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## Eternal Punishment, Universal Salvation and Pragmatic Theology in Leibniz

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In this chapter I will consider Leibniz's attitude towards the doctrines of eternal punishment and universal salvation. The question of Leibniz's views on this issue was the subject of a debate around half a century after Leibniz's death between Johann August Eberhard, who argued in his *Neue Apologie des Sokrates* [*New Apology for Sokrates*] (1772) that Leibniz had been a secret advocate of universal salvation, and Gorthold Ephraim Lessing, who argued in his *Leibniz on Eternal Punishment* (1773) that he adhered to the doctrine of eternal damnation.<sup>1</sup>

However, I will frame my discussion primarily as a response to a more recent defence of Lessing's position by Lloyd Strickland, according to whom "Leibniz held (and only ever held) the traditional view, i.e. that the wicked will suffer eternal punishment."<sup>2</sup> In arguing for this

<sup>1</sup> See Eberhard, *Neue Apologie des Sokrates and Lessing, Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 37–60.

<sup>2</sup> Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 308.

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view Strickland places himself at odds with other recent commentators who have sided with Eberhard. In particular, Strickland is keen to argue against the positions of Allison Coudert and Catherine Wilson, who have defended the view that, by the end of the 1690s, Leibniz supported the doctrine of universal salvation, i.e. the doctrine that the wicked would ultimately be saved after a period of punishment.<sup>3</sup>

After critically reviewing the case for both positions, I shall tentatively endorse another explanation for the texts that I consider. In arguing for this conclusion, I shall consider the way in which the doctrine of eternal punishment has been treated in a recent article by Robert Adams. Whilst I shall agree with Adams that we should regard Leibniz's position on the issue as resulting from practical reason rather than theoretical reason, I shall suggest that we should not follow Adams in thinking that this should lead us to regard Leibniz as a proponent of eternal punishment. Rather I shall argue that the texts are at least consistent with the hypothesis that Leibniz regarded eternal damnation and universal salvation as features of distinct theologies, whose appropriateness is determined by the extent to which they are capable of engendering "true piety" in their audiences.

## 1 Leibniz's Conception of Eternal Punishment and Salvation

Whilst the thesis of the rest of this chapter will not turn to any great extent on the way in which Leibniz understood the notions of salvation and eternal punishment, I want to begin by offering a brief sketch. One of the main functions of this section will be to reveal how far from everyday conceptions of the plight of the saved and damned Leibniz's thinking on these issues is. At no point are we offered a Dante-like vision

<sup>3</sup>Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, chapter 6, and Wilson, "The reception of Leibniz". As Strickland points out, Coudert offers a more nuanced view than Wilson in that she suggests that Leibniz changed his views over time and was committed to eternal punishment earlier in his career. Others who have endorsed some form of the thesis that Leibniz was committed to universal salvation include Anne Becco ("Leibniz et François-Mercure van Helmont") and Andrew Carlson (*The Divine Ethic of Creation in Leibniz*). The thesis that Leibniz was committed to the doctrine of eternal punishment is defended by Lucy Shear (*Eternal Damnation in Leibniz's Early Theology*) and Robert Adams ("Justice, happiness, and perfection").

of excruciating physical suffering or a contrasting view of salvation as a repose in a garden of earthly delights. The picture of our post-mortem reward or punishment is developed through an account of the psychological states that we will find ourselves in.

The discussion of punishment and reward after death occurs primarily in contexts where Leibniz is concerned with the problem of evil and the *prima facie* tension between the existence of eternal punishment and the existence of a benevolent God as traditionally conceived. Leibniz's most sustained discussion of damnation is to be found in the relatively early dialogue, *Confessio philosophi* [*The Philosopher's Confession*] (1672–3). In discussing the case of Judas, the character of the philosopher, who is most readily identified with Leibniz himself, observes that Judas' eternal punishment followed from "his burning hatred of God—the state in which he died and in which consists the nature of despair".<sup>4</sup> Leibniz goes on to explain that this "suffices for damnation"—i.e. eternal punishment—both because of the kind of suffering involved and the fact that, prior to resurrection, the soul has nothing to contemplate other than its own mental life. The plight is described as follows:

[F]rom the hatred of God, that is the most happy being, the greatest sadness follows, for *to hate* is to be sad about the happiness of the one hated (just as *to love* is to take joy in the happiness of the one loved), and therefore the greatest sadness arises in the case of hatred of the greatest happiness. The greatest sadness is misery or damnation.<sup>5</sup>

And, later in the dialogue, the grounds for thinking that it is eternal are explained thus:

Whoever dies malcontent dies a harer of God. And now he follows along the road on which he began, as if he were headed for the precipice; and not being held back by external things, since access to his senses has been closed off, he nourishes his soul, which has withdrawn into itself, with that hatred of things already begun, and with that misery and disdain, and with indignation, envy, and displeasure, all of them increasing more and more. When

<sup>4</sup>CP 35.

<sup>5</sup>CP 35–7.

he has been reunited with his body and his senses have returned, he endlessly finds new material for contempt, disapproval, and anger; and he is the more tormented the less he can change and endure the torrent of things that are displeasing to him.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, the damned are punished eternally because they die with a psychology that leads to the greatest misery and survive in such a way that this psychology does not alter in ways that would alleviate this.

*Confessio philosophi* also contains an account of the post-mortem existence that is enjoyed by "the blessed"<sup>7</sup> in which they are characterized as those who "have been admitted to God, i.e., to the universal harmony and the supreme reason, and have grasped it as if concentrated in a single stroke of vision".<sup>8</sup> They are said to "have delight without end because they multiply their delight to infinity by a more distinct reflection on the elements of their joy".<sup>9</sup> Leibniz frequently equates pleasure and joy with the perception of perfection,<sup>10</sup> where, as Leibniz tells Christian Wolff in 1715, "[p]erfection is the harmony of things ... that is, the state of agreement or identity in variety".<sup>11</sup> And right at the beginning of *Confessio philosophi* he equates "delight" with the "experience of harmony"<sup>12</sup> and observes that "the greatest harmony of the mind or happiness consists in the concentration of the universal harmony, i.e., God in the mind".<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere, Leibniz is clear that this salvation is not dependent on adherence to any particular dogma, observing that "no revealed article is absolutely necessary, and therefore it is possible to be saved in every Religion, provided that one truly loves God above all things".<sup>14</sup> Throughout his career Leibniz regards love as pleasure that is taken in the perfection

<sup>6</sup> CP 91. Also see CP 83.

<sup>7</sup> CP 83.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> For example, see AG 233 and PW 147.

<sup>11</sup> AG 233.

<sup>12</sup> CP 29–31.

<sup>13</sup> CP 31.

<sup>14</sup> AI 6, 144. Translation from Antognazza, "Theory and praxis in Leibniz's theological thought".

of the other.<sup>15</sup> Thus we can see that what Leibniz has in mind is that the salvation of the blessed comprises the happiness that arises through acquiring a stable perception of the perfection that is the infinite complexity of the universal harmony emerging from the infinite ground that is God's creative act. The blessed are those who have been admitted to God, i.e. those to whom this has become self-consciously available.

Clearly there is much more that could be said about Leibniz's conceptions of damnation and salvation. But the foregoing should suffice for present purposes, given that we are concerned with the issue of whether Leibniz was committed to the doctrine of eternal punishment or universal salvation. However, towards the end of the chapter I shall return briefly to the relationship between salvation and knowledge of God among those who are not among the blessed.

## 2 The Case for Leibniz's Commitment to the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment

The main plank on which Strickland rests his thesis is his thorough examination of the texts in which Leibniz discusses damnation. These range from the early 1670s all the way up to the last few years of Leibniz's life.

Strickland begins with a consideration of *Confessio philosophi*.<sup>16</sup> Here he suggests that the fact Leibniz "comes down firmly in favour of the doctrine of eternal punishment is not in doubt",<sup>17</sup> by alerting the reader to passages in which Leibniz discusses the way in which he speaks of "the damned" and those, such as the ones discussed in the preceding section, in which Leibniz conceives of their plight.<sup>18</sup>

Another passage offered by Strickland comes from a 1694 letter to Electress Sophie in which, after discussing a range of views on damnation, Leibniz adds "my own view is that punishments would only be

<sup>15</sup> For example, see PPL 137; PPL 150; AG 37; GP III, 386; AG 224.

<sup>16</sup> See Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 310–11.

<sup>17</sup> Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 309.

<sup>18</sup> CP 81, 83, 93 and 99.

eternal because of the eternity of sins".<sup>19</sup> Unsurprisingly, there are also a number of passages from the *Theodicee* [*Theodicy*] (1710) and the *Causa Dei* [*A Vindication of God*] (1710). In these we find Leibniz offering components of his account of how one might reconcile the eternal damnation of some creatures with divine perfection, in a context where he has explicitly acknowledged that "the pains of the damned continue, even when they no longer serve to turn them away from evil".<sup>20</sup>

At first glance the case that Strickland makes above might look unsalable. He provides passages from throughout Leibniz's career that include detailed discussion of the nature of eternal punishment and its justification as part of the creative act of a perfect God. However, I think that this may not be the whole story. I do not want to disagree with Strickland's claim that "[w]hatever doubts we may have about the quality of the arguments Leibniz used to support the doctrine of eternal punishment, it is ... clear that he did endorse it".<sup>21</sup> However, I want to offer considerations that suggest that the inference from the claim that Leibniz endorsed the view to the conclusion that he held it is defeasible given the evidence that Strickland presents.

I want to turn first to the places in which Strickland discusses the *Confessio philosophi*. Strickland draws attention to passages relatively late in the work in making his case for eternal punishment. In fact the issue is introduced much earlier in the dialogue and receives more detailed consideration a few pages later when the case of Judas is discussed.<sup>22</sup> Again, at first glance, these initial passages seem only to strengthen Strickland's case. In response to the statement, "[f]or example, Judas was damned", the character of the philosopher responds, "[w]ho doesn't know that?"<sup>23</sup> and this leads to a discussion of the way in which Judas' state of mind at death lead naturally to his being trapped in the unending hatred of God which Leibniz equates with eternal damnation here and elsewhere.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> LITS 104. Strickland notes that we find the same sentiment in a 1705 in a series of notes on *An Answer to the Query of a Deist* (TI 249).

<sup>20</sup> H 162. See H 162; H 205; H 290; H 292. MPE 126.

<sup>21</sup> Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 317.

<sup>22</sup> *Confessio philosophi* takes up 33 pages in the Akademie edition, i.e. A VI 3, 116–49, and the earliest passage which Strickland cites is from A VI 3, 138.

<sup>23</sup> CP 93.

<sup>24</sup> CP 35–7. Also see CP 83; SLT 204.

However, if we look closer things seem less clear-cut to me. Leibniz begins his consideration of the problem of damnation after providing a proof of the claim that God is just because he loves everyone. At this point the conversation goes as follows:

TH: Little is left for me to say [to confirm] that you have demonstrated that. Certainly I believe that no one, even among those who deny universal grace, will contradict what you say, provided they understand the words in the sense in which you use them, which is not in conflict with the general usage.

PH: That is what I claim can be deduced from their own opinion. For when they assert that God loves only the elect they clearly mean that he loved some in preference to others (for this is to *elect*) and that accordingly, since not everyone could be saved ... some, less loved, were *rejected*, not by God's willing it ... but by God's permitting it when the nature of things demanded it.<sup>25</sup>

Here we can see that the entire discussion of the issue of damnation in *Confessio philosophi* is framed by the thought that there needs to be something that can be said to a particular group of people—"those who deny universal grace", for whom "not everyone could be saved"—in order that the love of God not be compromised. But Leibniz remains neutral on the issue of whether this antecedent view is one that he supports.

The same phenomenon recurs when we look at the discussions in the *Theodicee*. Leibniz's discussion of damnation occurs within the context of a general defence of the perfection of God in the face of the existence of evil. However, it appears only after the following introduction:

The difficulties which I have endeavoured up to now to remove have been almost all common to natural and revealed theology. Now it will be necessary to come to a question of revealed theology, concerning the election or the reprobation of men, with the dispensation or use of divine grace in connexion with these acts of the mercy or the justice of God.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> CP 31.

<sup>26</sup> H 163.

That there are reprobrates is a piece of revealed theology. And, whilst it is clear that Leibniz wants to provide an explanation of how the doctrine of eternal damnation is rationally comparable with belief in a perfect God, there is no indication from Leibniz regarding his own views about the truth of this particular revelation.

The second challenge that I want to pose for Strickland's interpretation is based on a passage from a letter to Lorenz Hertel from 1695 in which Leibniz is commenting on the book *Seder Olam* [*The Order of the World*].<sup>27</sup>

All that can be said about that [i.e. the doctrine of universal salvation] is that it would be true if it were possible, and if divine justice could allow it. But as we do not know the depths of it [i.e. divine justice], it is safer not to advance opinions which are not soundly established and can be harmful since they are capable of keeping sinners in their security. It is very true that there would not be an eternity of punishments if there were not an eternity of sins. For sinners damn themselves, so to speak, and keep themselves in damnation by continuing to sin.<sup>28</sup>

Pace Strickland, who sees this passage as yet further evidence of Leibniz's commitment to eternal damnation<sup>29</sup> it seems to me that this is again at best neutral—though one might wonder whether Leibniz's suggestion that universal salvation “would be true if it were possible” indicates a more positive assessment.

More importantly, this passage appears to indicate that Leibniz thinks widespread acceptance of universal salvation would be a dangerous thing and that, given that we have limited epistemic access to the details of how divine justice plays itself out in the actual world, it is “safer” not to promote the doctrine. Here Leibniz commits himself to a view which would lead one to expect him to endorse the doctrine of eternal punish-

<sup>27</sup> Strickland notes (“Leibniz on eternal punishment”, 311 n.14) that this book is sometimes attributed to Leibniz's friend Francis Mercury van Helmont, but was in fact by an anonymous author “upon the leave of F. M. Baron of Helmont”, according to the title page.

<sup>28</sup> A I 11, 21. Translation taken from <http://www.leibniz-translations.com/hertel.htm> (accessed 6 January 2016).

<sup>29</sup> See Strickland, “Leibniz on eternal punishment”, 311.

ment in public works such as the *Theodicee* and *Confessio philosophi* as a matter of pragmatic theology whatever his own beliefs.<sup>30</sup>

An apparently more damning text for my claim is the following one:

And so it must be established whether it was indeed possible for all men to be saved, and the fall of Adam prevented, but that has not happened, because God, according to the nature of his wisdom, has willed to choose the most perfect out of the infinite series of possibles. But the nature of possible things makes it so that that series which contains an Adam who does not fall, and in which all men are saved, is not the most perfect; I judge this to be so from the outcome, since such a series was not chosen.<sup>31</sup>

It is hard to know whether Leibniz is speaking in his own voice or not in this passage, given that it is a reading note which was never incorporated into a finished text. But here again I want to suggest that we should be willing to consider the thought that Leibniz is speaking about the place of universal salvation in revealed doctrine, and again recognize, in light of the claims about “safety” above, that if this is the case we should expect Leibniz to say just this kind of thing independently of his own views.

### 3 The Case for Leibniz's Commitment to the Doctrine of Universal Salvation

In the previous section, whilst acknowledging Leibniz's endorsement of the doctrine of eternal punishment, I presented considerations that might lead one to question the textual case that Strickland makes for Leibniz's personal belief in eternal punishment. At this point I want to turn to his critique of evidence that others have presented in favour of Leibniz's adherence to universal salvation.

In a discussion of the reception of Leibniz's works by Eberhard and Lessing, Catherine Wilson draws attention to the fact that Leibniz actively sought to reprint Ernst Soner's *Demonstratio Theologica et Philosophica*,

<sup>30</sup> I shall return to the notion of pragmatic theology and its relation to Leibniz's thinking towards the end of the chapter.

<sup>31</sup> TT 340–1. Translation taken from Strickland, “Leibniz on eternal punishment”, 321.

*quod aeterna impiorum supplicia non arguant Dei iustitiam, sed iniustitiam* [A Theological and Philosophical Demonstration that the Eternal Punishments of the Impious do not Prove the Justice of God but His Injustice] (1603).<sup>32</sup> Whilst the reprinting did not occur, Leibniz drafted a preface in which he offered a counter-argument to Soner's key thesis. Soner had argued that eternal damnation would be incompatible with divine justice, given the finite nature of human sin. Leibniz responded that, whilst each sin would be finite, the number of sins committed over an eternal duration would be infinite.<sup>33</sup>

Wilson argues that, despite the content of the preface, Leibniz's interest in reprinting the book is evidence of his sympathy for the contents. Her thinking here is twofold. Citing Adolf von Harnack's *History of the Prussian Academy* as evidence,<sup>34</sup> she observes that Leibniz "was a strong proponent of censorship for dangerous books".<sup>35</sup> With this in mind, she takes Leibniz's desire to reprint with a critical preface as evidence of his wanting to get the ideas into the public domain without the repercussions of having them associated with his name.

Whilst recognizing that this might appeal to a human tendency to look for hidden agendas, Strickland suggests that "such thoughts can, in this case, be dispelled easily enough".<sup>36</sup> His evidence for this comes from comments that Leibniz made on Christoph Stegmann's *On the Unitarian Metaphysics*. Towards the beginning of this essay Leibniz observes:

[W]hen, during a recent examination of old papers, I came across these criticisms of mine of Stegmann's metaphysics, I thought that, once revised, they might be usefully published together with the author's own book. I had no fear that it would be harmful, especially when accompanied by this antidote, which I thought would not only break the force of this poison but also act as a remedy.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, "The reception of Leibniz", 460.

<sup>33</sup> See LGR 325–6 for a translation of the whole preface.

<sup>34</sup> See von Harnack and Köhnke, *Geschichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, II, 95.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, "The reception of Leibniz", 473 n.51.

<sup>36</sup> Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 326.

<sup>37</sup> Translated by Nicholas Jolley (see Jolley, *Leibniz and Locke*, 1985).

As Strickland points out "what this passage tells us is that Leibniz did not have to be sympathetic to the ideas of others in order to want to reprint their work".<sup>38</sup> Whilst this doesn't rule out Wilson's conjecture altogether, of course, it clearly weakens the positive force of the evidence that she presents.

Another attempt to provide evidence for Leibniz's commitment to universal salvation has been offered by Allison Coudert. This comes from consideration of another instance of Leibniz's engagement with the works of others. In this case, however, it is in the form of his encouraging Johann Wilhelm Petersen, who was both a millenarian and advocate of universal salvation, to write an epic poem by the name *Uranias*, which was finally published in 1720. Leibniz describes the plan for the poem in a letter he sent to Johann Fabricius in 1711:

It [*Uranias*] would have to begin with cosmogony and paradise, which would be the subject of the first book, or even the first and second. The third, fourth and fifth, if it were thought fit, would relate the fall of Adam and redemption of mankind through Christ, and touch on the history of the church. Then I would readily allow the poet to give in the sixth book a description of the millennial reign, and to depict in the seventh the anti-Christ invading with Gog and Magog, and finally overthrown by a breath from the divine mouth. In the eighth we would have the day of judgement and the punishments of the damned; in the ninth, tenth and eleventh, the happiness of the blessed, the grandeur and beauty of the City of God and of the abode of the blessed, and excursions through the immense spaces of the universe to illuminate the wonderful works of God; one would also add a description of the heavenly palace itself. The twelfth would end everything with the restitution of all things, that is, with the evil themselves reformed and restored to happiness and to God, with God henceforth operating all in all without exception. Here and there one might engage in a more sublime philosophy mixed with mystical theology, where the origin of things would be treated in the manner of Lucretius, Vida and Fracastor. A poet would be forgiven for things which would be harder to tolerate from a dogmatic theologian. Such a work would make its author immortal and could be wonderfully useful for moving the souls of men to hope for a better state and for lighting the sparks of a more genuine piety.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 326.

<sup>39</sup> LGR 300–1.

The key point here is the fact that Petersen is encouraged to present a version of universal salvation in the twelfth and final book. For Couderf, albeit when she is discussing a different iteration of Leibniz's design for the poem in a letter written for Petersen in 1706, this is evidence that Leibniz himself embraced universal salvation. Couderf herself is not explicit about why she regards the passage as evidence, but presumably it is because Leibniz is publicly advocating the propagation of the doctrine.<sup>40</sup>

Strickland counters this argument by noting that the poem was also supposed to describe a history of the world that included a millennial age, when "there is solid evidence from elsewhere to suggest that he was not a millenarianist".<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Strickland observes that in a later letter to Fabricius of 10 March 1712, Leibniz notes that the twelfth book of *Uranias*, "deals with an opinion which I do not condemn at all, but which I am not willing to make my own".<sup>42</sup>

It seems far from clear that Leibniz's inclusion of millenarianism gives us direct evidence that Leibniz did not believe in universal salvation. However, as with Wilson's claims about Soner, the evidence for Leibniz's commitment to universal salvation in this passage seems at best neutral. All we have is Leibniz telling a correspondent that he will neither condemn nor embrace it.

#### 4 What Did Leibniz Really Think?

In the previous sections, I have considered a number of pieces of evidence that have been presented for and against the theses that Leibniz believed in the doctrines of eternal punishment and universal salvation. My suggestion has been that neither side has a compelling case. Strickland's evidence for eternal punishment consists of passages that all occur in

<sup>40</sup> See Couderf, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, 115. Couderf is not entirely explicit about why she regards the passage as evidence. This is a 1706 reply to a letter from Petersen, which may in fact never have been sent (see Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 327–8).

<sup>41</sup> Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 329. Also see Cook and Strickland, "Leibniz and millenarianism" and Antognazza and Horson, *Alestad and Leibniz on God*.

<sup>42</sup> Durens 5, 297 (translation from Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 329).

contexts where Leibniz is explaining how orthodox views in revealed theology about damnation can be made consistent with the justice of God. But they are not supported by direct evidence that Leibniz himself accepted these doctrines. And when we turn to the evidence for a commitment to universal salvation it again seems equivocal. There is no clear link to be made between Leibniz's support for the public presentation of universalist views and his own personal commitments.

One might be tempted at this point to suggest that we should leave things and accept that there is no way to decide what Leibniz himself really thought. However, if we return to Leibniz's relationship with Petersen, further evidence emerges that suggests that Leibniz may himself have held neither view. If we turn to the passage from the letter to Petersen that Couderf cites, we find a significantly different account of the significance of the section of the poem which recounts universal salvation. Leibniz's suggestions are much more programmatic at this stage and all he says about future times is the following:

The second part [of the poem] should treat the future as it pertains to the body and soul. Here the purification of souls and the restitution of all things, or rather their gradual improvement and elevation, could be discussed.<sup>43</sup>

When Petersen finally got round to writing the lengthy poem it included a restitution in terms of the more traditional notion of universal salvation. Leibniz was dissatisfied with the work in a number of ways and set about rewriting parts of it, telling Fabricius on 8 January 1712 "I have changed many things"<sup>44</sup> and a month later: "I often encounter whole passages which need to be improved and substituted with others".<sup>45</sup> As time went on, Leibniz found himself drawn into further work revising the poem. By 22 January 1715, he was telling Fabricius "I have expended much effort on it, in order to polish and recall to order a thing too hastily

<sup>43</sup> HD 25. The translation here and those in the next paragraph are from Antognazza and Horson, *Alestad and Leibniz on God*, 193–6, excepting the last, which is from Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 329.

<sup>44</sup> Durens 5, 296.

<sup>45</sup> Durens 5, 297.

written,<sup>46</sup> and a letter to Fabricius from 6 July 1716 indicates that Leibniz continued with revisions which were unfinished by the time of Leibniz's death later that year.<sup>47</sup> However, none of this rewriting covered the account of universal salvation. Indeed, it was whilst discussing the rewriting that he observed to Fabricius that this part of *Uranias* "deals with an opinion which I do not condemn at all, but which I am not willing to make my own".<sup>48</sup> But although *Uranias* itself did not include anything other than the doctrine of universal salvation, the composition of the poem did yield additional reflection on future times by Leibniz. In fact, in 1715 Leibniz composed two short works entitled *Απογοῶνσις πᾶντων* (*The Restitution of all Things*) and *Απογοῶνσις* (*The Restitution*) respectively.<sup>49</sup> In these works, Leibniz interprets restitution in terms of a "continually ascending spiral"<sup>50</sup> which allows for the unending perfection of individual souls.<sup>51</sup> And, just a year later, the motto "*Inclinata resurget*" [that which declines will rise again] was carved in the image on his coffin.<sup>52</sup>

I think it is plausible to think that this view is also present in a better known, and unpublished, work *De rerum origine radicali* [*On the ultimate origination of things*]:

Furthermore, it must be recognized that there is a perpetual and most free progress of the whole universe towards a consummation of the universal beauty and perfection of the works of God, so that it is always advancing towards greater cultivation, just as now a great part of our earth has received cultivation, and will receive it more and more ... And to the objection that could be raised: that if this was so the world would already have been made paradise, my response is ready: although many substances have already come to great perfection, nevertheless because of the divisibility to infinity of the continuum, there always remain in the abyss of things parts that hitherto have been asleep, to be awakened and to be driven on to something

<sup>46</sup> Durens 5, 301.

<sup>47</sup> See Durens 5, 301.

<sup>48</sup> Durens 5, 297.

<sup>49</sup> HD 60–77 and HD 110–17.

<sup>50</sup> Antognazza and Hoson, *Aleisd and Leibniz on God*, 212.

<sup>51</sup> Also see the account given by Michel Fichant at HD 204–8 and in Antognazza, *Leibniz*, 540–3.

<sup>52</sup> See Antognazza *Leibniz*, 545.

greater and better, and as I may put it in a word, to a better state of cultivation. And hence progress never comes to an end.<sup>53</sup>

This passage contains claims that are in direct tension with the thesis of eternal punishment. But it also allows us to see why Leibniz's preferred metaphysical theory precludes a full-blown universalism. For given the infinite number of substances that comprise the actual world there will never be a time at which they have all reached a state of perfection sufficient for the achievement of salvation.<sup>54</sup>

If we assumed that some version of the doctrine of future times expressed in the *Απογοῶνσις* texts was the one that should be regarded as Leibniz's official account, we would have an answer to the original question that I posed at the beginning of this chapter. Leibniz was a proponent of neither eternal punishment nor universal salvation. However, this leaves us with a residual puzzle, namely why Leibniz was willing to write, or at least support others in writing, in ways that contradict that view.

This puzzle is not, of course, one that occurs only for the interpretation that I am supporting. Given Strickland's commitment to the view that Leibniz was an advocate of the doctrine of eternal punishment, he has a similar burden to discharge with respect to Leibniz's involvement with *Uranias*. And I am going to draw first on Strickland's speculations about Leibniz's motivations for encouraging the writing of *Uranias*.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> SLT 38.

<sup>54</sup> The process by which this progress to salvation is achieved in any given case is not something on which Leibniz offers much opinion. However, it is possible to see his apparent sympathy for the doctrine of purgatory (see Strickland, "Leibniz's philosophy of purgatory") as suggestive of the inclusion of demythologized equivalent in which post-mortem existence involves a slow education in which past sins must be punished for the sake of the progress they give rise to.

<sup>55</sup> In another discussion of universal salvation D. P. Walker suggests that Leibniz might have thought that the denouement of *Uranias* was "more conducive to true piety than that of eternal torment", and that "the exoteric, useful but untrue doctrine is universal salvation, while eternal torment is the esoteric, dangerous but true doctrine" (*The Decline of Hell*, 216). Walker suggests that, in light of this, Leibniz may have been happy to encourage the propagation of a useful view as long as he didn't have to explicitly subscribe to it. As Strickland points out, Walker's claims seem somewhat confused (see Strickland, "Leibniz on eternal punishment", 330). The evidence does not suggest that Leibniz regarded eternal punishment as a dangerous doctrine. Indeed, as we have already seen, at least earlier in his career, he seems to have regarded propagation of universal salvation as the more risky strategy. Furthermore, it is hard to believe that Leibniz could have regarded eternal damnation as esoteric, given that it was a mainstream doctrine and one that Leibniz did not deviate from in his public discussions.



Strickland closes his paper by returning to the passage from 1712 in which Leibniz refers to universal salvation as “a thesis that I do not in the least condemn,”<sup>56</sup> and claims that this suggests that Leibniz “no longer considered it to be harmful in the way that he had [earlier in his career].”<sup>57</sup> His preferred explanation for this is that Leibniz regarded universal salvation a “useful lie” to tell.<sup>58</sup> Whilst Strickland does not say much about the kind of utility that he has in mind, he observes that “It might be tempting to think that Leibniz considered universal salvation a useful lie for those who considered the doctrine of eternal punishment a barrier to faith.”<sup>59</sup> But he then expresses scepticism about this explanation, noting “I can find no evidence to suppose that he did think this.”<sup>60</sup> The “more plausible” suggestion for Strickland is as follows:

[Leibniz] considered it useful in the very role he suggested for it, namely as the conclusion to an epic theological poem whose goal is to inspire and edify. In that context universal salvation is, as it were, the ultimate happy ending, a fitting last act in an epic cosmic drama in which good not only vanquishes evil but destroys it utterly; as such it serves as a clever poetic device quite able to uplift, promote piety and inspire hope, irrespective of whether one believes it to be true.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst it is not based on any direct evidence, Strickland thinks that this chimes with the remarks in Leibniz’s second set of comments on the poem and another place in which he (Leibniz) observes that for most people “something is needed which stirs passions and ravishes souls, as does music and poetry.”<sup>62</sup>

I do not have evidence to refute what Strickland suggests here—indeed, it might be that any explanation will ultimately be irrefutable. However, I

<sup>56</sup> Durans 5, 297. Translation from Strickland, “Leibniz on eternal punishment”, 331.

<sup>57</sup> Strickland, “Leibniz on eternal punishment”, 331.

<sup>58</sup> Strickland, “Leibniz on eternal punishment”, 330.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> IGR 149. Also see Antagonazza and Hotson’s suggestion that *Uranus* “is far more able to arouse love of God and hope for better things” than Leibniz’s own philosophical reasonings (*Alsted and Leibniz on God*, 198).

want to offer an alternative explanation for Leibniz’s apparent vacillation between eternal punishment, universal salvation and unending progress, all of which are advocated towards the end of his career. Here I shall draw on remarks that we find in the Preface to the *Theodiceë*.

Leibniz begins the Preface by drawing a distinction between “true piety” and its imitation in “the outward forms of religion”, where the “principles and practice” of the former are expressed as “formularies of belief” and “ceremonial practices”.<sup>63</sup> Leibniz does not provide examples of either when he introduces these distinctions. But we later discover that “true piety ... consist[s] in the love of God, but a love so enlightened that its fervour is attended by insight”,<sup>64</sup> where the insight in question comprises the knowledge of the divine perfections. After observing this, Leibniz describes the consequences of true piety for the pious individual:

This kind of love begets that pleasure in good actions which gives relief to virtue, and, relating all to God as to the centre, transports the human to the divine. For in doing one’s duty, in obeying reason, one carries out the orders of Supreme Reason. One directs all one’s intentions to the common good, which is no other than the glory of God. Thus one finds that there is no greater individual interest than to espouse that of the community, and one gains satisfaction for oneself by taking pleasure in the acquisition of true benefits for men. Whether one succeeds therein or not, one is content with what comes to pass, being once resigned to the will of God and knowing that what he wills is best. But before he declares his will by the event one endeavours to find it out by doing that which appears most in accord with his commands. When we are in this state of mind, we are not disheartened by ill success, we regret only our faults; and the ungrateful ways of men cause no relaxation in the exercise of our kindly disposition. Our charity is humble and full of moderation, it presumes not to domineer; attentive alike to our own faults and to the talents of others, we are inclined to criticize our own actions and to excuse and vindicate those of others. We must work out our own perfection and do wrong to no man. There is no piety where there is not charity; and without being kindly and beneficent one cannot show sincere religion.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> H 49.

<sup>64</sup> H 51.

<sup>65</sup> H 51–2.

One thing that is striking here is the way in which this account relates to the account of Leibniz's conception of damnation and salvation that I outlined in the first section of this chapter. As we saw, Leibniz presents the plight of those who are eternally punished as one that befalls those who die hating God and his creation and are unable to reverse this sentiment. And salvation consists in a self-conscious perception of the perfection of God and the universal harmony of the created universe. Given this, we might speculate that, for Leibniz, salvation and true piety are essentially one and the same thing.

If this is correct, there are two somewhat surprising corollaries. Firstly, it appears that Leibniz regards salvation as something that can be attained in the present life; and, secondly, it is something independent of any of the traditional Christian conceptions of post-mortem divine judgement that comprise what he calls the "formularies of belief" concerning these issues.

But these are not the only relevant resources available in the Preface when it comes to the question of Leibniz's views on eternal punishment and salvation. Consider the following:

[O]urward forms [of religion] would be commendable if those who had invented them had rendered them appropriate to maintain and express that which they imitate - if religious ceremonies, ecclesiastical discipline, the rules of communities, human laws were always like a hedge round the divine law, to withdraw us from any approach to vice, to inure us to the good and to make us familiar with virtue. That was the aim of Moses and of other good lawgivers, of the wise men who founded religious orders, and above all of Jesus Christ, divine founder of the purest and most enlightened religion. It is just the same with the formularies of belief: they would be valid provided there were nothing in them inconsistent with truth unto salvation, even though the full truth concerned were not there.<sup>66</sup>

What this passage suggests is that, for Leibniz, religious doctrines are legitimated in virtue of the contribution that they make to our salvation, i.e. the acquisition of true piety. If this is correct, then it offers a possible solution to the problem that Strickland has located regarding Leibniz's apparent change of heart on universal salvation and, *a fortiori*, the threefold approach that I have suggested we find in Leibniz's account of future times.

<sup>66</sup> H 49–50.

As Robert Adams has argued, Leibniz's approach to theology is significantly informed by pragmatic considerations.<sup>67</sup> Leibniz tells Thomas Burnet in a letter of 1/11 February 1697 that he regards some theological propositions as ones which can be "demonstrated absolutely, with metaphysical necessity and in an incontestable manner".<sup>68</sup> However, these do not include propositions of revealed theology, which he regarded as having at best "moral certainty".<sup>69</sup> Adams notes that Leibniz associates this weaker epistemic modality with practical philosophy and "the art of estimating the degrees of proof",<sup>70</sup> or, in other words, probable reasoning. And he argues that in cases where probable reasoning is involved, there will be an ineliminable appeal to practical reason as far as acceptance or rejection of the proposition is concerned. As Adams puts it:

In terms native to our discourse of probability, not Leibniz's, where the probability of the proposition is less than 1.0, acceptance of the proposition must be justified by expected utilities, and not by theoretical probabilities of truth alone.<sup>71</sup>

Adams also notes that in Leibniz's theological writings the added element brought by practical reason is often expressed in terms of what it is safe or harmful to believe. And in this respect, Leibniz aligns himself with one side of a traditional debate concerning the question of whether theology is a theoretical or a practical science, namely with the latter, and accordingly places himself in the company of St Bonaventure rather than St Thomas Aquinas.<sup>72</sup>

Returning to the issue of eternal punishment and universal salvation, I want to consider further the relationship between Leibniz's pragmatic

<sup>67</sup> See Adams, "Leibniz's Examination of the Christian Religion", 536–41, and Adams, "Justice, happiness, and perfection", 213–18. The theme of pragmatism in Leibniz's theology is also discussed in Antognazza, "Theory and praxis in Leibniz's theological thought".

<sup>68</sup> GP III, 193. Translation from Daclot, *The Art of Controversies*, 365.

<sup>69</sup> H 76.

<sup>70</sup> GP III, 193. Translation from Daclot, *The Art of Controversies*, 366.

<sup>71</sup> Adams, "Justice, happiness, and perfection", 214.

<sup>72</sup> See Adams, "Justice, happiness, and perfection", 215. For Aquinas, see *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 1a.4; for Bonaventure *In primum librum sententiarum*, Proemium q. 3 (Bonaventure, *Opera Omnia* vol. 1, 12–14).

theology and the case that Strickland makes for his commitment to eternal punishment. In responding to Strickland's argument, I suggested that the fact that Leibniz offered a defence of the doctrine of eternal punishment grounded in its safety was reason to be sceptical with regard to the further conclusion that he was himself committed to the doctrine.

Adams considers this very doctrine in the context in which he sketches his account of Leibniz's pragmatic theology. Here he focuses on the passage from Leibniz's letter to Herrel and draws the conclusion that:

He argues ... that it is *practically unwise* to adopt the universalism because we can foresee moral and spiritual harm that might result from it, and because it is not ecclesiastically established as a revealed doctrine as the rival doctrine of eternal punishment is.<sup>73</sup>

This much seems consistent with the texts that I considered above, where Leibniz emerges as someone who tries to show that the doctrine of eternal damnation is rationally admissible as a piece of revealed theology in the context of concerns about theodicy. But Adams takes this recommendation of adoption as indicative of Leibniz himself having a sincere belief in the doctrine by way of the following reasoning.

I assume that [Leibniz] was sincerely committed, so to speak, and more generally to act, on the assumption that the doctrine is true, and that he sincerely regarded the doctrine as having at least the minimum theoretical probability required to sustain such a commitment to a practically advantageous proposition. (Given his epistemology, what more by way of sincerity of belief can we reasonably expect of him?)<sup>74</sup>

But earlier in his paper Adams draws attention to Leibniz's discussion of universal salvation in the *Theodicee*, noting that "Leibniz expresses himself indecisively"<sup>75</sup> and that his "own propositional attitudes are hard to pin down."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Adams, "Justice, happiness, and perfection", 217.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Adams, "Justice, happiness, and perfection", 212.

<sup>76</sup> Adams, "Justice, happiness, and perfection", 213.

I do not want to suggest that we are in a position to pin them down either. However, it seems to me that the move from observing that Leibniz did not advocate universalism to the conclusion that he himself acted "on the assumption that the doctrine [of eternal punishment] is true" is somewhat premature. And, it is here that I want to return to the role that Leibniz played in the publication of Petersen's *Uranias* and his writing of the *Αποχρηδότης* texts.

It seems at least possible that Leibniz's conception of theology was pragmatic enough that he might have regarded both the doctrine of eternal punishment and the doctrine of universal salvation as admissible provided they were consumed by the appropriate audience. For, given the remarks that we find in the Preface of the *Theodicee*, it seems that Leibniz's concern with dogma is largely (perhaps entirely) a function of the role that they might play in engendering true piety and the salvation that comprises.

If this is the case, it would allow us to provide an explanation for distinct accounts of the punishment and reward in the afterlife to emerge in *Confessio philosophi* and the *Theodicee* to the one in *Uranias*. I suggested above that the former seems to have been designed to preserve belief in a perfect (and hence lovable) God in an audience for whom damnation was an article of faith that they were unlikely to give up. Furthermore, given Leibniz's comments about the safety of this strategy, one might think that this would have been regarded as the most appropriate vehicle for promotion of true piety among a late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century audience. By contrast, the support for *Uranias* might have been fuelled by the recognition of the emergence of readers with more liberal inclinations, for whom a religion that included eternal damnation could be nothing other than an obstacle to true piety and the salvation it comprises. The suggestion then is that Leibniz left the universalist elements of *Uranias* as they were because he thought it would work for some, but that he was pessimistic about its utility for most of his contemporaries who would have been steeped in traditions that required adherence to eternal punishment. Indeed, we have even seen a suggestion that Leibniz might have regarded this as the safer, and hence most appropriate, way for many people to think about the possible consequences of a sinful existence.

These considerations do not really settle the issue of Leibniz's own beliefs. We have seen that he appears to have regarded the universalist position as an approximation to a view which he built into the formal

structure of his own account of the nature of post-mortem existence in the *Restitution* texts of 1715. But what of the ultimate status of this version of the story? It is possible that Leibniz thought that this was the most probable view and as having some objective purchase on all rational beings. And, if so, it would be natural to think that he embraced it as part of a conception of the nature of himself and his place in reality.

But one might also wonder whether something even more radical could have been going on. If we follow Adams' conception of the role that practical reason plays in Leibniz's approach to moral certainty, it looks like the moral certainty of the belief in perpetual progress is something that Leibniz would have grounded in the further belief that it was likely to contribute to the goal of achieving salvation. But at the same time it seems as though Leibniz was sensitive to the thought that salvation was attainable by those who did not share this belief—whether as part of a tradition that embraced the dogma of eternal punishment or as one attracted to the more radical universalist position. And if this is the case, might Leibniz himself have reached a point where he came to see perpetual progress as merely another story which might or might not be of utility for those trying to achieve salvation.

If so, it would perhaps justify Leibniz's having earned the nickname "Loevenix" [believes nothing] towards the end of his life even if it was derived merely from the external evidence of his irregular church attendance.<sup>77</sup> Maybe by this stage in his life Leibniz took himself to have acquired true piety to such a degree that it was a virtue whose instantiation required no dogmatic support at all, or at least none in connection with post-mortem existence, but which received its warrant and sustenance from his love of God and the created world and his active participation within it?<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> See Antognazza, *Leibniz*, 546.

<sup>78</sup> Many thanks to the audience at the conference *Leibniz—Scientist, Leibniz—Philosopher* at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David in July 2015 for their comments on the presentation on which this chapter is based. I am also grateful to Michel Fichant for alerting me to his discussion of Leibniz's views in HD, to Rosa Antognazza for several conversations about the issues, to Lucy Sheaf both for comments on an earlier version of the chapter and alerting me to the importance of Leibniz's views on damnation and salvation as an examiner of her MPhil thesis, and to Lloyd Strickland and Julia Weckend for comments on the penultimate draft.

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# Part V

## Biographical Conclusion