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1. Introduction

As the previous essays in this volume have shown, the 17th century was an especially vibrant period of philosophical reflection, ushering in novel accounts in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, natural science, philosophical theology, and even the methodology of philosophy itself. Many of these developments were shaped by a rich historical backdrop, and the same is true for the problem of evil. Philosophical reflections on evil in the form of Christian theodicies reach a high point in the late 17th century, but they weren't produced in a vacuum. The goal of this essay is to shed fresh light on the context and content of the most influential early modern discussions of evil.

Before turning to the problem of evil in its historical clothing, it will be helpful to have a sense for what the problem is supposed to be. In its most general form, the problem of evil concerns the relation between God and the evils in our world. If God is all-powerful and perfectly good, whence evil? Of course, like the "problem of freewill" and the "problem of skepticism," the so-called "problem of evil" is really a *host* of philosophical and theological issues that have been lumped together as one of the great, transcendent problems of philosophy to be repeatedly clarified, but never really solved. I will consider only a subset of the issues here.

Part of what makes philosophical reflection on God and evil so rich and interesting is how it draws deeply from many other branches of philosophy: theses from metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and philosophical theology are all utilized in even formulating the problems. Another reason for the perennial interest in the relation of God

to evil is less sanguine. We are each intimately acquainted with evil, both as perpetrators and victims, and this personal closeness can make the problems seem more urgent. The previous century was marred by evil on an epic scale, one that as yet shows no signs of shrinking in the new millennium.[1]

The 17th century also witnessed its fair share of large-scale horrors: religious wars, genocidal conquests, tyrannical oppression, persecution, plagues, catastrophic natural disasters – not to mention the prosaic evils encountered and committed in everyday life. As Bayle put it in 1697,

> Man is wicked and miserable. Everyone is aware of this from what goes on within himself, and from the commerce he is obliged to carry on with his neighbor…monuments to human misery and wickedness are found everywhere – prisons, hospitals, gallows, beggars…Properly speaking, history is nothing but the crimes and misfortunes of the human race.[2]

Milton voices a similar view near the end of *Paradise Lost* (1667), as Adam is given a glimpse of the depths of human suffering in its many forms. The description concludes,

> Dire was the tossing, deep the groans. Despair
> Tended the sick busiest from couch to couch.
> And over them triumphant Death his dart
> Shook, but delayed to strike, though oft invoked
> With vows, as their chief good, and final hope.

Adam weeps in reply,

> O miserable mankind! To what fall
> Degraded, to what wretched state reserved!
> Better end here unborn.[3]

Although the tone and emphases of 17th century discussions of evil are similar to those in contemporary philosophy of religion, it is worth highlighting a few notable

[1] A canvassing of the 20th century large-scale horrors can be found in Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*.
[2] Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Manicheans," rem. D
[3] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, XI.489-503

differences at the outset. First, contemporary discussions usually focus on whether or not God *exists*, given the existence, distribution, and/or kinds of evil in the world. "God" is usually taken in a generically monotheistic way as an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent personal being. Discussions about the problem of evil are usually between (real or imagined) atheists, on the one hand, and theists, on the other.[4]

By contrast, almost all of the early modern authors we will discuss in this essay were committed monotheists of one stripe or another. "Atheism," as we use the term today, was then a charge leveled against one's intellectual enemies and never a label willingly embraced. Even the two great bogeymen of the 17th century, Hobbes and Spinoza, vociferously denied being atheists (though to little avail). And while there was much written in the period decrying the rising tide of atheism, the named targets were usually long dead Epicureans and Stoics – though with intimations that their followers were alive and well in modern times. Even those, like Bayle, who emphasized the problem of widespread human suffering, did not openly proclaim that the evil in our world constitutes a defeater for revealed religion.

A second major difference between then and now concerns how the problem of evil is framed. Contemporary discussions often present the issue in epistemological terms: is belief in the existence of God justified, given the facts about evil? The early moderns we will discuss were generally much more interested in metaphysical questions about the relation between God and evil. It was a guiding assumption in the Western world, powerfully defended but rarely doubted in public, that the God described in Jewish and Christian scriptures exists and is perfect in power, knowledge, and goodness. (Exactly what those qualities amounted to and entailed was, of course, a matter of

[4] For a recent sample of this kind of discussion, see Plantinga and Tooley, *Knowledge of God*.

considerable debate.) Although confidence was generally high that satisfying answers could be given, 17th century philosophers raised many ontological and causal questions about evil. Given God's goodness, how is God causally involved in our evil-soaked cosmos? Given God's sovereignty, how is God not the author of sin? What greater goods explain and justify God's willingness to allow and sometimes cause so much pain and suffering? Could God have made a world that contained less evil, and if so, why didn't God? Most generally, what is the nature and source of evil?[5]

Early moderns proposed a variety of answers to these questions in the form of what we now call "theodicies," a coin termed by Leibniz. For example, some argued that the good of a uniformly law-governed cosmos explains and justifies the existence of horribly disfigured creatures in a world created by God. This kind of global, positive explanation for why some evils exist mark a final point of contrast with contemporary discussions. Attempts to provide comprehensive theodicies reached their peak in the late 1600s and early 1700s. Today, most theistic philosophers of religion set a far more modest goal in addressing objections from evil: a defense, rather than a theodicy.[6] They focus on what justifiable reasons God *might* have for allowing the evils of our world (or why we should expect not to know God's reasons), without trying to show what reasons God *in fact* has.

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[5] Another issue that was treated as part of the problem of evil in the 17th century concerned the distribution and efficaciousness of divine grace. There were bitter divides within Catholic factions (e.g., Jesuits vs. Dominicans vs. Jansenists) and Protestant factions (e.g., Lutherans vs. Calvinists vs. Methodists) over grace. Leibniz highlights the divisiveness of these issues:

> It is here that people have principally divided; no comet, no earthquake, no plague has done more harm. It is here that laziness has found shelter, evil has found camouflage, and God himself has had to be a pretence for both...we [Christians] have awakened so many sects that rarely a rift has arisen among us in which predestination and election have not had a part (Leibniz, CP 7).

Though we would now classify this as a theological dispute, the boundaries between philosophy and theology were more fluid in the 1600s. For reasons of space, I will mostly ignore this topic here.

[6] The "defense" label was coined by Alvin Plantinga, a contemporary philosopher of religion who has developed several theistic defenses against objections from evil.

In addition to differences in orientation and goals, contemporary discussions also diverge in *content* from their 17th century counterparts. There was a dominant core of philosophical teaching about evil that originated in neo-Platonism, was embraced by early Christian church theologians, elevated to the status of orthodoxy by Augustine, flourished under the enriching of Aristotelian scholastics, survived on both sides of the Reformation split, and remained deeply attractive to many well into the 17th century. This traditional set of ideas formed the backbone of Western philosophical reflections on the problem of evil for centuries.[7] Although some pieces of that traditional account survive today in fractured form, other elements have been eclipsed since the early modern period. What happened? As we will see, part of this neglected story lies in the developments of the 17th century.

2. Warm-Up: Some 17th Century Questions about God and Evil

Pre-modern discussions of evil often assumed that one must understand the ontological nature of evil before trying to understand its source.[8] This ontology-first project fueled elaborate taxonomies of evils in the medieval period. By and large, the early moderns tended to eschew such classification projects, and by the start of the 1700s, a simple three-fold division of evil was quickly becoming standard. Evils were categorized as (a) evils of imperfection (sometimes called "metaphysical evils"); (b) physical evils (sometimes called "natural evils"); and (c) moral evils (frequently called "sins").

[7] A few qualifiers: I mean only that a sizable and influential number adhered to these views, not that there were no influential dissenters. By "traditional," I have in mind those who were heavily influential in the Western Christian tradition. There are other theistic traditions, but in this essay I will focus on the tradition most influencing the 17th century figures we will be discussing, namely the Christianity of the Latin West.
[8] See, for instance, Augustine, *On Free Choice of Will*, 1 and 4; Aquinas, ST I, q 48; Suarez, DM XI.i.

Samuel Clarke nicely summarizes the basic categories: "all that we call evil is either an evil of imperfection, as the want of certain faculties and excellencies which other creatures have, or natural evil, as pain death and the like, or moral evil, as all kinds of vice."[9] Working backwards through Clarke's list, *moral evil* is the familiar category of culpable misdeeds and omissions brought about by free rational agents, i.e., sin. *Physical* or *natural evils* are states accompanied by pain and suffering that are brought about either by natural events (e.g., earthquakes and dog bites), or by rational agents (e.g., just punishments for committing moral evils or consequences of another's free action).[10] *Metaphysical evils* are probably the least familiar category, and exploring them in the next section will take us deep into the heart of the most prominent traditional account of God's relation to evil. For now, we should think of them as species-specific limitations in the way Clarke suggests: that I cannot fly, that my dog cannot compose a symphony, and so forth.[11]

Using this division, we can now consider some of the main questions about God's relation to evil that occupied 17th century philosophers. The following numbered propositions, which I will refer back to repeatedly in subsequent sections, were among the generally accepted tenets of Western Christian theism in the late 1600s:

(1) God exists and is perfect in power, knowledge, and goodness.
(2) God created the world *ex nihilo*, preserves the world at each moment of its existence, and concurs[12] immediately in all secondary causal activity.

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[9] Clarke, *Demonstration*, 78-9; see also King, *De Origine Mali*, 37; and Leibniz, T 21.
[10] I will use "physical" to keep us from thinking only of things like natural disasters when the category is invoked, though it should be kept in mind that mental suffering falls under this category too.
[11] We shouldn't get hung up at this point on whether it is appropriate to call such limitations "evils." (Aquinas suggests "no" (ST I, q 48, art 3).) The more important issue will be the role these creaturely limitations play in explaining moral and physical evil.
[12] Concurrence was a complex theory about how God's causal activity, over and above creation and preservation, relates to the causal activity of creatures, so called "secondary causes." The dominant

(3) God does not cause any moral evils.

(4) God causes some physical evils.

(5) God causes all metaphysical evils.

(6) God is entirely blameless for the existence of any moral, physical, or metaphysical evil.

Premise (3) states that God doesn't cause sin, which was extended to exclude God's causing agents to sin. As it was often put, God is not the author of sins. Premises (4) and (5) may sound surprising until we recall what is meant by "evil" there. Typical examples of the physical evils that God causes would be the suffering of creatures to punish them for disobedience or to inculcate virtues like perseverance in them.[13] To say that God causes all metaphysical evil is just to draw out a consequence of (2), since being limited in various ways is part of what it is to be a creature instead of a god.[14] These close connections between God and evil is balanced by (6), the claim that God is in no way blameworthy for any evils, even ones God has a direct hand in bringing about.

The task of the theodicist was to explain how these premises were to be reconciled with the facts about evil that Bayle and Milton noted above. After all, everyday experience strongly recommends (7):

(7) Moral, physical, and metaphysical evils exist in abundance. [15]

Scholastic position was that God cooperates, or *concurs*, immediately in every effect that creatures bring about. This happens in such a way that the divine and secondary cause act by a single action and are each the total cause of a single, undivided, and non-over-determined effect. The two main alternatives were occasionalism, according to which God is the sole causal agent, and mere conservationism, according to which creatures bring about some effects without the immediate causal cooperation of God. For a very lucid discussion of concurrence theory, see Freddoso "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes." Like any of these tenets, divine concurrence was not accepted by *everyone* in the 1600s, but dissenters (e.g., Malebranche) could expect to be accused of heterodoxy.

[13] See Aquinas, ST I, q 49, art 2 and Suarez, DM XI.iii.24

[14] Aquinas, ST I, q 47, art 1

[15] I will ignore the question of the appropriate bearers of evil: intentions, actions, persons, the states of affairs they bring about, or some combination of these. I will instead follow 17th century practice and loosely slide back and forth for readability.

There are tensions among these seven propositions. To see this, let's begin with moral evils. According to (3), moral evils are not brought about by God. But according to (2), God sustains the world in existence at every moment, which presumably includes sustaining the sinful states of the world. But how can God preserve the world at each moment without being at least partially responsible for the existence of its moral evils? After all, at least this much seems plausible: if God hadn't sustained the world in existence after 1652, the Huguenots would not have been persecuted under Louis XIV's reign.[16] If so, we might wonder how God can remain entirely blameless for subsequent moral atrocities. Matters become even murkier when we add with (2) the widely accepted thesis that God cooperates immediately in every creaturely action, including morally evil acts. For it is not clear how God can cooperate in the production of moral evil without being the partial cause of moral evil as well.

Furthermore, if God causes some non-moral evils ((4) and (5)), we may wonder how God remains blameless for them (6). Again, this seems at least initially plausible: God could have made a world free of at least some of our world's physical evils and limitations without thereby making more evil. But if so, it is difficult to see how God isn't blameworthy for not bringing about less physical and metaphysical evil than God could have.

There are, of course, quick replies that could be made to these concerns, though they only deepen the puzzles. For instance, perhaps (7) is overly strong: maybe the range and distribution of evils isn't as abundant as a quick glance at a history book would suggest. Leibniz sometimes pursues this tact, claiming that we readily ascent to (7)

[16] In 1652, Louis XIV endorsed the Edict of Nantes, which granted political and religious liberties to the Protestant Huguenots; by the time he repealed it in 1685 (known as "the Revocation"), their widespread persecution in the Sun King's France was already well underway.

because we are not used to taking the entire universe into account when judging the distributions and amounts of evil. We tend to focus only on our little isolated portion of the cosmos, which generates far too small a sample size of rational creatures to make sound such judgments about the overall balance or imbalance of evils and goods in the universe.[17] But even if one agreed with Leibniz that the world doesn't contain as much evil as Bayle and Milton claimed, the same sorts of questions about (1)-(6) could be raised with a weaker version of (7), such as (7*):

(7*) There exist at least some moral, physical, and metaphysical evils.

Leibniz can't sensibly deny (7*), regardless of how isolated or uncommon those evils are.

Another quick reply to worries about (4) and (5) would be to advance the following moral principle:

> (8) An agent is not blameworthy for bringing about an evil if the bringing about of that evil also brings about a greater good that, necessarily, could not otherwise be had.

Premise (8) is a strong moral principle that would need independent defense and refinement. But we use something like it in everyday moral reasoning. Think of the blamelessness of the parent who causes her child to suffer by giving him foul-tasting medicine, the only available remedy, in order to bring about the greater good of restored health. This suggests that there may be greater goods, tightly attached to certain evils, whose outweighing goodness justifies our causing or permitting those evils.

However, even if something like (8) were true, it isn't obvious that *God* could ever be in such a situation. It may seem like a perfectly powerful being could bring about *any* good it wanted, without being forced, as it were, to allow evils as a consequence. In

[17] Leibniz, T 19 and 220.

the analogue to the parent case, surely God could get the good of a healthy creature without relying on medicine at all!

The tensions are quickly multiplying. As we will see, the 17th century abounded in replies. But first, let us consider what had been a dominant reply to these concerns for over a thousand years. As it happens, it is also the same basic reply given by one of the seventeenth century's greatest innovators: Descartes.

3. Descartes' (Mostly) Traditional Answers

However we judge Descartes' pretensions for philosophical novelty, when it comes to the problem of evil, he is thoroughly and self-consciously conservative. In the *Meditations*, he focuses mostly on cognitive error and its source in extending our wills beyond the clear and distinct deliverances of our intellects. But Descartes' account generalizes,[18] and his language and framework for explaining evil mostly repeats the main Scholastic account of evil. Indeed, in a few compact sentences in the Fourth Meditation, Descartes neatly summarizes the major conclusions of over a dozen centuries of Christian reflection on evil:

> In this incorrect use of free will may be found the privation which constitutes the essence of error. The privation, I say, lies in the operation of the will insofar as it proceeds from me, but not in the faculty of will which I received from God, nor even in its operation, insofar as it depends on him.
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> [Two paragraphs later, Descartes continues:]
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> For insofar as these acts depend on God, they are wholly true and good; and my ability to perform them means that there is in a sense more perfection in me than

[18] Descartes describes his account in the *Meditations* as explaining "the source of my error *and sin*" (CSM II/41, emphasis mine), and he claims to avoid talking about good and evil only to avoid becoming embattled in a theological controversy (CSMK III/234 and 342). (Admittedly, Descartes added a note in the Synopsis of the *Meditations* that "I do not deal at all with sin…" (CSM II/11), though this was added to a later edition to appease Arnauld and does not, I think, represent Descartes' real view so much as his desire to appear free of making theological claims (see CSMK III/175).)

> would be if I lacked this ability. As for the privation involved – which is all that the essential definition of falsity and wrong consists in – this does not in any way require the concurrence of God, since it is not a thing; indeed, when it is referred to God as its cause, it should be called not a privation but simply a negation.
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> [A few sentences later, Descartes adds:]
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> Had God made me [better able to align my will and understanding], I can easily understand that, considered as a totality, I would have been more perfect than I am now. But I cannot therefore deny that there may in some way be more perfection in the universe as a whole because some of its parts are not immune from error, while others are immune, than there would be if all the parts were exactly alike.[19]

Although some of the details may seem obscure at first glance, Descartes' reasoning in these paragraphs echoes the three main components of the most prevalent pre-seventeenth century theodicy: privation theory, creaturely freedom, and cosmic diversity. I will use Descartes as a guide through each of these traditional pieces before turning to the mounting criticisms this account faced in the 17th century.

3.1 Privation Theory and Moral Evil

Let's begin with a bit of metaphysical background. According to a then-standard ontological picture, reality is stratified into what has been dubbed "the great chain of being."[20] At the top of (or even beyond) this variegated chain lies God, who is the most real, the most perfect, the most intelligible, and the most good. Humans, somewhere lower down on the scale of being than God, are less real, less perfect, and less good. Rocks, somewhere yet lower on the chain than humans, are even less real, perfect, and good than both God and humans. Linking the members of the chain together are relations of dependence; the stuff lower on the chain is more dependent and hence less perfect than the stuff higher up. As Descartes reflects on his own ontological status in the Fourth

[19] Descartes, CSM II/41-42

[20] The classical study on this background is Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, though I have reservations about some of the details of his analyses of early modern figures (especially Spinoza and Leibniz).

Meditation, "I realize that I am, as it were, something intermediate between God and nothingness, or between supreme being and non-being."[21]

Two widely accepted corollaries to this account are important for the problem of evil. First, *goodness and being are co-extensive*.[22] To the degree to which something is real, to that degree it is good. And to the degree to which a thing lacks goodness, to that degree it lacks being or reality – and hence it lies farther down on the ontological chain. Call this the "co-extensive principle."

Second, *the chain of being is plentiful*. Usually this meant that for any pair of creatures *x* and *y* that differ in some degree of being, there exists at least one thing (or one type of thing) that is more real, perfect, good, and intelligible than *x* and less real, *et al.* than *y*.[23] Reality is as full as it can be, which means there are no jumps or gaps along the chain. Call this the "plentitude principle." The plenitude principle entails that the created order is smooth and continuous, a conclusion that led to extravagant and wonderfully imaginative cosmologies during the medieval period. Although many of the scientific beliefs and practices that had been used to fill out this plenum were challenged during the early modern period, the basic metaphysics of a plentiful chain of being and goodness remained enormously influential and vibrant throughout the 17th century.

Using this background, here is one possible account of the nature of evil. Everything that exists must exist somewhere on the chain of being, in which case everything that exists has some degree of reality. It follows, by the co-extensive principle,

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[21] Descartes, CSM II/48

[22] In Scholasticism, this was known as the convertibility of goodness and being. For a representative defense of this view, see Aquinas, ST I, q 5, art 1.

[23] For simplicity, I will pass over questions about whether plentitude should be applied at the level of properties, individuals, species, and/or natural kinds, as these distinctions will not be relevant below. Many medieval accounts applied plentitude at the level of species.

that everything that exists also has some degree of goodness. Hence there does not exist anything that is purely evil; all creation is to some degree good.[24] But the chain of being is quite stratified, according to the plenitude principle. So while everything that exists is to some degree good, perhaps things are more evil the more limited they are, i.e., the farther down they stand on the chain of being. That is, perhaps all evil is just an *absence of goodness*. Call this the "evil as limitation" view, a view that was held by some neo-Platonists.[25]

The *evil as limitation* view would satisfy monotheists' competing intuitions that (a) good and evil are correlated and inter-definable and (b) good and evil are asymmetrically dependent (e.g., goodness is prior to evil). On this view, things are evil just to the extent to which they lack goodness, which is just to the extent to which they lack reality, being, or perfection.

Despite its coherence and historical pedigree, the *evil as limitation* view was rejected by almost everyone in the Western Christian tradition since at least Augustine.[26] For one, the view entailed that all evil was due entirely to metaphysical limitations, which collapsed the distinction between moral and non-moral evil. Christians especially denied that all evil was based entirely on creaturely weaknesses or limitations. Sometimes evils involve a perversion, a twisting, a turning away.[27] They conceded that although the explanation for moral evil will always involve creaturely limitations, those limitations could not bear all the explanatory weight.

[24] Aquinas, ST I, q 49, art 3.
[25] See, for instance, Plotinus *Enneads* I.8 and Proclus, *The Nature and Origin of Evil*, sec. 51.
[26] For a helpful summary of the most influential figures, see Suarez, DM XI.i.3.
[27] Aquinas, SCG IIIa.x.11

Furthermore, if *evil as limitation* were correct, God would be causally responsible for all instances of evil. After all, in the monotheistic version, God created the chain of beings, in which case God would also be the creator of every evil. Just as this would put too much responsibility on God, it would also ascribe too little responsibility for evil to created moral agents. Talk about excuses! All our moral failures could be blamed on limitations that were built into our very natures.

Descartes briefly considers the *evil as limitation* view, but then follows the bulk of Christian tradition in rejecting it as inadequate. "For error is not a pure negation [i.e., limitation], but rather a privation or lack of some knowledge *which should be in me*" (emphasis mine).[28] Descartes reasons that some evil involves a lack of goodness that a thing *ought to have*, goodness that it has been de*prive*d from having. Some evil, in other words, involves a *privation of goodness*, not merely a lack of goodness. This echoes the dominant understanding of the nature of evil heading into the 17th century. According to the traditional view, moral and physical evils were privations of appropriate perfections. Call this the "evil as privation view."

An underlying assumption of the *evil as privation* view is that there are independent standards built into the world that establish what degree of goodness and kinds of perfections each thing ought to possess. These "oughts" aren't established by human conventions or cultural standards. For Descartes, some of these standards concern how rational agents ought to use their wills and intellects: we ought not assent to confused and obscure ideas.

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[28] Descartes, CSM II/38. Though I think it amounts to a terminological difference, recall that Aquinas was hesitant to call purely metaphysical limitations "evil," whereas some early moderns accepted calling them "evil." Hence, in the Thomistic tradition, *all* evils are privations, and God is not blameworthy for non-evil limitations. But the same point holds for 17th century categories: all non-metaphysical evils are privations, and God is not blameworthy for metaphysical evils.

Scholastics understood physical evils to be privative, and so they also needed a non-moral source of natural "oughts." Within Scholastic Aristotelianism, the source of such natural oughts was found in the purposive natures of things: the intrinsic *telos* of a thing's nature determined the perfections it ought to have.[29] Take the classical example of blindness. The evil of blindness is not simply the absence of sight, or else it would follow that rocks suffer the plight of blindness. But it would seem highly inappropriate for us to bemoan the plague of blindness ravaging the world's mountains. According to privation theory, such rock lamentations are out of place because rocks aren't the sorts of things that are supposed to see in the first place. The evil of blindness is a *privation* of sight, an absence of sight in something that, by its nature, *ought to see*. As Aquinas explains, "therefore, not every defect of the good is an evil, but the defect of the good *which is naturally due*. For the want of sight is not an evil in a stone, but it is an evil in an animal, since it is against the nature of a stone to see" (emphasis mine).[30] This meant, for example, that what was a physical evil for a fawn (being eaten by a lion) need not be an evil for a lion (eating a tasty fawn).

The extension of privations into the natural realm via teleology is a rare point at which Descartes challenges the Scholastic tradition on the topic of evil. In the Sixth Meditation, Descartes denies that bodies have natures with intrinsic "oughts" attached to them, and so bodies cannot be deprived of due perfections.[31] Thus, although Descartes uses traditional privation theory in the moral realm for minds, he denies that non-mental substances suffer physical privations.

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[29] The teleological nature of traditional privation theory is vividly displayed in Aquinas, SCG IIIa.iv.4; *On Evil* I, art 1, ad 10; and ST I, q 49, art 1.
[30] Aquinas, ST I, q 48, art 5, ad 1
[31] Descartes, CSM II/58-59; for more on this point in Descartes, see Newlands, "Evils, Privations, and the Early Moderns."

So far, I have focused on the ontology of evil and claimed that Descartes follows the Scholastics in accepting the privation view of moral evil over the limitation view. But even if this ontology of moral evils is correct, we still need an account of the cause and justification of moral evils in a world blamelessly brought about by a perfectly good God.

Consider an example of moral evil: out of selfish anger, I push a man into a busy street where he is struck by a car. Creaturely limitations are part of what make that evil possible: that the man's body can be shoved against his will, that he is capable of experiencing pain and suffering, that I am susceptible to emotional outbursts, etc. Descartes acknowledges that God brings about those creaturely limitations, but he claims that God is blameless for doing so.[32] In fact, some of those limitations are based on perfections that other types of things lack. Descartes explains, "my ability to perform [these wrong acts] means that there is in a sense more perfection in me than would be if I lacked this ability."[33] That is, while my susceptibility to emotional outbursts is a prerequisite for my pushing the man in anger, my ability to experience emotions is a kind of excellence, one that lowly rocks fail to have.

This accounts for God's causal involvement in the *prerequisites* for moral evil. (For the *justification* of that involvement, see section 3.4.) But according (2), God causally contributes to more than just the prerequisites for my pushing the man. God causally cooperates in the very act of pushing itself, a thesis Descartes would also accept. "For *insofar as these acts depend on God*, they are wholly true and good" (emphasis

[32] Descartes, CSM II/41-42
[33] Descartes, CSM II/42

mine).[34] That is, God causally cooperates in the very acts of moral evil, though in such a way that God is not at all responsible for the evil aspects of moral evils. However, it is not yet clear how God can cooperate in my pushing the man onto the street (the sinful *act*) without thereby being a partial cause of the moral evil of my angry shoving (the sinful *aspect* of the act).

Here is where privation theory truly earns its keep for Descartes. "As for the privation involved – which is all that the essential definition of falsity and wrong consists in – this does not in any way require the concurrence of God, *since it is not a thing*" (my emphasis).[35] He is even clearer in the *Principles*: "Moreover, errors are not things, requiring the real concurrence of God for their production."[36] And again: "When I say [God understands, wills, and accomplishes] 'everything' I mean all *things*: for God does not will the evil of sin, which is not a thing."[37]

Descartes' idea for reconciling (2) and (3) seems to be that God doesn't concur in the morally evil aspects of my sin since there isn't any*thing* there for God to cause. The ontology of evil plays a significant role here. Moral evil is a *privation* of goodness, a kind of perverted absence. But God doesn't need to concur in absences; God, as the source of all and only good things, needs to concur only in the production of goodness and being. As Aquinas summarizes this strategy, "whatever there is of being and action in a bad action, is reduced to God as the cause; whereas whatever defect is in it is not caused by

[34] Descartes, CSM II/42 (see also CSM II/41; *Principles* I.23 (CSM I/201) and I.41 (CSM I/206)). Descartes here echoes Aquinas' claim that God causally contributes to the *acts* of sin, though not the sinful aspects of sins (see Aquinas, ST I-II, q 79, art 2).
[35] Descartes, CSM II/42
[36] Descartes, Principles I.31 (CSM I/203-4)
[37] Descartes, Principles I.23 (CSM I/201).

God, but by the deficient secondary cause."[38] So to the extent to which my shoving the man expresses being and goodness – as it surely does, since pushing at will isn't something rocks can do – God concurs in it. But God doesn't concur in the failing short of the goodness my actions ought to express, for there isn't anything there with which God need concur.

There are a number of questions one might raise about this purported reconciliation.[39] Are the evil and non-evil aspects of a sin so neatly separable? If God doesn't cause the evil aspect of moral evil *because* God doesn't cause privations, who does cause the privative evil aspect and how? How is God blameless for creating a world full of limitations in the first place? Descartes' answers to some of these questions involve the remaining two pieces of the traditional account: creaturely freedom and cosmic diversity.

3.2 Moral Evil and the Greater Good of Freedom

Descartes admits that God is responsible for the *possibility* of moral evil in virtue of having created limited creatures. In this section, we will look at who or what, according to Descartes, is responsible for the *actuality* of moral evil. His account is again a familiar one: God is responsible but blameless for creating free creatures capable of

[38] Aquinas, ST I, q 49, art 2, ad 2. One might ask Aquinas, "But what is the cause of the deficiency of the secondary cause?" Aquinas' basic answer is that the *non-sinful* deficiency or limitation arises from our ability to ignore the demands of reason and God's law in a given situation, whereas *actual sin* happens when we freely will without paying attention to those demands (see ST I, q 49, art. 2, ad 3; *On Evil* I, art 3; III, art 2; and III, art 3, ad 13.) If one then asks for a prior cause of *that* free action, Aquinas claims that no further answer is needed: "And there is no need to seek a cause of this nonuse of the aforementioned rule, since the very freedom of the will, by which it can act or not act, is enough to explain the non-use" (*On Evil*, I, art 3; for an earlier version of this reply, see Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, 104-105). As Suarez emphasizes (foreshadowing a version of Descartes' point above), because the evil aspect of this free action is found in its *non*-use of the appropriate rule, there is no need for divine concurrence, since "a secondary cause does not need God's cooperation insofar as it does not act, but only insofar as it does anything" (Suarez, DM XI.iii.22).

[39] For a fuller discussion, see Newlands, "Evils, Privations, and the Early Moderns" and Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil."

misusing their freedom, and free creatures are responsible and very blameworthy for actually misusing it.

Descartes' appeal to freedom in the problem of evil has three basic pieces, all of which echo the traditional free will theodicy. First, all moral evil is due to rational creatures misusing their freedom. Second, at least some kinds of free creatures cannot be free without possessing the ability to misuse their freedom and produce moral evil. Lastly, a world containing free creatures which possess the ability for misused freedom is better, all things considered, than a world without such free creatures.

Descartes emphatically affirms the existence of freedom in us: "That there is freedom in our will, and that we have the power in many cases to give or withhold our assent at will, is so evident that it must be counted among the first and most common notions that are innate in us."[40] Descartes also endorses the claim that all moral evil is the result of misused creaturely freedom: "In this incorrect use of free will may be found the privation which constitutes the essence of error."[41] Descartes emphasizes that because the source of moral error lies in our actual misuses of freedom, the blame lies squarely with us and not with our God-given natures: "The fact that we fall into error is a defect in the way we act or in the use we make of our freedom, but not a defect in our nature."[42]

The second step of the traditional free will theodicy helps explains *why* our misuses of freedom aren't due to a defective nature. According to Scholastic accounts of human freedom, a necessary condition on being free with respect to a moral action is the ability to either bring about that action or to refrain from doing so. Some in the late 17th

[40] Descartes, Principles I.39 (CSM 205-6)
[41] Descartes, CSM II/41; though Descartes focuses here on our will's free assent to confused and obscure perceptions as the source of culpable error, his account on this point generalizes to all moral fault.
[42] Descartes, Principles I.38 (CSM I/205)

century disagreed with this so-called "indifference" condition on freedom (see section 4.2).[43] But Descartes appears to affirm something like it, claiming that "the will consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid) […]"[44] If so, then even God couldn't bring about the good of free creatures like us without allowing the possibility of error and sin.

The final step of the traditional free will theodicy makes a claim about the *value* of our freedom. According to free will theodicies, it is better that the world contains creatures who are capable of freely bringing about moral evil than that it not contain them, even if worlds without free creatures also contain no moral evil.[45] The point is sometimes strengthened to cover actual misuses of freedom too: worlds like ours with actually abused freedom are better, all else equal, than worlds without any freedom and moral evil.

According to this account, the existence of creatures with potentially and perhaps even actually abused freedom is the greater good that renders blameless God's creation of a world like ours containing moral evils. Furthermore, God couldn't realize this great good without allowing at least the possibility of evil. And, according to the first step (along with privation theory, discussed above in section 3.2), actual moral evil is caused

[43] Note that indifference does not require equipoise of reasons, although some early moderns uncharitably took it to. A canonical formulation of indifference coming out of late Scholasticism is something like: all the temporally (and, according to the Jesuits, causally) prior requisites of the action having been posited, an agent can (a) either will or not will [freedom of exercise]) and (b) either will φ or will some other alternative to φ [freedom of specification]. This condition *doesn't* mean that the agent must have no stronger reason for doing one rather than the other, à la Buridan's ass.

[44] Descartes, CSM II/40 (see also CSMK III/234 and 245). Descartes' view on the necessary conditions for freedom is a notoriously difficult interpretive matter. Descartes continues in the above passage, "[…] or rather," and then goes on to write things that seem to undermine the point he has just made about the requirements for freedom. For more, see C.P. Ragland's article in this volume.

[45] Descartes' version is more hesitant than this, as we will see (Descartes, CSM II/42-43).

entirely by creatures misusing that freedom. Together, this account shows how God is neither the author of sin (3) nor blameworthy for allowing creatures to cause sins (6).

One might be tempted to use the free will theodicy to cover the justification of physical evils as well. Augustine influentially argued that misused creaturely freedom was ultimately responsible for physical evils: "a perverse will is the cause of all [moral and physical] evil."[46] According to this account, human and animal suffering involved in natural disasters, disease, and death are justly administered divine punishments for original and ongoing human sin. Hence, God's blamelessness in producing physical evils is also explained by creaturely freedom gone afoul: someone had to punish them![47]

This extension of the free will theodicy won fewer adherents in the 17th century. Locke and others argued against the moral appropriateness of inherited guilt.[48] And even if we now could make sense of how later human beings were "with" original sinners in sinning and so deserving of punishment prior to actually sinning, it is hard to see why the punishment of non-human animals would be justified as a consequence of original sin, especially given the millions of years of suffering endured by sentient, non-rational creatures that occurred prior to the arrival of *homo sapiens*. Later, we will see how others in the 17th century, most notably Malebranche, provided an alternative explanation for the existence of physical evils and animal suffering that was not rooted in an extension of the traditional free will theodicy (section 5).[49]

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[46] Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, 104

[47] Aquinas emphasizes that God's intention in meting out punishment is not the suffering of creatures *per se*, but rather the establishing of God's justice in the world – a necessary (but unintended) consequence of which is the suffering of deserving creatures (Aquinas, *On Evil*, q I, art 3, ad 10).

[48] For discussion, see Phillip L. Quinn, "Disputing the Augustinian Legacy."

[49] Although Descartes does not explicitly address this aspect of Augustine's extended free will theodicy, he gives an alternative account of some physical evils (CSM II/58-61). Interestingly, Descartes' independent remarks on the nature of animals have also occasioned another non-Augustinian reply to the problem of

We have now seen how Descartes relies on privation theory and creaturely freedom to explain how God is not the cause of moral evil and is blameless for its existence. But Descartes acknowledges a concern about his account. Even if a necessary condition on our freedom is the *ability* to err and sin, surely an omnipotent being could have acted in such a way that we sin and err much less – or even not at all. "I can see, however, that God could easily have brought it about that without losing my freedom, and despite the limitations in my knowledge, I should nonetheless never make a mistake."[50] God's failure to do so re-raises concerns about God's blamelessness for the existence of moral evils. To put it bluntly: if God could have brought it about that free creatures "never make a mistake," why didn't God? To answer this, we need the final piece of the traditional theodicy: the great good of cosmic diversity.

3.3 Metaphysical Evil and the Great Good of Diversity

The previous two sections focused on God's relation to moral and physical evils. Parts of that discussion appealed to the inherent limitations of creatures. In this section, we will look at the traditional justification for these limitations. This issue is especially pressing in light of Descartes' admission that God could have given us natures such that we are free and yet never in fact err and sin. What justifies God's decision not to give us these (or any other) better natures?

Descartes rejects one way of taking this question. "[God] did not bestow on us everything which he was able to bestow, but which equally we can see he was not

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animal suffering, one that denies that animals suffer in the relevant ways. For a contemporary discussion of this so-called "Neo-Cartesian" move, see Michael Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*.

[50] Descartes, CSM II/42. According to Augustine, God *did* create free creatures who, by gifts of divine grace, are unable to sin (Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace,* 99; for a weaker version that God created free creatures who, as a matter of fact, will never sin, see *Free Choice of the Will*, 80-81). Aquinas claims that although *by nature*, all rational creatures can sin, by grace some may be unable to sin (ST I, q 63, art 1).

obliged to give us."[51] That is, we shouldn't think that God was in any way *obliged* to give us more abilities or perfections than God has given us. But even if God wasn't *obliged* to do better for us, we can still wonder why God didn't, as a matter of fact, do better for us. This is an instance of a more general puzzle facing the traditional theodicy. If imperfect things like rocks and humans are so limited, why make them at all?

The classical answer involves a greater goods appeal to something we've already encountered: plenitude. A world with a plentiful range of diverse creatures is better than a world of homogenized excellence, even if creating diversity requires God to create more limited and deficient creatures. Variety isn't just the spice of life: it is an excellent-making feature of the universe. Aquinas claims that "the universe would not be perfect if only one grade of goodness were found in things."[52] He then applies this insight:

> The perfection of the universe requires that there should be inequality in things, so that every grade of goodness may be realized. Now, one grade of goodness is that of the good which cannot fail. Another grade of goodness is that of the good which can fail in goodness, and this grade is to be found in existence itself.[53]

The basic idea is that God brings about lesser goods and beings because their existence contributes to a rich cosmic variety that could not otherwise be had. Whereas moral evil was justified by the greater good of freedom, metaphysical evil is justified by the greater good of cosmic diversity.

Appeals to the good of cosmic diversity continued into the late 17th century. The great Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth argued that to think that God's goodness

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[51] Descartes, *Principles* I/31 (I/204), note added to French edition
[52] Aquinas, ST I, q 47, art 2; see also art 1. For Augustine's version, see *On Free Choice of the Will*, 79-80.
[53] Aquinas, ST I, q 48, art 2. Aquinas is speaking of corruptibility in general, not simply moral evil, though I think his point is supposed to apply to the goodness of morally corruptible creatures too. (Aquinas sometimes goes further: "so the perfection of the universe requires that there should be some [things] which can fail in goodness, and *thence it follows that sometimes they do fail*" (Aquinas, ST I, q 48, art 2). If applied to rational creatures, the italicized inference threatens the traditional account. But if we follow Leibniz and contemporary metaphysicians in sharply distinguishing the modal from the temporal, there is also little reason to follow Aquinas in making it.)

requires God to produce no metaphysical evils is to think that "God should either have made nothing at all, since there can be nothing besides himself absolutely perfect, or else nothing but the higher rank of angels, free from mortality and all those other evils that attend mankind."[54] But this, Cudworth scorns, would be to become

> like those who would blame a comedy or tragedy because they were not all kings or heroes that acted in it, but some servants and rustic clowns introduced also, talking after their rude fashion. Whereas the dramatic poem would neither be complete, nor elegant and delightful, were all those worser parts taken out of it.[55]

Hence, while metaphysically limited creatures (our "rustic clowns") are imperfect relative to other, less limited creatures, their existence contributes to a more perfect whole by making the world more diverse.

I have already quoted the passage in which Descartes appears sympathetic to the appeal to cosmic diversity:

> Had God made me [better able to align my will and understanding], I can easily understand that, considered as a totality, I would have been more perfect than I am now. But I cannot therefore deny that there may in some way be more perfection in the universe as a whole because some of its parts are not immune from error, while others are immune, than there would be if all the parts were exactly alike.[56]

Descartes claims that while God could have made me better by making me better disposed to make correct judgments, the world as a whole is better for containing creatures like me instead of containing only rational creatures whose wills and intellects never misalign. Descartes admits here that God could have been better *to me*, though at the cost of bringing about a less perfect world as a whole. And since God has no obligation to be better to me than God already has been, God is justified in bringing about the greater good of a diverse world by creating limited creatures like me.

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[54] Cudworth, *Intellectual System* II.338
[55] Cudworth, *Intellectual System* II.340; Leibniz makes similarly colorful appeals (Leibniz, T 124).
[56] CSM II/41-42

At least, that *would* be the traditional version of Descartes' point, but that isn't quite what he says. Descartes doesn't claim that the world *is* better as a whole for having limited parts like us in it. He claims it *might be*, or rather, that he *can't deny* that it might be, a double-qualification where tradition asserts a simple indicative.

This is Descartes' second main departure from the traditional theodicy we've been considering. It is noteworthy mostly because it severely curtails the scope of the rest of Descartes' theodicy. If Descartes asserts that the world as a whole *is* more perfect in virtue of containing limited parts like us, he can explain God's blamelessness in creating metaphysical evils. But Descartes offers a more cautious, defensive conclusion: it hasn't been proven impossible that the cosmic diversity cited by Aquinas and Cudworth is a greater good that could not otherwise be had without the kinds and distributions of metaphysical evils in our world.

However, Descartes' sudden pullback from theodicy to mere defense undermines the explanatory force of the rest of Descartes' theodicy in the Fourth Mediation. For if limitations make moral evils possible, and if it is merely possible that God is blameless in creating those limitations, then it is likewise merely possible that God is blameless for the existence of moral evils. A merely possible explanation may be better than no explanation at all, but the explanatory force of Descartes' account of evil is weakened considerably.[57]

In later sections, we will see Spinoza and Leibniz offer justifications for metaphysical evils at full theodician strength. But they will also conclude that there are

[57] Descartes' qualified claim also raises tough questions from a contemporary perspective. Is it supposed to be *probable* that such diversity is the greater good? Merely *logically possible*? Or is it really just a claim about an open epistemic possibility, in which case Descartes' defense would answer only the most absurdly strong atheistic arguments from evil?

good reasons to reject the first two parts of the traditional theodicy, the ones that Descartes had tried to keep at full strength.

4. 17th Century Criticisms of the Traditional Answers

For all its influence, the three-part explanation of the relation between God and evil – privation theory, freedom, and diversity – faced increasingly sharp challenges in the 17th century. In this section, we will look at several criticisms of appeals to privation theory and freedom in theodicies.

4.1 Privation Theory Challenged

Although it occupied a central role for centuries, privation theory has largely fallen by the wayside in contemporary discussions of the problem of evil.[58] In the late 17th century, the abandonment of privation theory was already underway. This was partly due to larger intellectual shifts occurring in the early modern period. The main advocates of privation theory at the turn of the 17th century were Aristotelian scholastics. These so-called "Schoolmen" became a common target for progressive early moderns. The laborious and prolix writing style of Scholastics was taken as good evidence for the intellectual darkness into which the West had plunged prior to the rebirth of humanism and the rise of modern natural science. Hobbes wonders of Scholastics, "When men write whole volumes of such stuff, are they not mad, or intend to make others so?"[59]

[58] This section is a heavily condensed version of parts of Newlands, "Evils, Privations, and the Early Moderns."

[59] Hobbes, *Leviathan* 46. Hobbes even suggests that some of the religious strife in Christendom was due to the way Scholastics merged Aristotle and Christianity, "from whence there arose so many contradictions and absurdities as brought the clergy into a reputation both of ignorance and fraudulent intention, and inclined people to revolt from them" (Hobbes, *Leviathan* 73).

Hobbes' sharp-tongued criticism wasn't leveled only at Scholasticism in general. After outlining a version of traditional privation theory, Hobbes concludes, "So, where the Scholastics wanted to seem most subtle, they showed most their stupidity."[60] Even Leibniz, who was fairly sympathetic to Scholastic ideas and who later offered nominal support of privation theory, initially condemned it as tainted. He writes that privation theory is "a leftover from the visionary philosophy of the past; it is a subterfuge with which a reasonable person will never be satisfied."[61]

Making matters worse in the eyes of leading early moderns, privations were also entrenched in Aristotelian physics.[62] Aquinas even applied the language of privative *evil* to the natural world: heat is an evil for water when it deprives water of its naturally cold state.[63] Undoubtedly, the growing 17th belief in the triumph of mechanism over Aristotelian physics cast a dark shadow over the entire framework of explanation via privations, moral and natural alike. If privations were no longer needed for science in the natural realm (as even Descartes agreed), why think they are required for a science of the mind and morality?

While this "guilt by association" charge explains some of the disappearance of privation theory, early moderns also raised more direct philosophical concerns in the context of the problem of evil. Malebranche, for instance, objects that "pain is a real and true evil…thus not every evil is an evil just because it deprives us of good," adding later that pain "is always a real evil to those who suffer it, as long as they suffer it."[64] That is, some physical evils like pain and suffering are not merely absences of an appropriate

[60] Hobbes, *Leviathan* 476
[61] Leibniz, CP 111
[62] See, for example, Aristotle, *Physics* V.6
[63] Aquinas, *On Evil*, I, art. 1, ad 1; see also Suarez, DM XI.iii.12. For Descartes' reply, see CSMK III/79.
[64] Malebranche, *Search*, 348 and 392, respectively.

good; their evil is quite positive and real.[65] If so, privation theory is not an extensionally adequate account of the nature of evil.

Of course, medieval advocates of privation theory admitted that there was *something* real in all evil, namely the subject of the privation.[66] Privation theorists did not claim that there is nothing real to the evils of our world, though they are sometimes caricatured in this way. But they did think that our very real experiences of pain and suffering are not themselves evil. Rather, the evil of, say, a debilitating neurological disorder lies in the malfunctioning of the patient's nerves and the corresponding absence of proper function. In fact, the patient's experience of pain is an appropriate perfection that, coupled with a properly functioning set of nerves, would result only in goods, like desires to seek out food and to avoid touching hot sticks.

Malebranche rejects this account and claims that the evil of at least some pain is itself a real, positive quality that is opposed to the good of the sufferer, and not simply the absence of an appropriately functioning mechanism. Attempts by privation theorists to re-describe the cases are simply unconvincing, Malebranche thinks. Whether or not he's right, Malebranche's verdict on the intrinsic evil of some pains and suffering is now the dominant and mostly unquestioned view in contemporary discussions of evil.

Leibniz objected not so much to the ontology of privative accounts of evil[67], but to Scholastic attempts to use privation theory to demonstrate that God is not the author of sin. In an early essay, Leibniz writes,

> For to say that God is not the author of sin, because he is not the author of a privation, although he can be called the author of everything that is real and

[65] For a discussion of other places where Malebranche asserts a more positive ontology of evil, see Moreau, *Deux Cartesians*, 93-95. Not for nothing was Malebranche accused of being a Manichean!
[66] Aquinas, *On Evil* I, art. 1; Suarez DM XI.iii.6
[67] Though see Leibniz, Ak 2.1.488, where he makes a similar point to Malebranche's.

> positive in the sin – that is a manifest illusion…I am amazed that these people did not go further and try to persuade us that man himself is not the author of sin, since he is only the author of the physical or real aspect, the privation being something for which there is no author.[68]

Leibniz's main objection in this passage is that if Descartes' "evil is not a thing" move absolves God from causal responsibility for moral evil, parallel reasoning will also absolve humans from causal responsibility for moral evil, a *reductio ad absurdum*.[69] For if evil has no divine cause because it is not real, then it isn't clear how there can be *any* cause of it.[70] Leibniz reasons that privation theory thus entails that all moral and physical evil is entirely uncaused, and one doesn't have to share his fondness for the Principle of Sufficient Reason to find that conclusion troubling.

The obvious rejoinder is that although evil is a privation of goodness and being, *there is* a real subject of the privation that lacks the appropriate perfection. So even if nothing can cause a privation *per se*, humans *can* bring it about that subjects lack perfections they ought to have, and, in that sense, they can cause privative evils. But Leibniz could simply push his point a step further. If humans cause privative moral evil by producing changes in subjects that are thereby deprived of appropriate perfections, then the same could hold equally well of God. After all, God too has the power to cause real subjects to lack appropriate perfections (such as when in meting out punishments), and so if to cause a privation one has only to cause a subject to lack an appropriate perfection, it is no longer clear why God can't cause privative evils after all. Therefore,

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[68] CP 111

[69] For a fuller discussion of this passage, and Leibniz's views on privation theory more generally, see Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil."

[70] Bayle makes a similar objection (Bayle, *Objections to Poiret* 161).

Leibniz concludes, if God is nevertheless not responsible for moral evil, it must be in virtue of something besides the fact that evil is a privation.[71]

Spinoza offered a far more sweeping criticism of privation theory. In 1663, Spinoza published a book on the Cartesian system in which he repeated Descartes' account of error as "a privation of the proper use of liberty."[72] William Blyenbergh, a young Dutch Calvinist, wrote to Spinoza to express his dissatisfaction with this account. Blyenbergh presented Spinoza with a dilemma: "either Adam's forbidden act…is not evil in itself, or else God himself seems to bring about what we call evil." He added, "And it seems to me that neither you nor Monsieur Descartes solve this difficulty by saying that evil is a non-being with which God does not concur."[73]

In reply, Spinoza undercuts the very foundations of privation theory. Recall that the traditional distinction between mere negation and privation assumed the existence of human-independent norms of goodness and appropriate perfections. Spinoza rejects this supposition. "Privation is not an act of depriving; it is nothing more than a state of want, which in itself is nothing. It is only a construct of the mind or a mode of thinking which we form from comparing things with one another."[74] Rather than being based on the failure to conform to intrinsic "oughts," privations result from comparative human judgments. "[A] privation is nothing but denying something of a thing which *we judge* to pertain to its nature, and negation nothing but denying something of a thing because it does not pertain to its nature" (emphasis mine).[75]

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[71] For what it's worth, I do not think the Scholastics would have found this objection as damning as Leibniz takes it to be (see Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil" for discussion).
[72] Spinoza, *Collected Works* 257
[73] Spinoza, Ep 18
[74] Spinoza, Ep 21
[75] Spinoza, Ep 21

Spinoza uses the traditional example of blindness to deny that blindness in humans is a privation of a perfection that every human, by their shared natures, ought to have. According to Spinoza, the evil of blindness is based on an all-too-human judgment, not some unrealized natural *telos*:

> We say, for example, that a blind man is deprived of sight because we easily imagine him as seeing, whether this imagination arises from the fact that we compare him with others who see, or his present state with his past when he used to see. And when we consider man in this way, by comparing his nature with that of others or with his own past nature, then we affirm that seeing pertains to his nature, and *for that reason* we say that he is deprived of it.[76]

Hence, on Spinoza's view, *all privation is mere negation*, plus a bit of comparative judgment.

Spinoza rejects more than just traditional privative accounts of *physical* evils. In the appendix to his book on Descartes, Spinoza also denies the traditional account of moral evil: "evil and sins are nothing in things, but are only in the human mind which compares things with one another…"[77] Nor is his rejection limited to evils. According to Spinoza, claims about *goodness* also turn out to be based on subjective judgments of utility. "As far as good and evil are concerned, they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another."[78]

Interestingly, by the time Spinoza reaches these sweeping heights (or lows), he has conceded Blyenburgh's original point. Blyenburgh had claimed that either God is the author of moral evil or else there is no moral evil. In the end, Spinoza embraces the second horn of the dilemma and admits that there is no such thing as moral (or physical)

[76] Spinoza, Ep 21, emphasis mine
[77] Spinoza, *Collected Works* 328
[78] Spinoza, *Collected Works* 545

evil, if "evil" refers to the deprivation of an intrinsic excellence that is independent of human judgments.

To the extent to which he even retains the term, evil for Spinoza is only a kind of weakness or relative limitation.[79] Put positively, all evil for Spinoza is metaphysical evil, a return to the *evil as limitation* view. Spinoza does, however, follow traditionalist on one point. Like everyone else we've discussed, Spinoza explains the existence of metaphysical evils by appeal to cosmic diversity.

> But to those who ask, "Why did God not create all men so that they would be governed by the command of reason?" I answer only, "because he did not lack the material to create all things, from the highest degree of perfection to the lowest"; or, to speak more properly, "because the laws of his nature have been so ample that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect" (as I have demonstrated in Ip16).[80]

By the start of the 18th century, privation theory began to disappear from discussions of evil, even among those who otherwise continued to embrace the traditional account. Clarke, for instance, presents a standard version of the traditional theodicy in 1705, just 54 years after Descartes's *Meditations*.

> For liberty implying a natural power of doing evil as well as good; and the imperfect nature of finite beings making it possible for them to abuse this their liberty to an actual commission of evil; and it being necessary to the order and beauty of the whole and the for displaying the infinite wisdom of the creator that there should be different and various degrees of creatures whereof consequently some must be less perfect than others, hence there necessarily arises a possibility of evil, notwithstanding that the creator is infinitely good.[81]

Clarke's account is notable mostly for its complete lack of appeal to privation and its presumption that this absence needs no explanation.

4.2 Free Will Theodicy Challenged

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[79] Spinoza, *Collected Works* 546
[80] Spinoza, *Collected Works* 446
[81] Clark, *Demonstration* 78

Privation theory wasn't the only aspect of the traditional theodicy under fire in the 17th century. Some early moderns objected to the broadly libertarian accounts of creaturely freedom in late Scholasticism. But the two main alternatives to libertarianism – compatibilism (Hobbes, Locke and Leibniz[82]) and hard incompatibilism (Spinoza[83]) – could not as easily shift the burden for moral evils to misused creaturely freedom. For if we can act freely while being determined to do so (compatibilism), surely God could have determined us to commit much less moral evil. And if there is no creaturely freedom (hard incompatibilism), tracing evils back to morally responsible creatures is a non-starter.

There were also challenges to the free will theodicy that did not focus as directly on the viability of libertarianism. Bayle was a particularly sharp critic in this regard:

> Those who say that God permitted sin because he could not have prevented it without destroying the free will that he had given to man, and which was the best present he made to him, expose themselves greatly. The reason they give is lovely. It has a *je ne sais quoi*, an indefinable something that is dazzling. It has grandeur. But in the end, it can be opposed by arguments more easily understood by all men and based more on common sense and the ideas of order.[84]

Bayle's most penetrating criticisms focus on the metaphysics and the value of creaturely freedom.

First, Bayle questions why an omnipotent and omniscient God couldn't create free creatures who in fact perform only morally good actions, while still retaining the *capacity* to bring about moral evil. The cogency of Bayle's challenge on this point turns on larger issues of grace, foreknowledge, and freedom, so I will just mention two of Bayle's ideas here.

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[82] Hobbes, *Leviathan* 137; Locke, *Essay* II.21; Leibniz, T 288
[83] Spinoza, *Collected Works* 425 and 483-4
[84] Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Paulicians," rem. E

First, Bayle thinks God could allow creatures to act freely just in cases in which God knows that they otherwise would use their freedom to perform morally good actions. Bayle likens this oversight to what we would expect of an effective guardian: "if [God] gives them free will, [God ought to] always efficiently watch over them to prevent their falling into sin."[85] By using such knowledge, God could override our freedom whenever God knows that we would otherwise use it to freely bring about moral evil.

One might object that this preventative oversight would undermine the excellence of our freedom. But Bayle wonders why the greater good of creaturely freedom must involve *unconstrained* freedom. Why isn't an unrealized *capacity* for freely causing moral evil enough of a good? "To have regard for man's free will, to abstain carefully from interfering with the inclination of a man who is going to lose his innocence forever and is going to condemn himself eternally, do you call that a legitimate observation of the privileges of freedom?"[86]

In a different vein, Bayle suggests that God could bestow on each of us a sufficient amount of grace so that we invariably, though still freely, perform only good actions. He thinks theologians are already committed to the compatibility of praiseworthy human free actions and the gift of divine grace.[87] He reasons that God could therefore give creatures enough grace to ensure that they perform only good actions without undermining their freedom:

> All theologians agree that God can infallibly produce a good act of the will in the human soul without depriving it of its free functions…then they have to

[85] Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Manicheans," rem. D
[86] Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Paulicians," rem. M
[87] In the background is the Scholastic idea that every praiseworthy creaturely act must be accompanied by a special concurring gift of divine grace that is over and above God's ordinary, general concurrence. There were sharp disputes at the start of the 17th century over exactly how this was compatible with human freedom, but *that they were compatible* was widely agreed upon (see fn 50 above).

> acknowledge that a proper assistance furnished by God to Adam, or some help that was so arranged that it would have infallibly prevented his Fall, would have been in complete accord with the use of his free will…and would have left him sufficient room to act meritoriously.[88]

Bayle's second main challenge focuses on the value claim of the free will theodicy. Bayle denies that the good of human freedom outweighs the costs of the moral evils of our world, in which case a truly good God would have created a world without free creatures at all. Bayle presents colorful examples from everyday life to support this judgment, such as:

> There is no good mother who, having given her daughters permission to go to a dance, would not revoke that permission if she were assured that they would succumb to temptation and lose their virginity there. And any mother who, knowing for sure that this would come to pass, allowed them to go to the dance and was satisfied with exhorting them to be virtuous and with threatening to disown them if they were no longer virgins when they returned home, would, at the very least, bring upon herself the charge that she loved neither her daughters nor chastity…She would be told that…it would have been better to keep her daughters in her sight than to give them the privilege of freedom…[89]

In other words, Bayle thinks that a perfectly good God, faced with a choice between creating free sinners whom God knows will screw up in the ways we do or creating a world without free creatures at all, ought to choose no freedom and no moral evil. "If there be no other way of avoiding this result than by revoking his donation [of freedom], he would have to do this. This would better preserve his character as patron and benefactor than anything else he might do."[90]

Part of Bayle's point in using examples from human life is to remind his readers that we would surely judge *human* agents morally deficient if they acted in the ways that God is supposed to have acted according to free will theodicies. So either the standards of

[88] Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Paulicians," rem. M
[89] Bayle *Dictionary*, "Paulicians," rem. E
[90] Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Paulicians," rem. M

human and divine goodness are different (an option Bayle rejects for other reasons), or else free will theodicies fail to demonstrate God's blamelessness. Bayle thinks this conclusion is even more obvious when we recall that the punishment for misused freedom is supposed to be eternal damnation: "But it follows necessarily that he should have deprived them of [freedom] at any cost rather than wait until it should result in their eternal damnation."[91]

Bayle's own solution – at least the one he officially gives – is to avoid seeking explanations altogether for why God allows evil. According to Bayle, theists should instead say, "'I do not know; I only believe that He had some reasons for it that are really worthy of his infinite wisdom, but which are incomprehensible to me.' By offering this answer, you will stop the most obstinate disputers short…"[92] Although appeals to faith without explanations resonated with some in the 17th century, the remaining figures we will look at defend the appropriateness of offering theodicies, even though they share some of Bayle's suspicions about the traditional account.

5. Malebranche and Physical Evil

So far, I have focused mostly on moral and metaphysical evils. In this section, I'll turn to physical evils and Malebranche's striking explanation for their existence and distribution in a world sustained by an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God.[93]

Malebranche is in a pretty tight spot when it comes to the problem of evil. He is an occasionalist, which means he rejects premise (2), but in a way that makes explaining

[91] Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Paulicians," rem. M
[92] Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Paulicians," rem. M
[93] For the sake of space, I will ignore Malebranche's appeal to the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the motive for God's creating anything in the first place and as part of the explanation for God's action in the world (cf. Malebranche, *Dialogues* IX.154-160, 210-215; TNG I.i-iv, xxxii, liv). For an overview of this strand in Malebranche, see Don Rutherford, "Malebranche's Theodicy."

God's blamelessness in evil even more difficult. For according to occasionalism, God is the *only* true cause. So not only does God cause *some* physical evils (4), God is the sole cause of every change in the world.[94] This means that attempts to justify God's actions by claiming that God merely *allows*, but doesn't *cause*, physical evils won't work for Malebranche. God causes natural disasters and deformities, as well as any pain and suffering that attends them. "He does not allow monsters; it is He who makes them."[95] Hence, the problem of evil that Malebranche raises for himself is quite daunting: "Therefore, the universe is the most perfect God can create? What! So many monsters, so many disorders, the great number of impious people; does all this contribute to the perfection of the universe?"[96]

In reply, Malebranche concedes that God could have made a better world than ours. "God could, no doubt, make a world more perfect than the one in which we live."[97] In particular, God could have made a world with much less physical evil, including fewer natural disasters, diseases, and deformities, and less pain and suffering. Malebranche explains that God didn't because

> God wills that His action as well as His world bear the character of his attributes. Not content that the universe honors Him through its excellence and beauty, He wills that His ways glorify Him through their simplicity, their fecundity, their universality…[98]

That is, God doesn't decide which possible world to create based only on the content of the world. God also wants to produce that content *in the best possible way*. "Thus, do not

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[94] Like everyone else in the 17th century, Malebranche denies that God causes moral evil (Malebranche, *Search* 556), and he appeals to creaturely freedom as the true source of sins. However, it is very difficult to see how humans could ever be morally responsible, given occasionalism. (For Malebranche's most succinct attempt to address this concern, see Malebranche, *Search* 547-558).
[95] Malebranche, *Dialogues* IX.164
[96] Malebranche, *Dialogues* IX.161
[97] Malebranche, *TNG* I.xiv
[98] Malebranche, *Dialogues* IX.163

imagine that God willed absolutely to make the most perfect work possible, but only the most perfect in relation to the ways most worthy of Him."[99]

According to Malebranche, God acts in the most perfect ways when God acts through simple, constant and uniform means – characteristics that reflect some of God's own attributes. In the physical world, Malebranche thinks God so perfectly acts through two fundamental laws of motion.[100] An unfortunate but unavoidable byproduct of God's acting through such simple, constant, and uniform physical laws is the production of many physical evils.

> Now these laws, because of their simplicity, necessarily have unhappy consequences with respect to us: but these consequences do not make it necessary for God to change these laws into more complicated ones…it is true that God could remedy these unhappy consequences through an infinite number of particular wills: but order will not have it so.[101]

Malebranche here acknowledges that God could, of course, interrupt or complicate the physical laws and prevent many physical evils from occurring. For example, God could suspend the laws of motion whenever cars crash into each other. But doing so would require God to act in a less simple, constant, and uniform manner – in short, in a less perfect way. Since God is at least as concerned about acting in the most perfect way as He is about the excellence of the world these ways produce, God usually does not circumvent the natural order.[102]

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[99] Malebranche, *Dialogues* IX.163
[100] Malebranche, *TNG* I.xv
[101] Malebranche, TNG I.xliii
[102] Malebranche does allow for the possibilities of miraculous interventions in cases where God's other attributes (such as justice or benevolence) overrule the demands of simplicity, but these are exceptional (cf. Malebranche, *Dialogues* XI.199 and TNG I.xxi). In a throwback to Augustine's strategy, Malebranche also claims that prior to sinning, Adam had the ability to avoid physical evils by stopping the communication of pain from his body to his mind, but that part of his punishment for sin was losing that ability (Malebranche, *Search*, 580-81).

Malebranche claims that God's intention to act in the most perfect way also explains why God is blameless for doing so, despite the bad consequences we suffer as a result. "And in consequence, God is not to be blamed for not distributing the order and simplicity of his laws by miracles which would be quite convenient to our needs, but quite opposed to the wisdom of God…"[103] Behind Malebranche's justification is, I believe, an appeal to something like the Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE).[104] God foresaw but did not intend the physical evils that result from God's praiseworthy effort to create and preserve the world in the best possible manner. "He has not established the laws of the communication of motion *with the design* of producing monsters…he willed these laws *because* of their fruitfulness, and not their sterility" (emphases mine).[105]

Malebranche's point is that God does not *use* physical evils as a means to achieve God's goals in creation, nor are the evils part of God's intended goals. "Thus, God does not will positively or directly that there should be monsters, but He wills positively certain laws of the communication of motion, of which monsters are necessary consequences."[106] Malebranche readily admits that if there had been a possible world with equally simple, uniform, and constant laws and fewer physical evils, God would have created it instead.[107] But, alas for us, there is no such possible world.[108]

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[103] Malebranche, TNG I.xliii

[104] According to the doctrine of double effect, it may be permissible for an agent to act in a way that has both good and bad effects, so long as the bad effects meet certain conditions. The most important conditions are that the bad effects are neither the intended goal of the act nor part of the means for achieving that goal. The bad effects must also not be *so* bad as to disproportionately outweigh the good effects, a condition that is more difficult for Malebranche's theodicy to satisfy.

[105] Malebranche, TNG I.xix; see also TNG I.xviii.

[106] Malebranche, *Search*, 589; see also *Dialogues* IX.164

[107] Malebranche, TNG I.xxii

[108] Like Leibniz (and unlike Descartes), Malebranche denies that the content of possible worlds are determined by God's volitions (Malebranche, *Search* 587 and *Dialogues* VII.111). Such is our bad modal luck: there is not a better possible world than ours that could be preserved by at least as perfect means. (For Malebranche's version of possible worlds, which is very similar to Leibniz's, see *Dialogues* X.191, 199, 208 and TNG I.xii.)

Malebranche elegantly applies this strategy to the distribution of both physical evils and divine grace. "Here is why the world is filled with *impious people*, monsters, disorders of all kinds. *God could convert all people* and prevent all disorders. But He must not thereby upset the simplicity and uniformity of His action" (emphases mine).[109] Just as sometimes the simplicity and constancy of God's action in the physical world means that rain falls uselessly in the ocean, so too God's simple and uniform distribution of grace to everyone may entail that it sometimes falls uselessly on those ill-disposed to consent to its taking root.

> Thus as one has no right to be annoyed that rain falls in the sea where it is useless, and that it does not fall on seeded grounds where it is necessary…so too one ought not complain of the apparent irregularity according to which grace is given to men…the simplicity of general laws does not permit that this grace, which is inefficacious in this corrupted heart, fall in another heart where it would be efficacious…For finally the order of grace would be less perfect, less admirable, less lovable, if it were more complex.[110]

Leibniz, our final 17th century theodicist, thought Malebranche was on the right track. Leibniz agrees that God takes into account the means of organizing and preserving the world when choosing which possible world to bring about. But Leibniz denies that God is as singularly concerned with the uniformity and constancy of God's ways as Malebranche sometimes suggests. Leibniz thinks God seeks to maximize *both* the simplicity of means and the "variety, richness, and abundance" of effects.[111] In fact, according to Leibniz, our world is the best possible world partly because it best

[109] Malebranche, *Dialogues* IX.164
[110] Malebranche, TNG I.xliv
[111] Leibniz, AG 38-39. Leibniz may talk past Malebranche here, since Malebranche sometimes claims that God's means are perfect partly in virtue of their productivity and fecundity (Malebranche, TNG I.xvii-xviii), although he most often emphasizes their simplicity and uniformity.

harmonizes these twin demands of perfection: simplicity of ways and diversity of effects.[112]

6.0 Leibniz and the Best Possible World

If there is a single philosopher most closely associated with the problem of evil in intellectual history, it is Leibniz. One of the unsurpassed geniuses of the 17th century, Leibniz wrestled throughout his philosophical career with understanding the relation between God and evil. He explores numerous and sometimes conflicting accounts, some traditional, others novel. Several of these explanations are pulled together in the only book he ever published, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*.[113]

The thesis at the heart of Leibniz's theodicy – indeed, much of his philosophical system – is that God freely created the best of all possible worlds, namely ours. There are a number of internal concerns one might have about this claim, as Leibniz himself recognized. He struggled throughout his writings to show how God's creation of the best possible world was free and contingent, while also maintaining that God, by God's very nature, couldn't have done less than the best. He also denied repeatedly that God's choice of the best rendered our actions (including moral evils) necessary, a perpetual worry for Leibniz's theodicy. For if God must choose the best possible world, and if our sins are part of the best possible world, it seems like our sins will be somehow necessary too. And if our sins do follow as consequences of God's choice of the best possible world, it isn't

[112] Malebranche too claims that God seeks to achieve "the most beautiful harmony possible" (Malebranche, *Dialogues* XI.208). Hence, one might again wonder how deep Leibniz's disagreement with Malebranche over the bestness of our world really runs (Leibniz, AG 36-37). If the means of God's actions are included as parts of possible worlds, Malebranche would agree that the actual world is the best possible world.
[113] Virtually every substantive claim that Leibniz makes in his *Theodicy* also appears in writings he left unpublished. In the interests of accessibility, I will cite the *Theodicy* versions of his claims when possible.

clear how we remain morally responsible and God remains blameless for them. These are important concerns to which Leibniz regularly returned, but I will focus here on more general issues surrounding Leibniz's claim that this is the best of all possible worlds.[114]

Leibniz thinks he can prove that ours is the sole best of all possible worlds (BPW), at least assuming that God exists and is perfectly wise and reasonable (which are also provable, according to Leibniz).[115] Our world is the best along the three dimensions that we have been using for evil: "For perfection includes not only the moral good and the physical good of intelligent creatures, but also the good which is purely metaphysical, and concerns also creatures devoid of reason."[116] So our world, according to Leibniz, is morally, physically, and metaphysically the best and most perfect that God could create.

If Leibniz is right about this, then he will have an immediate explanation of God's blamelessness for the existence of evil, one that neatly circumvents all the previously discussed options. For if our world is the BPW, then God can hardly be blamed for bringing it about, at least on the assumptions that ought implies can and that bringing about nothing would be an inferior possibility. In other words, once we add that ours is the BPW, (6) follows from (1) and (2) without needing further explanation of why God causes physical and metaphysical evils or allows moral evils.[117]

> It is true that one can imagine possible worlds without sin and without unhappiness…but these same worlds again would be very inferior to ours in

[114] For a brief overview of Leibniz's reply to some of the above concerns, see Michael Murray, "Leibniz on the Problem of Evil."
[115] For a quick version of his proof that God exists and created the BPW, see Leibniz, T 7-9 and 224-228. He claims elsewhere that his view has the support of "a great many passages from Sacred Scripture and the holy fathers" (Leibniz, AG 37). For further discussion, see Steven Nadler's essay in this volume.
[116] Leibniz, T 209
[117] Not that Leibniz shies away from offering such explanations. Indeed, he sometimes embraces the three main aspects of the traditional account: the good of plenitude explains metaphysical evils (Leibniz, T 124); the good of retributive justice explains at least some physical evils (Leibniz, T 265-266); and misused creaturely freedom explains moral evil (Leibniz, T 273).

> goodness. I cannot show you this in detail…But you must judge with me *ab effectu* [from the effect], since God has chosen this world as it is.[118]

Leibniz even takes his BPW claim on the offensive: if God had created a world with less evil, God wouldn't have been perfectly good. "Wisdom only shows God the best possible exercise of His goodness: after that, the evil that occurs is an inevitable result of the best. I will add something stronger: To permit the evil, as God permits it, is the greatest goodness."[119] Hence, God is actually *praiseworthy* for creating a world that contains evil. "Since, in short, it was necessary to choose from all the things possible what produced the best effect together, and since vice entered in by this door, God would not have been altogether good, altogether wise if he had excluded it."[120]

Leibniz hastens to explain that this does *not* mean that God prefers sin and suffering. Like Malebranche, Leibniz admits that God would have preferred to create a world in which Judas doesn't betray Jesus (to use one of Leibniz's favorite examples), at least when that betrayal is considered in isolation. But when deciding on which possible world to create, God doesn't consider events in isolation, since not all events are possible together, according to Leibniz. Instead, God considers entire worlds, complete series of compossible events.[121] Therefore, an event that is preferable in isolation may be part of an overall non-preferable series. So while God would prefer, say, a world without damned sinners, *all else being equal*, once everything else in such possible worlds is taken into account, God sees that those worlds are undesirable, *all things considered*.[122]

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[118] Leibniz, T 10 It is worth keeping in mind that despite Leibniz's bold claim that ours is the BPW, he does not think that we have much insight into what the compensating greater goods actually are that particular evils occasion.
[119] Leibniz, T 121
[120] Leibniz, T 194
[121] Leibniz, T 9 and 225
[122] Leibniz, T 22, 122 and 222

One might respond that surely God could have made our world without at least some of the parts that, considered in themselves, are highly undesirable. Why not make our world, except without Hitler? Leibniz replies that the content of possible worlds are so deeply intertwined that a world without Hitler would also be a world without us. More intuitively, who we are is bound up with our relations to other people and events, including the horrors of the 20th century.

Leibniz defends a very strong version of this idea, claiming that *every* part of a possible world is essentially connected to every other part. "Thus, if the smallest evil that comes to pass in the world were missing in it, it would no longer be this world" and, he adds elsewhere, none of us would have existed either.[123] Hence, wishing that God had created a different world, one free of any of the evils of our world, cuts against our own self-interests, at least if it is better for us to exist than never to have been born at all. More importantly, had God created a world with any less evil, God would have created a different, and therefore sub-optimal, world. Therefore, Leibniz concludes, "God, doing what his wisdom and his goodness combined ordain, is not answerable for the evil that he permits."[124]

Leibniz's claim that ours is the best of all possible worlds offers a sweeping, concise, and decisive justification for why God made a world with as much evil as ours. But can it be taken seriously? The reply from many upon reading the *Theodicy* was a firm "no." Indeed, the aftermath of this, the most famous early modern theodicy, represents a remarkable pivot in intellectual history. Within a generation, Leibniz's bold proclamation that our world (with all of its sin, misery, and deformities) is the best world that God

[123] Leibniz, T 9 and CP 107
[124] Leibniz, T 120

could have made became the subject of parody and ridicule among Parisian intellectuals. In his famous reply, *Candide*, Voltaire wryly mocks what he takes to be Leibniz's unrealistic optimism. "Candide, stunned, stupefied, despairing, bleeding, trembling, said to himself: – If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others like?"[125]

The individual suffering of Candide also raises a final, broader challenge for Leibniz and the others we have been considering. We have seen how 17th century theodicists appealed to a variety of greater goods to show how God's role in our evil-stricken world is blameless: cosmic diversity; unfettered creaturely freedom; simple, uniform, and fecund laws; the manifestation of divine justice; creaturely character development; and even goods beyond our ken.[126] Their appeals to these sorts of greater goods have not gone unchallenged, even by later theists. Some have pointedly asked, "*To whom or to what* do those greater goods accrue?"[127] The concern is that the greater goods of 17th century theodicies would be good only for the world as a whole or only for a subset of individuals, such as the perpetrators of evil or the non-damned. This has prompted fresh challenges for our 17th century theodicists, challenges that focus less on their explanations of God's blamelessness for evils and more on their assumptions about the focus and extent of God's goodness and love.[128]

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[125] Voltaire, *Candide* 12
[126] For the last, see Leibniz, AG 115.
[127] This is, for example, one way to understand Ivan Karamazov's challenge in Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 244. For a late 20th century version, see Marilyn Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God.*
[128] I am grateful to Sean Greenberg and Dan Kaufman for comments on an earlier draft.

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