only are there a number of places in which Leibniz discusses the basis for his commitment to the PSR, sections 18–20 and sections 125–20 (the last six sections) of Leibniz's final letter<sup>1</sup> contain an extended discussion of precisely this issue. Partly for reasons that I shall mention later, we should approach with some caution the thought that this represents Leibniz's definitive views on the justificatory status of the PSR. However, as we shall see, Leibniz offers a wide range of considerations in a philosophical swansong that was dispatched in August 18, 1716, only three months before his death.

I will begin by clarifying how Leibniz characterizes the PSR in the Clarke correspondence. Then I will turn to the sections mentioned above and use them as the basis for organizing other pertinent remarks scattered among Leibniz's five letters. This will yield a surprisingly large number of different justifications of the principle, which I will present in turn along with critical commentary. I will finish the paper in a rather speculative way. At the very end of his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter, Leibniz alludes to a justification for the PSR which he tells Clarke is "too abstruse for the present dispute" (Letter 5, Sec. 130/LC 96) and which he does not provide. I will take the liberty of using this as an opportunity to consider, among other things, a justification that we might take from a reading of one of Leibniz's more abstruse and lesser-known writings, which might also help resolve some of the worries arising in connection with those he does present.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the 'correspondence' comprises a set of extracts from and addenda to letters that were sent to Caroline, Princess of Wales. However, I shall refer to the texts as 'letters'.

## 2. Leibniz's characterization of the PSR

Leibniz introduces the PSR to Clarke in the first section of his 2nd Letter as one of two principles, the other being the Principle of Contradiction (PC). He presents it as follows: “the principle of sufficient reason, viz. that nothing happens without a reason why it should be so, rather than otherwise” (Letter 2, Sec. 1/LC 16). The PSR is characterized again at the beginning of the swansong in the 5<sup>th</sup> Letter, but here things are slightly more complex, with Leibniz talking of “the principle of the want of a sufficient reason; in order to any things existing, in order to any events happening, in order to any truth's taking place” (Letter 5, Sec. 125/LC 95).

At first glance it might appear that we can take the first statement to be a truncated version of the second. However, there is a crucial element in the 2nd Letter that is missing in the 5<sup>th</sup> Letter, namely the explicit assertion that the sufficient reason should account for both ‘why’ and ‘why not otherwise’.<sup>2</sup> In what follows I am going to take the PSR to be the most generous combination of the two, namely as:

PSR The principle of the want of a sufficient reason for a thing to exist rather than not exist, for an event to happen rather than not happen, for any truth's taking place rather than not taking place.

Whilst not explicitly labelled as the PSR, something close to this version can be found in *Confessio Philosophi* which dates all the way back to 1672–73:

[N]othing ever exists unless it is possible (at least for one who is omniscient) to assign a sufficient reason why it exists rather than not, and why it is thus and not otherwise. (A 6.3.118/CP 33)

Furthermore, this characterization is endorsed by Clarke in his 3rd Letter, where he says “Undoubtedly nothing is, without a sufficient reason why it is thus, rather than not; and why it is thus rather than otherwise” (Letter 3, Sec. 2/LC 30), and it coincides closely with what we find in another of Leibniz's relatively late writings, the *Monadology*, in section 32 of which the PSR is said to be:

[the principle] by virtue of which we consider that we can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise, although most of the time these reasons cannot be known to us. (GP 6.612/PE 217)

Another important feature of the way that the PSR is invoked in the Clarke correspondence is that there is only one occasion on which Leibniz offers an example of a sufficient reason, namely in section 9 of his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter. Here he observes that “the principle of what is best”, i. e., the proposition that God acts on the basis of his choice of the best is “the sufficient reason for the existence of things” (Letter 5, Sec. 9/LC 57).

It is unclear just what to make of this. However, one might plausibly read it as implying that neither the efficient causes cited in natural philosophical explanations nor the reasons that might be consciously considered during the deliberation of created rational beings could count as sufficient reasons for the *explananda* nor the decisions made

<sup>2</sup> As we shall see later, the ‘why not otherwise’ also fails to occur in a passage from *Demonstrations of Primary Propositions* of 1671–72(?) (A 6.2.483), which has often been presented as crucial locus for our understanding of Leibniz's commitment to the PSR.

respectively. Furthermore, given Leibniz's commitment to the limited nature of the cognitive capacities of created beings and the actually infinite structure of created universe, it is hard to see how he could regard things as otherwise.<sup>3</sup> And it also seems that Leibniz alludes to this with his parenthetical remark about omniscience in the passage from the *Confessio* above. Thus, these very general considerations point to the thought that the PSR is intimately connected with the fact that the universe results from divine choice, and that it is ineliminably a principle of final causation.

Finally, it is worth noting that the passage from the *Monadology* reminds us that Leibniz sometimes wishes to extend the notion of a sufficient reason to include *all* truths, including those which are necessary and whose truth is governed explicitly by what he calls the *Principle of Contradiction* (PC). The relation between these two principles is a complex one, but I will bracket these considerations in the context of the current essay. For when Leibniz is concerned with the justification of the PSR in the correspondence with Clarke, it is solely in connection with contingent truths concerning the created world and the divine activity by which it was produced.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Leibniz's swansong

Whilst the PSR is invoked in all of Leibniz's letters to Clarke, the issue of whether it is legitimate for Leibniz to invoke it does not arise until late in the correspondence. Clarke begins his 4<sup>th</sup> Letter by criticizing Leibniz's insistence that the will of God must be determined by a reason that differentiates the things chosen from those not chosen. In addition to claiming that such a view would lead to necessitarianism, he questions Leibniz's grounds for rejecting the situation in which "there may be a very good reason to act, though two or more ways of acting may be absolutely indifferent" given that he [Leibniz] "supposes the contrary, as a principle; but gives no proof of it, either from the nature of things, or the perfection of God" (Letter 4, Secs. 1–2 / LC 45). Leibniz takes this to be an explicit critique of the PSR, and in his response provides what appears to be a proof of each kind, as well as offering a number of additional considerations which speak to the challenge. But he also observes "I shall speak more largely at the conclusion of this paper, concerning the solidity and importance of this great principle" (Letter 5, Sec. 20 / LC 60). And, true to his word, he returns to the issue in Sections 125–130, confident by the penultimate sentence of his last letter to Clarke, that he has "said what is sufficient to justify [the PSR]" (Letter 5, Sec. 130 / LC 96).

I will draw on other parts of the correspondence as I proceed, but for the present I want to focus on what I am calling Leibniz's swansong, namely his comments on why one should adopt the PSR at the end of his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter. Since it will be important to attend to the flow and interconnections of the claims that Leibniz makes here, I will begin by quoting the relevant passages in full, along with sections 18–20 of the same letter:

<sup>3</sup> In Sec. 66 of his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter Leibniz observes that unlike God, "Men, being such limited creatures, as they are, may act in this manner. They may resolve upon a thing and then find themselves perplexed about the means, ways, places, and circumstances," (LC 78). However, he stops short of saying that this will always be the case.

<sup>4</sup> For a helpful discussion the relationship between the PSR and the PC, and for Leibniz's views on the PSR in other writings, see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2013.

18. [...] [T]is very strange to charge me with advancing my principle of the want of a sufficient reason, without any proof drawn from the nature of things, or from divine perfections. For the nature of things requires, that every event should have beforehand its conditions, requisites and dispositions, the existence whereof makes the sufficient reason of such an event.

19. And God's perfection requires, that all his actions should be agreeable to his wisdom; and that it may not be said of him, that he has acted without a reason; or that he preferred a weaker reason before a stronger.

20. I shall speak more largely at the conclusion of this paper, concerning the solidity and importance of this great principle of the want of a sufficient reason in order to every event; the overthrowing of which principle would overthrow the best part of all philosophy. 'Tis therefore very strange that the author should say, I am herein guilty of a *petitio principii*; and it plainly appears he is desirous to maintain indefensible opinions, since he is reduced to deny that great principle which is one of the most essential principles of reasoning (Letter 5, Secs. 18–20/LC 60)

125. I shall conclude with what the author objected against me at the beginning of his Fourth Reply: to which I have already given an answer above (Numb. 18, 19, 20. But I deferred speaking more fully upon that head, to the conclusion of this paper. He pretended that I have been guilty of a *petitio principii*. But, of what principle, I beseech you? Would to God less clear principles had never been laid down. The principle in question, is the principle of the want of a sufficient reason; in any order to any thing's existing, in order to any events happening, in order to any truth's taking place. Is this a principle, that wants to be proved? The author granted it, or pretended to grant it, Numb. 2 of his Third Paper; possibly, because the denial of it would have appeared too unreasonable. But either he has done it only in words, or he contradicts himself, or retracts his concession.

126. I dare say that, without this great principle, one cannot prove the existence of God, nor account for many other important truths.

127. Has not everybody made use of this principle, upon a thousand occasions? 'Tis true, it has been neglected, out of carelessness on many occasions: but that neglect has been the true cause of chimeras; such as are (for instance,) an absolute real time or space, a vacuum, atoms, attraction in the scholastic sense, a physical influence of the soul over the body, and a thousand other fictions, either derived from erroneous opinions of the ancients, or lately invented by modern philosophers.

128. Was it not upon account of Epicurus's violating this great principle, that the ancients derided his groundless declination of atoms? And I dare say, the scholastic attraction, revived in our days and no less derided about thirty years ago, is not at all more reasonable.

129. I have often defied people to allege an instance against that great principle, to bring any one uncontested example wherein it fails. But they have never done it, nor ever will. 'Tis certain, there is an infinite number of instances, wherein it succeeds [or rather it succeeds]<sup>5</sup> in all the known cases in which it has been made use of. From whence one may reasonably judge, that it will succeed also in unknown cases, or in such cases as can only by its means become known: according to the method of experimental philosophy which proceeds *a posteriori*, though the principle were not otherwise justified by bare reason, or *a priori*.

130. To deny this great principle, is likewise to do as Epicurus did; who was reduced to deny that other great principle, viz. the principle of contradiction, which is that every intelligible enunciation must be either true, or false. Chrysippus undertook to prove that principle against

<sup>5</sup> The square brackets indicate an interpolation that was added by Leibniz in his own copy subsequent to the dispatch to Caroline.

Epicurus; but I think I need not imitate him.<sup>6</sup> I have already said what is sufficient to justify mine: and I might say something more upon it, but perhaps it would be too abstruse for this present dispute. And I believe, reasonable and impartial men will grant me, that having forced an adversary to deny that principle is reducing him *ad absurdum*. (Letter 5, Secs. 125–30/LC 96–97)

Whilst it is hard to pick apart all the strands in these passages, I want to suggest that we can usefully distinguish five distinct approaches which comprise responses to Clarke's demand for a proof of the PSR. They are all worthy of attention, though I will have more to say about those that appear in Sections 18, 19 and 130 than the others.

Before moving on to the things that look like justifications for the PSR, or at least claims that might be the bases for such justifications, it is worth noting the way in which Leibniz approaches Clarke's demand in Section 125:

Is this a principle that wants to be proved? The author granted it or pretended to grant it, Numb. 2 of his Third Paper; possibly, because the denial of it would have appeared too unreasonable. (Letter 5, Sec. 125/LC 96)

Leibniz's initial move is to question whether there is really any need to prove the PSR, and elsewhere in the correspondence he refers to the PSR as an "axiom" (Letter 3, Sec. 7/LC 27). In light of this, one might be tempted to think Leibniz took the PSR to be in need of no support because it is a self-evident foundational claim.

However, setting aside the issue of just how the term 'axiom' is intended in this context, Leibniz makes clear it elsewhere that being an axiom entails neither foundational status nor self-evidence. He does exclude the need to prove "primary axioms" (NE 75), where these are propositions that fall into the class of "identities" (NE 406), i. e., those whose truth is self-evident in virtue of their form rather than their content; or to put it a little anachronistically, analytic truths whose analyticity has been represented explicitly. However, Leibniz also takes there to be "secondary axioms", and he insists on "the importance of demonstrating all secondary axioms by bringing them back to axioms which are primary" (*ibid.*). It is surely the case that if the PSR falls into either of these categories it is the second. Assuming this is so, then Leibniz appears to be committed to the idea that the axiomatic status of the PSR could in some way be rendered perspicuous in terms of some "primary axiom /s", whose truth was analytic and self-evident as a matter of the form in which it they were expressed. But, whether Leibniz conceived of things explicitly in these terms or not is moot in the context of this paper. For there is nothing in the Clarke correspondence that looks like an attempt to articulate such a "bringing back" as justification.

Given these considerations, it seems to me that we should take Leibniz's initial comment as nothing more than an allusion to the fact that it seems odd for Clarke to demand a proof of the PSR given that he is willing to accept it. That said, as we shall see later on, this apparent agreement masks some serious differences.

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<sup>6</sup> As Alexander observes, this is reported in Cicero's *De Fato*, X (LC 96, n. 1).

#### 4. A proof from the nature of things

As we have seen, Clarke's 4<sup>th</sup> Letter includes the accusation that Leibniz has not proved the PSR "either from the nature of things, or the perfection of God" (Letter 4, Secs. 1–2 / LC 45). Leibniz responds directly to the first of these charges in Section 18 of his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter.

For the nature of things requires, that every event should have beforehand its conditions, requisites and dispositions, the existence whereof makes the sufficient reason of such an event. (Letter 5, Sec. 18 / LC 60)

A number of commentators have suggested that we should regard this as a version of an argument that occurs much earlier in Leibniz's career, namely the one in the *Demonstrations of Primary Propositions* and the *Confessio Philosophi*.<sup>7</sup> As presented in the *Demonstrations*, the argument runs as follows:

Proposition: Nothing is without a reason, or whatever is has a sufficient reason.

Definition 1. A sufficient reason is that which is such that if it is posited the thing is.

Definition 2. A requirement is that which is such that if it is not posited the thing is not.

Demonstration:

Whatever is, has all [its] requirements.

For if one [of them] is not posited the thing is not by def. 2.

If all [its] requirements are posited, the thing is.

For if it is not, it will be kept from being by the lack of something, that is, a requirement.

Therefore all the requirements are a sufficient reason by def. 1.

Therefore whatever is has a sufficient reason.

Q. E. D.

(A 6.2.483 / Adams 1994, 68)

This argument has been roundly criticized on the grounds that it begs the question against those who would deny the PSR. Thus Robert Adams observes: "anyone who denies the Principle of Sufficient Reason will suppose that when all the necessary conditions of a thing's existing are given, there might still be the possibility of its existing and a possibility of its not existing" (Adams 1994, 68).

My main interest here, however, is not with the plausibility of the demonstration. Instead (though ultimately, this must surely be a related claim), I want to suggest that we should be wary of assuming that the demonstration of 1671–72(?) is really the same argument as the one Leibniz presents to Clarke in his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter. For one thing, as I noted above, the formulation of the PSR in this text differs from the one in the Clarke correspondence, in that there is no reference to a "rather than". So, there is a sense in which a truncated repetition of this argument could not be fully adequate to the task set by Clarke. But there are other *prima facie* reasons to think they are different.

To begin with one might wonder why Leibniz did not offer the 1671–72(?) demonstration in full if he intended to convey the same justification. But we also find differences as we turn to the content that *is* presented in each case. In the Clarke correspondence, rather than things "having all their requirements", it is the "existence" of the "proper con-

<sup>7</sup> See Sleight 1983, 203 and CP 151 n. 23; Adams 1994, 68; Look 2011, 205. Versions of the argument are also found in *On Existence* (A 6.3.587 / DSR 113) and *On Freedom* (PE 94).

ditions, requisites, and dispositions" that are said to "make the sufficient reason" (Letter 5, Sec. 18 / LC 60). And perhaps more importantly, embracing Clarke's language, Leibniz claims that "the nature of things requires" that which he equates with the PSR, rather than offering definitions of 'sufficient reason' and 'requirement' (a term which appears to be equivalent to 'requisite' in the correspondence) and demonstrating the PSR from them. Indeed, I think the differences become even clearer if we look at the context in which the comments of Section 18 occur.

If we focus on Section 18 alone, it may seem that Leibniz has nothing more in mind than the considerations of the *Demonstrations*, given that he prefaces the brief claim that he does make by observing "[T]is very strange to charge me with advancing my principle of the want of a sufficient reason, without any proof drawn from the nature of things, or from divine perfections" (ibid.). However, the content of Section 18 is informed by the contents of Sections 14–17. Crucially, these include an elaboration of Leibniz's views that rational agency requires that what emerges from such activity is fully determinate, and that this in turn entails that everything that is required to bring about the determinate outcome is also in place, i. e., the conditions that serve as a sufficient reason. Furthermore, in the background is a commitment shared by Clarke to the fact that the "the nature of things" is the result of divine rational agency. Thus, there is at least a case for the interpreting Leibniz as suggesting that it follows from the nature of things (i. e., created things) that everything contingent has a sufficient reason because of the way in which created reality is produced.

Assuming this is what Leibniz intended, there is, perhaps, something rather disappointing about this kind of justification. For however effective this proof may be in the context of debates with those who regard rational agency as the basis for all contingent truths, it falls short of explaining why this conception of source of contingent truths should be embraced. Furthermore, it becomes hard to see how it differs from the "proof from divine perfections" that we shall consider next. However, it is unclear to me how concerned we should be about the latter. Although I am presenting what Leibniz says in Sections 18 and 19 as two distinct justifications, Section 18 is very short and opaque. So it may just be that we are being offered two complementary ways of expressing the same considerations, one starting with the effect and one with the cause.

## 5. A proof from divine perfections

Leibniz's second response to Clarke's challenge is as follows:

And God's perfection requires, that all his actions should be agreeable to his wisdom; and that it may not be said of him, that he has acted without a reason; or that he preferred a weaker reason before a stronger. (Letter 5, Sec. 19 / LC 60)

At first pass it is hard to see that Leibniz is doing any more in this section than asserting the connection that Clarke has asked him to demonstrate, namely that the nature of God as a rational agent requires that the PSR holds of his activity and what that produces. However, the response echoes a good deal that has been said in earlier letters and it is possible to gain a better sense of why it is that Leibniz thinks that the divine perfections entail the PSR in light of these.

In his 2nd Letter, Clarke claims to support Leibniz's endorsement of PSR, but only to add that this is "oft-times no other, than the mere will of God" (Letter 2, Sec. 1/LC 20), on the grounds that to deny that the divine will "could act without a predetermining cause [...] would tend to take away all the power of choosing and to introduce fatality" (Letter 2, Sec. 1/LC 21). Leibniz's initial response is two-fold: First, he attacks Clarke on the grounds that he is "falling back into the loose indifference", which he claims to have "confuted at large, and showed to be absolutely chimerical, even in creatures, and contrary to the wisdom of God" (Letter 3, Sec. 7/LC 27); second, he defends his own conception of choice as determined by a sufficient reason as involving a benign kind of "fatality", which he equates with "the wisest order of providence" (Letter 3, Sec. 8/LC 28) as opposed to a "blind fatality or necessity, void of all wisdom and choice, which we ought to avoid" (ibid.).

Clarke's response to these claims is uncompromising and reveals more about his own understanding of divine activity and the way in which he interprets Leibniz's alternative:

Where there is any difference in the nature of things, there the consideration of that difference always determines an intelligent and perfectly wise agent. But when two ways of acting are equally and alike good (as in the instances before mentioned;) to affirm in such a case, that God cannot act at all, or that 'tis no perfection in him to be able to act, because he can have no external reason to move him to act one way or another seems to be a denying God to have in himself any original principle or power of beginning to act, but that he must needs (as it were mechanically) be always determined by things extrinsic (Letter 3, Secs. 7 and 8/LC 32–33)

Clarke agrees with Leibniz that where the objects of choice differ, God (*qua* perfectly wise agent) will be determined in his choice by his "consideration of that difference". But this still allows for cases in which consideration reveals equally good options, and hence no difference that could provide a basis for choice. And, to Clarke's mind, Leibniz's claim that God could not act in such a situation is to deny that God has an internal power to initiate change, and to insist that God is always determined to act by extrinsic causes.

The significance of these claims was clearly not lost on Leibniz, given that his 4<sup>th</sup> Letter begins with a somewhat terse response:

1. In things absolutely indifferent, there is no [foundation for]<sup>8</sup> choice; and consequently no election, nor will; since choice must be founded on some reason, or principle.
2. A mere will without any motive is a fiction, not only contrary to God's perfection, but also chimerical and contradictory; inconsistent with the definition of the will. (Letter 4, Sec. 2/LC 36)

And Leibniz returns to the issues in Section 18 of his 4<sup>th</sup> Letter, observing that "A will without reason would be the chance of the Epicureans. A God, who should act by such a will, would be a God only in name" (Letter 4, Sec. 18/LC 39), adding in Sections 19 and 20:

19. When two things which cannot both be together, are equally good; and neither in themselves, nor by their combination with other things, has one any advantage over the other; God will produce neither of them.
20. God is never determined by external things, but always by what is in himself; that is by his knowledge of things, before any thing exists without himself. (Letter 4, Secs. 19–20/LC 39)

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<sup>8</sup> The bracketed material was added by Clarke.



We can see how radical the difference is between Leibniz's and Clarke's conceptions of divine activity in these passages. But, nonetheless it is clear that both men believe that the activity of God as they conceive it is wise and in accordance with the PSR.

One crucial difference that feeds into Clarke's 4<sup>th</sup> Letter and Leibniz's 5<sup>th</sup> Letter is Clarke's apparent willingness to embrace the idea that God's activity may in some situations be determined by things external to the divine nature, namely in those situations where alternative courses fail to be "equally and alike good" (Letter 3, Secs. 7 and 8/LC 32) and their natures, as conceived correctly by God, determine the way God acts. This is then contrasted with situations in which God's activity is not so determined due to indiscernibility (such as deciding where to locate matter in infinite homogeneous space), and here Clarke insists that rational activity proceeds via spontaneous internal act of divine will. Leibniz objects to this view for two reasons. One is the very familiar idea that God would refrain from acting were there no best option, but the other is less prominent in his writings. For Leibniz finds himself needing to make the point that God is "never determined by external things" (Letter 4, Sec. 20/LC 39).

In his 4<sup>th</sup> Letter Clarke returns to the charge that Leibniz's conception of divine action "leads to a universal necessity and fate" (Letter 4, Secs. 1 and 2/LC 45), but he also draws on an analogy that Leibniz himself had introduced in the first section of his 2nd Letter (Letter 2, Sec. 1/LC 16). Clarke suggests that Leibniz is assimilating the way in which motives are related to the will to the way in which weights act on a balance – the stronger motive determining the agent as a heavier weight would, and cases in which the motives are "equally alike and good" leaving the agent unmoved like a balance in equilibrium. Clarke insists that the analogy is inappropriate.

A balance is no agent, but is merely passive and acted upon by the weights; so that when the weights are equal, there is nothing to move it. But intelligent beings are agents; not passive, in being moved by motives, as a balance is by weights; but they have active powers and do move themselves, sometimes upon the view of strong motives, sometimes upon weak ones, and sometimes where things are absolutely indifferent. In which latter case, there may be very good reason to act, though two or more ways of acting may be absolutely indifferent. (Letter 4, Secs. 1 and 2/LC 45)

Here Clarke attempts to articulate a view which allows both that intelligent beings act "upon the view of" of external conditions and yet "move themselves", as opposed to the "merely passive" changes that occur when weights are placed on a balance and the arms move (or not). Leibniz's response in Sections 14 and 15 of his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter reveal the inadequacies that he sees in Clarke's sketch of the disanalogy.

In Section 14 Leibniz claims that it is incorrect to think that the patterns of motion when weights are placed on a balance sometimes involve activity and sometimes not. Both the balance and the weights are active whatever the scenario, with the pattern of motion due to the resolution of this activity. However, more importantly, in Section 15 Leibniz tells us how we should conceive what is going on in agency "properly speaking" (Letter 5, Sec. 15/LC 59). Central to this account is the claim that "motives do not act upon the mind [...] but 'tis rather the mind that acts by virtue of the motives, which are its dispositions to act" (ibid.). It is not entirely clear how Clarke conceives of motives. However, he seems not to think of them as intrinsic features of an agent. Rather they seem to be extrinsic features that may be acted upon or not as a matter of the agent's

preference, where the content of the preference is not amenable to characterization that is independent of the extrinsic motives.

Leibniz appears to adopt such a reading, insisting that Clarke's view is one which "divide[s] the mind from its motives, as if they were without the mind [...] as if the mind had, besides motives, other dispositions to act by virtue of which it could reject or accept motives" (ibid). In contrast, he insists that his own view is one on which "the motives comprehend all the dispositions, which the mind can have to act voluntarily; for they include not only the reasons, but also the inclinations arising from passions or other preceding impressions" (ibid). For Leibniz, reasons are a subset of the motives that give rise to mental activity, thus for him it is "a manifest contradiction" to claim, as Clarke does, that there could be reasons to act and yet the mind remain indifferent with regard to them, or even choose in spite of them.

The model of agency that Leibniz employs is one on which activity arises from a resolution of the motivational power of all the dispositions to act, whether rational or otherwise. As he observes, "if the mind should prefer a weak inclination to a strong one, it would act against itself, and otherwise than it is disposed to act" (ibid). But Clarke's response to this in his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter, to which Leibniz never responded, is unsurprising. He insists that Leibniz is "denying the mind to have in itself a principle of action", and he continues to claim that "the motive, or thing considered as in view, is something extrinsic to the mind" and that "the impression made upon the mind by that mind is the perceptive quality, in which the mind is passive" (Letter 5, Secs. 1–2 / LC 97).

For Leibniz rational agency is to be conceived univocally, with the source of activity entirely internal to the mind of the agent. What seems to be at issue here is that, by contrast, Clarke embraces a characterization of rational agency that is equivocal. In situations where there are differences in the goodness of external circumstances these determine the choice that is made, but in other cases rational agency is of a completely different character. For it is something that involves determination of the mind that is wholly spontaneous and uninfluenced by the external conditions given that they are identical in all relevant respects. And, perhaps most importantly for the current debate, Clarke is adamant that there are situations in which God's activity is in accordance with the PSR whilst being an entirely spontaneous choice between situations whose nature (and hence goodness) is identical – a central case being God's decision to create matter at a determinate position in an infinite homogeneous space (see Letter 3, Secs. 7 and 8 / LC 32).

If we take a step back from the issue of the possible resolution of the debate between Leibniz and Clarke, something else comes into view, namely a disagreement regarding the content of the concept to which each of the two men attach the word 'God'. Furthermore, it is a disagreement that is rendered particularly opaque, given that they each take it to be the case that God's nature conforms to the traditional triune conception. For this entails that both men take God's action to result from divine wisdom, and take divine wisdom to be the paradigm for rationality. In other words, both Leibniz and Clarke in their own way are committed to taking something that is plausibly termed 'the Principle of Sufficient Reason' as a principle that holds of the created world and the divine activity that gave rise to it. And they justify this in the same way, namely by appeal to the fact the God is source of all contingent truths.

We are now in a position to understand a crucial difference between these conceptions of rational agency. For, at least in the divine case, it is Leibniz's view that acting on a

reason requires: (1) that the content of that which is willed be internal to the agent and fully determinate; and (2) that the activity takes place in virtue of an awareness of that determinacy and the fact that it is the best option available. However, for Clarke, God can be a fully reasonable agent and yet there be an indeterminacy among the objects of choice with regard to their goodness, and hence a situation in which divine action emerges through a decision in favour of a course of action, the content of which cannot be rendered fully and determinately intelligible even by God. What we are not in a position to do, however, is to see how Leibniz thought this impasse might be resolved. Leibniz's and Clarke's Gods seem to be different, and their agency and that which emerges from it has a different character. But Leibniz has not told us why his should be regarded as the proper conception of God and the created world.

When Leibniz returns to the PSR at the end of his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter a number of additional claims are made that appear to speak to why he thinks we should adopt the principle and I will turn to those in sections 5–7 below. Unfortunately, it seems to me that they take us little further in resolving the impasses that have been exposed. However, in section 8 I will suggest that one interpretation of what Leibniz may have had in mind when he spoke of the ideas that he deemed “too abstruse for the present dispute” (Letter 5, sec. 130/LC 96) might go some way toward a resolution.

## 6. PSR and the truths of natural philosophy and metaphysics

In section 126 of his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter, Leibniz suggests that “without this great principle [i. e., the PSR], one cannot prove the existence of God, nor account for many other important truths” (Letter 5, Sec. 126/LC 95). This is a recapitulation of a point made in his 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter in slightly more grandiloquent terms. Here, in addition to “the being of God”, the PSR is said to enable us to “demonstrate [...] all the other parts of metaphysics or natural theology; and even, in some measure, those principles of natural philosophy that are independent upon mathematics” (Letter 2, Sec. 1/LC 16).

Throughout the correspondence, we find various examples of things that Leibniz attempts to establish on the basis of the PSR, or mentions as dependent on it, which fill out these more abstract claims. Most famously it is employed in arguing against the existence of absolute space (e. g., Letter 4, Sec. 13/LC 38).<sup>9</sup> But Leibniz also invokes the PSR to reject the existence of atoms and the vacuum (Letter 4, postscript/LC 44) and to argue for the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles (Letter 5, Sec. 21/LC 61 and Sec. 26/LC 61–62).<sup>10</sup> Among the things that are mentioned as positive consequences of the PSR, we are told, “in order to proceed from mathematics to natural philosophy, another principle [i. e., the PSR] is requisite” (Letter 2, Sec. 1/LC 15). And, as mentioned above, Leibniz illustrates this by claiming that the PSR plays this bridging role in Archimedes *On the Equilibrium of Planes* when “[Archimedes] takes it for granted, that if there be a balance, in which everything is alike on both sides, and if equal weights are hung on the two ends of that balance, the whole will be at rest” (Letter 2, Sec. 1/LC 16.). Closer to home, Leibniz also

<sup>9</sup> For helpful discussion of these arguments, see Section 2 of Brown (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> For differing views of the ways in which this argument proceeds, see Jauernig 2008, 208–212, and Rodriguez-Pereyra 2014, 104–14.

suggests the PSR is used to establish “the dynamic principles or the principles of force (Letter 2, Sec. 1/LC 16).

Some of the claims that count as “important truths” receive no further elaboration in the correspondence. Others that are rejected by Leibniz are presented as at odds with the claim that they are truths about a world created through the rational agency of God. But, perhaps unsurprisingly, Clarke is unmoved. For, as we have seen, he takes the will of God, in at least some cases, to be a sufficient reason in a way that is completely independent of any specification of the content of that will. Thus (to take one example), the fact that there is no difference between two atoms does not preclude their coming into existence at particular places for Clarke. They simply belong to the class of created beings whose existence emerges from a divine decision that is not wholly explicable by appeal to the nature of that which was chosen.

That said, one truth on which both men agree, of course, is the proposition that God exists. A number of puzzles arise in connection with Leibniz’s suggestion that the PSR is required to demonstrate this. It is not surprising to find Leibniz claiming that God’s existence can be proved in this way, given that it is a cosmological argument, one of the most common forms of argument for God’s existence in natural theology. But it is *prima facie* surprising that Leibniz suggests that without the PSR one *could not* prove God’s existence. It is true that Leibniz sometimes emphasizes this kind of reasoning in considering the existence of God and that there are contexts where it is presented alone.<sup>11</sup> However, he employs several other strategies for arguing for God’s existence throughout his career, and in the contemporary *Monadology* we find a version of the ontological argument (Section 45, GP 6.614/PE 218).<sup>12</sup>

The text of the correspondence does not allow us to resolve this puzzle. But one possibility is that Leibniz thought that the other arguments would have been dialectically impotent in the context of a discussion with Clarke, or at least that the cosmological argument would have been uncontentious in a way that might not have been true of the others. As Ezio Vailati observes (1998, 195, n. 2), Clarke not only offered a version of this argument, the whole of his *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God And Other Writings can be regarded as an extended cosmological argument*. However, this still leaves us without a way of defending Leibniz’s claim that the fact that the PSR can be used in this way provides justification for the PSR itself. Moreover, it is hard to see how such a strategy could go.<sup>13</sup>

One might also worry that Leibniz appears to be opening himself up to a charge of circularity by claiming that the PSR is required to prove God’s existence whilst offering it as an argument for the PSR. Two avenues seem worthy of consideration here. We have already seen that Leibniz embraces non-PSR grounded arguments for God’s existence. But it is also worth noting that the argument occurs in the context of a correspondence in which his opponent has granted that God exists. And, as we have seen, a central part of

<sup>11</sup> For example, it is the focus of detailed elaboration in the piece *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* of 1697 (GP 7.302-8/PE 149–55) and it is the only argument for God’s existence that appears in Leibniz’s only published book *The Theodicy* as the focus of Section 7 of Part 1 (GP 6.106-07/T 127–28).

<sup>12</sup> See Look (2014) for a useful overview of Leibniz’s arguments for the existence of God.

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that, as observed above, Leibniz also restricts himself to the cosmological argument in *The Theodicy* (GP 6.106-07/T 127–28).

the dispute concerns the relation between two competing conceptions of divine agency and what is involved in a commitment to the PSR. Both men agree that the two go hand in hand. Thus, at least in this context, it might have been legitimate for Leibniz to regard the circle as virtuous, since there is a sense in which, absent the PSR, Leibniz would lack a demonstration that the ground of contingent beings had the characteristics that his concept of God includes. But, again, it leaves the claim that the PSR can be independently justified on the basis of its employment in proving God's existence looking implausible.

Section 127 is also devoted to claims about the relation between the PSR and natural philosophy. Here Leibniz suggests that there are "chimeras" (Letter 5, Sec. 127/LC 96), "fictions [or] spectres of imagination" (LC 5.48/Al 72), belief in which has resulted from the fact that that "it [i. e., PSR] has been neglected, out of carelessness, on many occasions" (Letter 5, Sec. 127/LC 95). Leibniz offers several examples, namely "an absolute real time or space, a vacuum, attraction in the scholastic sense, a physical influence of the soul over the body [and of the body over the soul]<sup>14</sup> and a thousand other fictions, either derived from erroneous opinions of the ancients, or lately invented by modern philosophers" (ibid.), among which he explicitly mentions, for the moderns Henry More's "spirits that can make themselves impenetrable" (Letter 5, Sec. 48/LC 72), and for the ancients Epicurus's "groundless declination of atoms" (Letter 5, Sec. 128/LC 96). But here again there is little of dialectical significance as Leibniz is drawing attention to claims that Clarke would, or does, either reject or embrace on different grounds.

## 7. The ubiquitous use of PSR

The previous section was concerned with arguments that turn on the relation between particular empirical truth claims and the PSR. But Leibniz also tries to argue for the PSR on more generic empirical grounds. In section 127 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Letter, we find the observation "Has not everybody made use of this principle upon a thousand occasions?" (Letter 5, Sec. 127/LC 95). Leibniz does not say more about why he takes this to be significant. But we might assume that he is suggesting that some kind of support for the PSR is to be found by observing that everyone is aware of having themselves relied on the principle to govern their activity and are aware that other people seem to have acted in this way as well.

Construed literally, the claim that we know from experience that *everyone* uses the PSR on many occasions is clearly problematic. But a more charitable reading, namely that experience shows that people generally employ the principle is more persuasive, at least if we understand it to mean that people generally engage in the practice of looking for reasons for things until they take themselves to have found a reason that satisfies their search. Perhaps the significance of the claim is supposed to lie in the thought that an, as yet, unfalsified commitment to the truth of a given proposition is good enough grounds for holding it true.

That this is what Leibniz intends receives further support from Section 129 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Letter where Leibniz turns again to facts about the actual use of PSR. Here he observes that he has "often defied people to allege an instance against that great principle, to bring any one uncontested example wherein it fails. But they have never done it, nor ever will"

<sup>14</sup> Material in brackets added by Clarke.

(Letter 5, Sec. 129/LC 96). In light of this, Leibniz suggests that “one may reasonably judge, that it will succeed also in unknown cases, or in such cases as can only by its means be known” (ibid.) and that the principle can be justified “according to the method of experimental philosophy which proceeds *a posteriori*” (ibid.). In other words, Leibniz is suggesting that there is an inductive case to be made for the truth of the PSR, given that our natural tendency to regard it as true is something that survives attempts to find counterexamples.

The claim that Leibniz has challenged people to come up with counterexamples parallels the better-known claim he makes about challenging companions to find two identical leaves in defence of the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles (see Letter 4, Sec. 4/LC 36). However, it is much less clear what he has in mind in this case. As I noted at the beginning of the paper, Leibniz provides no examples of sufficient reasons, and leaves us with the thought that “the principle of the best” might really be the only one where we are restricting our attention to claims about created reality.

But, in addition to this, some of the best-known receptions of Leibniz’s writings provide us with examples that strike some people as clear cases that defy the PSR if it is conceived as a principle that requires an appeal to divine reason. Here I am thinking of the various examples of ‘senseless’ suffering in Voltaire’s *Candide* and the only slightly less famous passages from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which Ivan discusses the problem of evil with his brother Alyosha and contemplates the torture of innocent children – focusing in particular on the case of an eight year old deliberately torn apart by hunting dogs in front of his mother on the command of a nobleman for a minor misdemeanor. (Dostoyevsky 1958, 284). We can interpret these examples in the conventional way, namely as challenges to Leibniz’s thesis that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds and, by extension, to the thesis that a God who conforms to a traditional theistic conception exists. But another way to put the point is to suggest that, insofar as there are events of this kind, they are events for which no sufficient reason could be given as Leibniz conceives of such a thing. For even if such a world were the best among those that could have been created, there would remain the issue of whether the creation of nothing remained the better option.

At least as problematic is Leibniz’s claim that the methods of experimental philosophy, i. e., inductive reasoning, can be used to justify the PSR. This is perhaps most straightforwardly read as the claim that past experience of the kind evinced suffices for no more than the rational expectation that PSR will succeed in future cases. But Leibniz makes the stronger claim that those who attempts to provide a counterexample “never will”, i. e., that the PSR is both an infallible principle and that this can be established through induction. Indeed, this is something that is further compounded by the fact that Leibniz is committed to the existence of an actual infinity of created beings (e. g., see GP 1.416; A 6. 4.1393/LoC 234–235). There is clearly scope for turning to Leibniz’s views about the logic of experimental philosophy at this point. But, to the extent that he is serious in his claim that the PSR holds universally, it is hard to see how there could be a plausible empirical justification.

For all of this, however, it is hard to shake the thought that Leibniz is onto something. It is hard to deny that a commonplace aspect of human thinking and communication is the tendency to ask why, and to be satisfied only when one has been given reasons that render events, situations, and truths intelligible to one. And, whilst it may not be the case

that the answers in such cases are sufficient reasons in the strict sense, there is a more ordinary sense in which we relent in a satisfied way when, and only when, we discover or are convinced that conditions the obtaining of which suffice for that about which we asked have been found to obtain. One need only interact with an inquisitive three year old to be reminded all too much of this phenomenon.

That said, such requests often seem to fall short of the demand for a reason in Leibniz's sense, i. e., one that will render them intelligible as the products of rational deliberation. Furthermore, they still leave us without a clear sense of why the tendency to make such demands should be regarded as grounds for the truth of the claim that there is such a reason. Indeed, interactions with three year olds often seem to suggest just the opposite. But whatever is the case here, it becomes clear from the following section of the 5<sup>th</sup> Letter that Leibniz does not want to rest his case entirely on such claims.

### 8. To deny PSR is to be reduced to absurdity

When offering his *a posteriori* justification in Section 129 of his 5<sup>th</sup> Letter Leibniz adds that it would hold “even if the principle were not otherwise justified by pure reason, or *a priori*” (Letter 5, Sec. 129/LC 96). And, whilst he is not explicit, it appears that Section 130 is intended to provide this *a priori* justification. Here Leibniz observes that “To deny this great principle, is likewise to do as Epicurus did; who was reduced to deny that other great principle, namely, the principle of contradiction; which is that every intelligible enunciation must either be true or false” (Letter 5, Sec. 130/LC 96). Leibniz does not explain just what the connection is between the denial of the PSR and the PC, however he adds “I believe reasonable and impartial men will grant me that having forced an adversary to deny that principle [i. e., the PSR] is reducing him *ad absurdum*” (Letter 5, Sec. 130/LC 96 – 97).

What we seem to be hovering around at this point is the thought that it is somehow a requirement on being a “reasonable” person that one accept the PSR, just as it would be unreasonable to deny the PC. One might wonder whether there are resonances here with the justification of induction that we find in the work of P. F. Strawson, namely that it is constitutive of the practice of thinking rationally about unobserved cases that we utilize induction (see Strawson 1952, 256–263). Might Leibniz be claiming that is constitutive of thinking rationally more generally that one think in accordance with the PSR?

If this is the position, one obvious worry is that Leibniz is yet again doing no more than offering his preferred conception of divine wisdom and presenting it as the blueprint for what it is think properly. And if this is the case, we seem to face the very same impasse that has arisen again and again in the debate between the two men. For why couldn't Clarke make exactly the same Strawsonian move employing his own conception of rationality? In the next section, I will build on this thought in offering a speculative rendition of the “abstruse” justification that Leibniz did not share with Clarke.

Before turning to this part of my discussion, I think it is worth taking stock a little. One conclusion of my discussion of all the preceding justifications might be that, given the views to which Clarke is wedded, Leibniz is in fact begging the question throughout. He repeatedly reasserts the connection between the fact that the universe emerges through rational activity as he conceives it and a view about what the rational structure of the

universe consists in. But this conception of the emergence of the created universe from the uncreated ground is not itself motivated via an appeal to any common commitments. The discussion has exposed fundamental differences between the commitments of the two men regarding the concepts that terms like ‘God’ and ‘sufficient reason’ express. But, given this, it seems clear that there could never have been a genuine expectation of agreement. Furthermore, it seems clear that this emerges much earlier in the discussion than the swansong.

At this point, we might wonder what Leibniz was really trying to do. Did he think he could convince Clarke? Indeed, was he even trying to do this, or was he perhaps playing to others whom he thought the correspondence might be reaching. We should remember that Clarke was liaising with Newton and that the discussions were always passing through the hands of Princess Caroline. Furthermore, he could have reasonably expected that the correspondence would be published. But, interesting as these questions are, there is nothing in the correspondence that seems to help us answer them. However, in my account of the ‘abstruse justification’, I will try to offer an account of how Leibniz might have spoken in favour of these fundamental commitments had he decided to elaborate on it.

### 9. The abstruse justification?

At this point we have covered almost all of what Leibniz has to say in favour of the PSR in his swansong. Indeed, previous misgivings notwithstanding, in Section 130, the very last of the correspondence, Leibniz claims that he has “already said, what is sufficient to justify [the PSR]” (Letter 5, Sec. 130/LC 96). But he then adds “I might say something more upon it, but perhaps it would be too abstruse for this present dispute” (ibid.). Unfortunately, nothing more is said, but at the risk of going completely off piste, I want to end with some speculative thoughts about what Leibniz’s abstruse thoughts might have been, based on writings other than the correspondence.

As we have now seen, the debate between Leibniz and Clarke appears to turn on a dispute over the proper conception of rationality, and the concept of God that embodies this conception. The question at hand is what other abstruse reason Leibniz might have given for arbitrating between them. I want to consider three separate approaches that have some basis in things that Leibniz says elsewhere, in order of abstruseness. Clearly, it is impossible to know which, if any, of these Leibniz had in mind. But I want to use the opaque nature of his claim to take the opportunity to engage in some rather liberal exegesis, recognizing that the main part of what I will say invites and demands a good deal of further exploration.

The first kind of consideration that Leibniz may have had in mind is perhaps not abstruse enough, given that it is a complaint that he levels throughout his life at those whom he perceives as defending a voluntarist conception of God.<sup>15</sup> But I think it is nonetheless worth mentioning. As we have seen, Clarke allows that divine willing might have taken place where there was no intelligible content that differentiated that which

<sup>15</sup> For a particularly clear discussion, see the *Meditation of the Common Concept of Justice* dating from 1703 (PW 45–51), and for useful discussion see Arthur 2014, 170–171.



was willed and that which was not. For Leibniz, this leaves Clarke in the position where there is no intellectual basis on which a judgement of the goodness of God's action can be determined. Furthermore, Leibniz believes that this leaves Clarke (assuming that he wishes to claim that God's activity is good) in an untenable position. For he is required to maintain that God's activity and its consequences are good simply in virtue of God's having willed them so, much as he was happy to claim that God's activity is reasonable simply because it is the product of his wisdom. The problem with this from Leibniz's perspective is that it entails that anything that God had willed would have counted as good, something that to his mind reduces God to a tyrant who is to be feared, rather than a good God who deserves love.

Aside from the fact that this justification is too commonplace in Leibniz's writings to really deserve the title 'abstruse', it again moves the debate along no further. For, as should be obvious by now, this kind of response would not have moved Clarke. It is simply a part of the package to which he was self-consciously committed. Indeed, it may have been for this reason that Leibniz did not think it worth adding this consideration explicitly despite its being common in his other work.

Another strategy that Leibniz might have adopted is more abstruse, at least in the sense that it is not one that he appeals to often. Indeed, the only occasion of which I am aware in which he does use this strategy is in a letter to Burcher de Volder, with whom he corresponded between 1698 and 1706. One of the key disputes between the two men concerns the proper conception of substance. Whilst the debate is very complex, we need take note of very little of that here. What is of interest is one among a number of Leibniz's response to De Volder's claim that substance is that which can exist independently of anything else.<sup>16</sup> In his letter of July 6, 1701 we find: "I might point out that your concept of substance does not seem to agree with those things that are commonly so called" (LDV 207). And Leibniz elaborates in his letter of December 27, 1701:

I admit that you are within your rights to understand the word *substance* so that God alone is a substance and other things are called something else. But it is my intention to look for a notion that will apply to others and agrees with ordinary ways of speaking, according to which you, I and others are counted as substances. (LDV 223)

What we see here appears to offer a means by which Leibniz might try to arbitrate between his and Clarke's conception of God, namely on the grounds that the proper conception ought to track the extension of the term 'God' as commonly employed. But, interesting as this strategy is, it is again hard to see that Clarke should have been moved by anything of this kind.

For one thing, the analogy with the concept of God is a little awkward. In the case of substance, Leibniz points to the fact that a class of entities that would generally be called substances, namely human beings, do not fall under the extension of De Volder's definition of the term. But Leibniz and Clarke are arguing about the properties that should be ascribed to a being to which they both take themselves to have successfully referred and which they both regard as the creator of the universe. Nonetheless, one might think that Leibniz could appeal to the thought that appeal to traditional understanding of the term should prevail in the case of the dispute over the proper understanding of the divine

<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of De Volder's views and other responses that Leibniz offered, see LDV li – lx.

nature. But, again, whatever the merits in the case of the term ‘substance’, this strategy would have been weak in the current context. It is true that in being adamantly opposed to divine voluntarism, Leibniz stood in a long line of philosophical theologians, stretching at least as far back as St Thomas Aquinas, who would have agreed with him. But there is an equally well-established tradition of divine voluntarists, including Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, who would have opposed him. Thus, to the extent that Leibniz could have appealed to common usage, he would have met equivocation of a kind that would have helped neither him nor Clarke. Thus, I want then to turn to another, even more speculative suggestion.

This consideration is drawn from a discussion of a little-known piece that probably dates from around 1693, which was given the title “Leibniz’s Philosophical Dream” by an early keeper of Leibniz’s papers.<sup>17</sup> In this complex piece, which might be thought to be Leibniz’s attempt at a version of Plato’s allegory of the cave, a journey is described in which Leibniz is brought by a pair of guides to the use of “intelligence or reason”. My analysis of it will be based on the, admittedly questionable, hermeneutic principle that we should take it as an account of Leibniz’s actual experiences in its essentials if not in all its imagery.

At the start of the piece Leibniz portrays himself as someone who “naturally loved to act well and to know the truth,” (LH 108) but he adds: “I was satisfied with what I was among men, but I was not satisfied with human nature” (ibid.). He describes the problem as arising because he “often considered with chagrin the hardships to which we are subjected” (ibid.) The particular hardships that Leibniz mentions at this point are “the shortness of our life, the vanity of glory, the improprieties that are born of sensual pleasure, the illnesses that overwhelm even our spirit; finally, the annihilation of all our greatness and all our perfections in the moment of death, which appears to reduce to nothing the fruits of our labors” (ibid.) Leibniz then adds: “these meditations left me full of melancholy,” and that “it appeared that I punished myself unnecessarily, that a successful crime was worth more than an oppressed virtue, and that a madness that is content is preferable to an aggrieved reason” (ibid.)

Implicit here is the thought that Leibniz was tempted to turn away from acting well and the pursuit of truth, given the despair he suffered when contemplating the stark reality of a finite human existence and the fact that acting well was often less well-rewarded than “successful crime” (ibid.). But next we are told that, at this point in his life, he “resisted these objections and directed [his] spirit on the right course by thinking about the divinity who must have given a proper order to everything and who sustained my hopes with the expectation of a future capable of redressing everything” (ibid.) However, he goes on to suggest that this alternate focus on a mode of life governed by religious belief was of limited help:

This conflict was renewed in me by the sight of some great disturbance, either among men, when I saw injustice triumph and innocence chastened, or in nature, when hurricanes or earthquakes

<sup>17</sup> See LH 108–111. This piece is also translated in the original *Everyman* edition of *The Philosophical Writings of Leibniz* which was translated by Mary Morris and published in 1934 (PWL 253–257). However, it is notable that it was left out of the volume, which was the standard introductory selection for many years, when it was re-edited by G. H. R. Parkinson in 1973 (PW). I quote from the translation by Donald Rutherford, from whom I take the dating, at (<http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/rutherford/Leibniz/translations/Dream.pdf>).

destroyed cities and provinces and caused thousands to die without distinguishing the good from the wicked, as though nature cared no more for us than we trouble ourselves about ants or worms that we encounter in our path. I was greatly moved by these spectacles and could not stop myself pitying the condition of mortals. (ibid.)

What follows next is a description of a dream which is said to have occurred at some point when Leibniz found himself "fatigued from these thoughts" (ibid.). The dream comprises a situation in which Leibniz finds himself in a cavern surrounded by people pursuing "luminous trifles they called 'honors', or glittering little flies they called 'riches'" and by "many who searched the ground for bright bits of wood they called 'sensual pleasures'" (LH 108–109). The fates of those following these "evil lights" vary. Some are said to have switched from one evil to another, some to have "quit the chase altogether because of exhaustion or despair", some "who ran blindly and often believed they had reached their goal fell into crevasses", and some "were bitten by scorpions and other venomous creatures that left them wretched and often mad" (LH 109). But not only does the dreamscape contain people who are drawn to worldly pursuits and suffer as a consequence, they are people who are presented as bound to this fate. For Leibniz adds:

Yet neither these examples nor the arguments of persons better informed stopped others from chasing the same hazards and even entering into fights in order to forestall rivals or keep themselves from being forestalled. (ibid.)

In the world of the dream, the tendency to fall prey to the horrors that are met by those who choose worldly pursuits is portrayed as impervious both to the observation that it yields misery and to the persuasion of those who might be able to provide arguments for behaving otherwise.

It is natural to ask at this point, where Leibniz positions himself in this scenario. But this is only possible once we add his description of the ultimate escape route.

In the vault of this huge cavern there were little holes and almost imperceptible cracks. Here a trace of daylight entered; yet it was so weak that it required careful attention to notice it. One frequently heard voices which said, "Stop you mortals, or run like the miserable beings you are." Others said, "Raise your eyes to the sky." (ibid.)

Leibniz suggests that "no one stopped" on account of these additional features. But this is not meant to imply that no one paid attention, since he quickly adds "I was one of those who was greatly struck by these voices. I began often to look above me and finally recognized the small light which demanded so much attention" (ibid.) As the dream continues, the light becomes the focal point of attention. Leibniz tells us that:

It seemed to me to grow stronger the more I gazed steadily at it. My eyes were saturated with its rays, and when, immediately after, I relied on it to see where I was going, I could discern what was around me and what would suffice to secure me from dangers. (ibid.)

At this point, Leibniz is told that the light signifies "what is called 'intelligence' or 'reason' in us" by a "venerable old man who had wandered for a long time in the cave and who had had thoughts very similar to mine" (ibid.).

In conjunction with the passage above, we can see that Leibniz is constructing a story according to which he chances upon the faculty of reason, is drawn to and overcome by it, and then relies on it. Leibniz is not explicit about the nature of this faculty, but throughout the discussion with Clarke we have seen Leibniz return to the thought that

commitment to his version of the PSR is at least partially constitutive of what it is to think properly and engage in rational activity. Indeed, it seems to me that this is what is implied in Sections 31 and 32 of the contemporary *Monadology*, when Leibniz observes that “Our reasonings are based on two great principles, that of contradiction [...] and that of sufficient reason” (GP 6.612 / PE 217). Thus I want to suggest that Leibniz’s reliance on guidance by this “light” is another statement of his commitment to a practice which involves a faculty whose operation includes taking things to accord with the PSR, and hence involves a commitment to the truth of the PSR.<sup>18</sup> This is clearly related to the Strawsonian idea mentioned above, but here there is something additional. For Leibniz suggests that “a venerable old man”, i. e., someone with legitimate authority (Plato himself perhaps?) has anchored the terms ‘reason’ and ‘intelligence’ to that faculty.

In this context there is no other game in town, so the contrast with Clarke’s conception of intelligence or reason is not made explicit. But there can be no doubt that it is the one that is favoured by Leibniz himself that is being discussed and sanctioned and, as such, that Clarke’s is being implicitly rejected. Thus, we find something that, to Leibniz’s mind at least, might lead us out of the impasse in his dealings with Clarke and voluntarism more generally. For what we also see is that Leibniz offers considerations that speak to why we might commit to a mode of being which is grounded in acting in accord with his conception of reason, and hence taking the PSR to be true. More precisely, he suggests that in virtue of this commitment he could: 1) see where he was going; 2) see what was present in his environment; and 3) see what would protect him from danger.

If we take these claims to be expressions of a justification for the PSR, they are perhaps best construed as pragmatic. For it is not so much that the PSR yields beliefs in propositions that are true, or indeed that the PSR is itself true that stands in its favour. Rather, it is because relying on the PSR (and thus taking it to be true) is constitutive of a practice whose value is said to lie in the facilitation of behavior that leads the world to show up to Leibniz in a particular way. Namely, it enables Leibniz to avoid the dangers to which other less luminous beings fall foul. So, in addition to the Strawsonian claim that Leibniz thinks of the taking the PSR to be constitutive of rational engagement with the world, we have a higher-order, *a posteriori*, justification for taking this conception of rational agency seriously. But, of course, it is not one whose grounds are represented as plausible as a matter of inductive generalization. If it is to provide additional warrant, we need to trust Leibniz as the author of the dream as a reliable authority independently of our own practice, or the practice of others.

If this were all Leibniz said, it would be interesting. But this is not the end of the dream. And what follows will perhaps be even more surprising to some readers. As dream-time proceeds, Leibniz describes himself exploring the ways in which reason might operate. Here he starts to make more of the fact that there is more than one hole through which the light shines, and talks of “chang[ing] position in order to test” (*ibid.*), presumably with regards to the benefits mentioned above. These experiments lead him to discover situations in which “several beams could be seen at once from their true point of view,” and observes that in cases such as these “I found a collection of rays which greatly enligh-

<sup>18</sup> As Sleight 1983, 192–196 points out the matter is complicated by the fact that Leibniz often appears to invoke other principles. However, the constitutive nature of the PSR and the PC does not appear to be in much doubt.

tened me. This technique was of great help to me and left me more capable of acting in the darkness" (ibid.)

Finally Leibniz "was led by [...] good fortune" to a position that "was unique and the most advantageous in the cave, a place reserved for those whom the divinity wished to remove completely from this darkness" (LH 109–10). At this point he became "surrounded by a bright light shining from all sides [and] the whole cave and its miseries were fully disclosed to [his] eyes" (LH 110). Next Leibniz goes on to describe a more enlightened state to which he is led by "a celestial messenger" (ibid.) The messenger tells him "Give thanks to the divine goodness which releases you from this madness," and takes him beyond the cave altogether to "a high mountain, which revealed to [him] the face of the earth" (ibid.) Here Leibniz finds he has a kind of telescopic vision available which allows him to focus on any part of the world and magnify it so that he can "see it as though it were next to [him]" (ibid.).

Leibniz mentions two consequences of this: First he reports that it "gave me a marvelous pleasure" (ibid.); but in addition that it "emboldened me to say to my guide: 'Mighty spirit – for I cannot doubt that you are of the number of those celestial figures who make up the court surrounding the sovereign of the universe—since you have wanted to clarify so my eyes, will you do as much for my mind?'" (ibid.) The celestial figure, at whose identity we can but guess, then grants the wish, given that he believes that Leibniz "holds wisdom above the pleasure of those vain spectacles the world presents to [his] eyes," (ibid.) with the following promise:

However, you will lose nothing that is substantial in those same spectacles. You will see everything with eyes clarified in a completely different way. Your understanding being fortified from above, it will discover everywhere the brilliant illumination of the divine author of things. You will recognize only wisdom and happiness, wherever men are accustomed to find only vanity and bitterness. You will be content with your creator; you will be enraptured with the vision of his works. Your admiration will not be the effect of ignorance as it is with the vulgar. It will be the fruit of knowledge of the grandeur and marvels of God. Instead of scorning with men the unraveled secrets, which in earlier times they regarded with astonishment, you will find that when you are admitted into the interior of nature your raptures will go on growing the farther you advance. For you will only be at the beginning of a chain of beauties and delights that go on growing into infinity. The pleasures that enchain your senses and that Circe of your legends who changes men into beasts will have no hold on you, so long as you attach yourself to the beauties of the soul, which never die and never disappoint. You will belong to our fold and will go with us from world to world, from discovery to discovery, from perfection to perfection. With us you will pay court to the Supreme Being, who is beyond all worlds and fills them without being divided. You will be at once before his throne and among those who are distant from it. For God will establish his siege in your soul and heaven follows him everywhere. (LH 110–111)

What Leibniz depicts here is an initiation into a mode of being which involves transportation into the presence of the "supreme being" with "eyes clarified in a completely different way". In other words, there is another step on the journey which involves commitment to the truth of the PSR. And it appears to offer something even more precious as a reward for adherence to that principle, namely acquisition of capacity for intellectual perception of a different order that allows telescopic acquaintance with the whole endlessly rich universe and the ability to navigate it seamlessly. Arguably then there is another justification for taking the PSR to be true. It relies on the thought that doing so will eventually lead

one to be inducted into a practice that is ‘cognitive’ and yet not governed by the PSR, i. e., a beatific vision which arises from intuitive cognition of the way things are and which is also attended by a sense of being in the presence of the divine and of being a cosmic traveler.

If anything like this reading is correct, then we are being offered yet another *a posteriori* justification for the PSR, but, of course there is an added dimension. For in order to find any of this remotely motivating one would have to be willing to listen to the testimony of the dreamer who is telling the story in ways that might sound even less plausible than the story about the security brought through taking the PSR as a principle that governed one’s activity. Moreover, what we would be trusting is that a transformation, whose nature is not described at all, other than as something delivered by a “celestial figure”, will take place if we become servants of reason in the more straightforward sense. Here it seems that what we will have to take on trust can perhaps only be characterized as a report of the fruits of an instance of personal revelation to Leibniz, albeit one which chimes with claims made by many authors in the Platonic tradition and, arguably, in non-Western traditions as well. Leibniz seems to be suggesting that the capacity to live in accordance with the PSR and belief in its truth is a gift he received at some point by chance by trusting the authority of another, and that this led him first to a situation in which he could cope in the world, but also on a road to an even more mysterious path where he was led by another authority to a place where he acquired a mode of cognition that transcended this.

Now, of course none of this was revealed to Clarke, and one can imagine why. Leibniz had not managed to persuade Clarke that his version of PSR was constitutive of rationality using his more mundane tools, which at least have the appearance of possessing argumentative structure. By contrast here he is saying something that might be thought to amount to little more than “trust me in the way I have trusted others”. But setting its relation to Clarke aside, there is of course the question of whether this could have been what Leibniz thought. There is nothing even this explicit in any other writing of Leibniz’s that I know – though I think one might be able to marshal a case that there are hints in the places where he is writing about natural theology in ways that break free of its relation to Christianity. So in pointing to these passages I certainly do not take myself to be making a scholarly case. But, if I am right, what we seem to find on offer is an additional, and perhaps the ultimate, justification for taking the PSR to be true. For if we trust the authority of Leibniz, however mysterious the process by which this is to be ultimately achieved, commitment to the truth of the PSR is justified as part of the journey to ultimate enlightenment.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> I would like to thank the following people for their helpful comments and advice on earlier versions of this paper: Greg Brown, Michael Della Rocca, Sam Levey, Owen Pikkert, Eric Schliesser, Amia Srinivasan, Mark Wrathall, and an anonymous reviewer for this journal. I would also like to thank members of audiences in Houston and Berlin to whom the paper was presented and, especially, John Whipple for his formal response in Houston.

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