

# L'OR DANS LA BOUE

*LEIBNIZ ET LES PHILOSOPHIES  
ANTIQUES ET MÉDIÉVALES*

Vincent Carraud (dir.)



PHILOSOPHIES

L'un des traits caractéristiques de Leibniz est son rapport positif, érudit et essentiel à toute la tradition philosophique. Son recours aux auteurs et aux thèses du passé est d'autant plus frappant que la plupart de ses contemporains, à commencer par Descartes, prétendent inaugurer leur propre pensée dans le refus de la tradition philosophique. Le rapport que Leibniz assume à celle-ci peut s'entendre par analogie avec les parties célèbres où les joueurs d'échecs apprennent leur art : un bon joueur, instruit de l'histoire des échecs, reconnaît aux premiers coups l'ouverture choisie par son adversaire, identifie aussitôt la stratégie qu'il va suivre et anticipe la fin de partie qu'il tentera de mettre en place ; il s'épargne ainsi supputations et hypothèses, parce qu'il reconnaît les situations exemplaires déjà affrontées par les grands maîtres.

On trouvera ici non seulement restitué ce que Leibniz a pensé des auteurs antiques et médiévaux, mais encore analysé son bon *usage* de l'histoire de la philosophie.

Grand prix de philosophie de l'Académie française, titulaire de la chaire d'histoire de la philosophie moderne en Sorbonne et directeur de l'équipe de recherche *Métaphysique : histoires, transformations, actualité*, Vincent Carraud réunit dans ce volume à la fois les contributions de spécialistes de Leibniz et celles d'historiens des philosophies antiques et médiévales qui éprouvent l'or trouvé par Leibniz dans la boue de ses lectures scolastiques : Roger Ariew et Marin Lucio Mare, Thomas Auffret, Claire Bayle, Frédéric de Buzon, Michaël Devaux, Stefano Di Bella, Agustín Echavarría, Thomas Leinkauf, Juan A. Nicolás, François Ottmann, Arnaud Pelletier, Jean-Louis Poirier, Marwan Rashed, Donald Rutherford, Kristell Trego, avec un avant-propos de Jean-Luc Marion.

# LEIBNIZ AND STOICISM

Donald Rutherford

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Vincent Carraud (dir.)

*avec la collaboration de Claire Bayle  
& Gabriel Meyer-Bisch*

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## ABRÉVIATIONS

- A *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, éd. Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaft et Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, séries I-VIII, Darmstadt/Leipzig/Berlin, 1923-...
- GM *Leibnizens Mathematische Schriften*, éd. C. Gerhardt, 7 vol., Berlin/Halle, 1849-1863, rééd. Hildesheim/New York, Olms, 1971.
- GP *Leibniz. Die philosophischen Schriften*, éd. C. Gerhardt, 7 vol., Berlin, 1875-1890, rééd. Hildesheim/New York, Olms, 1965.
- Dutens Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Opera omnia*, éd. Louis Dutens, Genève, 1768, rééd. Hildesheim/New York, Olms, 1990.
- Grua Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Textes inédits d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre*, publiés et annotés par Gaston Grua, 2 vol., Paris, PUF, 1948.
- AT *Œuvres de Descartes*, publiées par Charles Adam et Paul Tannery, nouvelle présentation par Bernad Rochot & Pierre Costabel, 11 vol., Paris, Vrin, 1964-1974.



DEUXIÈME PARTIE

# Le fil de l'histoire



## LEIBNIZ AND STOICISM

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Leibniz's response to Stoicism lacks the enthusiasm he shows for the doctrines of Plato and later Platonists. Of the latter he writes to Nicolas Rémond, "I have always been most satisfied, from my very youth, with the ethics of Plato and in some ways with his metaphysics as well; these two sciences want each other's company, like mathematics and physics<sup>1</sup>". Again, to Michael Gottfried Hansch, he writes, "No ancient philosophy comes closer to Christianity, although we justly censure those who think that Plato is everywhere reconcilable with Christ<sup>2</sup>". When Leibniz speaks of the Stoics, he is invariably more circumspect. Representative is a passage from a text of the early 1680s, in which he describes "a kind of blessed

- 1 GP III 637, L, 659. I rely on the following abbreviations: AG = G.W. *Leibniz, Philosophical Essays*, tr. R. Ariew and D. Garber, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1989; H = *Essays on Theodicy*, tr. E. M. Huggard, LaSalle, Open Court, 1985; K = *Correspondance de Leibniz avec l'électrice Sophie de Brunswick-Lunebourg*, ed. O. Klopp, 3 vols., Hanover, Klindworth, 1874; L = G. W. *Leibniz, Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. and tr. L. E. Loemker, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1969 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.); LS = A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols., Cambridge, CUP, 1987; Mo = *Mitteilungen aus Leibnizens ungedruckten Schriften*, ed. G. Mollat, Leipzig, Haessel, 1893; R = *Leibniz. Political Writings*, tr. P. Riley, Cambridge, CUP, 1988; T = *Essais de Théodicée*, cited by section from GP VI; W = *Leibniz: Selections*, ed. P. P. Wiener, New York, Scribner's, 1951.
- 2 Dutens II 1, 223, Loemker, 592; "Plato in my opinion, surpasses all the others, for he brings us hope for a better life with good reason and he is closest to Christianity. For one to have a high opinion of him, it is sufficient to read his excellent dialogue on the immortality of the soul (or on the death of Socrates)" (A II, 1<sup>1</sup>, 500, AG 241). For Leibniz's Latin summary of Plato's *Phaedo*, see A VI, 3, N.<sup>201</sup>.

life” (*beatam quandam vitam*) that can be achieved “already now on earth by a mind that is not only content with all evils but also pleased by the very things that happen.” The Stoics, he says, “seem on occasion to have inclined to this view, which certain passages in Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Seneca appear to suggest, albeit rather obscurely. But Plato expresses the same view much more clearly and explicitly<sup>3</sup>”.

My aim in this paper is to scrutinize the basis of Leibniz’s affinity with, and reservations concerning, Stoicism<sup>4</sup>. We know that, in general, he is keen to emphasize points of contact between his views and those of the ancients. Yet Stoicism is rarely acknowledged. In the *Nouveaux Essais*, Theophilus remarks on a new “system”, which “appears to unite Plato with Democritus, Aristotle with Descartes, the scholastics with the moderns [...]. It seems that [its author] takes the best from all sides and then goes further than anyone has yet gone<sup>5</sup>”. Plato, Aristotle, Democritus, the Sceptics, Descartes, Carden, Campanella, Anne Conway, Van Helmont, Henry More—all are given their due, with no mention of the Stoics<sup>6</sup>. Is this because Leibniz regards their contributions to philosophy as insignificant? Or is it, perhaps, because he has a motive (conscious or not) for downplaying their importance?

In pursuing this question, I will consider two areas in which Leibniz’s philosophy has strong affinities with Stoicism, stronger perhaps than Leibniz himself was ready to acknowledge. One is his view of the natural world, conceived as a teleologically ordered system of bodies in which “all is connected” (*tout est lié*). The other is his ethics, based on the principle

3 A VI, 4, 485.

4 This paper builds on earlier work I have published on the topic: Donald Rutherford, “Leibniz and the Stoics: The Consolations of Theodicy”, in Elmar Kremer and Michael Latzer (eds.), *The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2001, p. 138-164; *id.*, “Patience sans Espérance: Leibniz’s Critique of Stoicism”, in Jon Miller and Brad Inwood (eds.), *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge, CUP, 2003, p. 62-89. See also David Forman, “Leibniz and the Stoics: Fate, Freedom and Providence”, in John Sellars (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*, New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 226-242.

5 A VI, 6, 71.

6 Cf. GP III, 606-607; an exception is his 1698 response to Pierre Bayle, where along other doctrines Leibniz cites “the Stoic connection, compatible with the spontaneity of others” (GP IV, 524).

that the highest virtue and happiness of a rational being consists in the identification of her will with the will by which God orders all things for the best.

As is well known, Leibniz casts his modern rivals, Descartes and Spinoza, as representatives of the “sect of the new Stoics”. Leibniz charges these philosophers with, among other errors, holding that a “blind necessity” determines God to act; that “all possible things happen after one another, following all the variations of which matter is capable”; and that “we must not seek final causes<sup>7</sup>”. None of these are Stoic doctrines, and it is not clear that Leibniz means to claim they are. Rather, he uses the word ‘Stoic’ as an epithet to criticize a cluster of views (some of which may be Stoic ones) with which he disagrees. Here we find a hint of the kind of motive I alluded to above: Leibniz may prefer not to acknowledge the full extent of his agreement with the Stoics because that would require confronting the full extent of his agreement with Spinoza—and that he does not want to do.

In what follows I set aside the seventeenth-century context in order to assess Leibniz’s relationship to ancient Stoicism. We may assume that he was familiar with the main textual sources available to a learned readership in the seventeenth century. In the *Théodicée*, much of his discussion of Stoic doctrines is framed in response to Pierre Bayle’s article “Chrysippe” in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. However, Leibniz also was acquainted with representations of Stoicism in central texts from the classical period—by Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius—as well as with Justus Lipsius’ early seventeenth-century compendia of Stoic doctrines<sup>8</sup>. From here on, I will have nothing more to say about Leibniz’s sources but will take it for granted that his knowledge of Stoicism was sufficient to support his engaging with it in a meaningful way.

7 A VI, 4, 1385, AG 282.

8 Cf. T 332, 379, citing Justus Lipsius, *Physiologiae Stoicorum Libri Tres: L. Annaeo Senecae, aliisque scriptoribus illustrandis* (Antwerp, 1604). A set of reading notes on Epictetus’ *Enchiridion* (A VI 3, N. 24) reveals Leibniz’s familiarity with other ancient authors, whom he would have encountered through his teacher Jakob Thomasius, author of *Exercitatio de stoica mundi exustione* (Leipzig, 1676).

## PLATO *VERSUS* THE STOICS

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The contrast between the metaphysical doctrines of Plato and the Stoics offers a useful lens for disentangling different strands in Leibniz's thought. In praising Plato's philosophy, Leibniz focuses on three main points<sup>9</sup>. The first, and most general, is Plato's identification of the intelligible and the real. This supports the thesis, developed by later Platonists, that the ultimate ground of all being and existence, God, is wholly independent of matter and hence in some sense transcendent with respect to the world of created, material things. Furthermore, the identification of the intelligible and the real provides a criterion for specifying which created things are fully real. In Leibniz's judgment, these are "intelligible substances", ultimately characterized as monads<sup>10</sup>. Second, Plato's dialogues, especially the *Phaedo*, offer support for the immateriality and the individual immortality of the human soul, a crucial condition, in Leibniz's view, for the exercise of divine justice: the good are rewarded for their virtue and the bad punished for their wickedness, if not in this life then in a post-mortem existence<sup>11</sup>. Finally, Leibniz highlights Plato's defense of natural teleology. Against earlier Greek thinkers, Plato advocates viewing natural change as occurring in accordance with final causes, and not simply material causes or brute necessity. Thus, nature as a whole is a system of ends, ordered for the best<sup>12</sup>.

On the first two points, the Stoics advance a very different metaphysical picture. They maintain that all existing things are bodies contained within a unitary cosmos, and that God is an intelligent power immanent within the cosmos. Indeed, as its active principle, God is the universe<sup>13</sup>. In conceiving God in this way, the Stoics effectively block key Leibnizian doctrines, in

9 On the Platonist background to Leibniz's thought, see Christia Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development*, Cambridge, CUP, 2001; Thomas Leinkauf, "Leibniz und Platon", *Zeitsprünge. Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit*, vol. 13, 2009, p. 23-45.

10 Letter to Queen Sophie Charlotte, 1702 (GP VI, 502-503, AG 189).

11 See note 2 above, and A VI, 4, 1386, AG 283.

12 Cf. *Phaedo* 97b-99c, often praised by Leibniz (A VI, 4, 1387-1388, A VI, 4, 1403), as well as the *Timaeus*.

13 Diogenes Laertius, *Lines of the Eminent Philosopher* (hereafter DL), 7.134-138.

particular, his view of the divine mind as containing representations of every possible way the world might be and the divine will as a principle of choice that results in the creation of a single actual world, ontologically distinct from God<sup>14</sup>. Equally objectionable from Leibniz's point of view is the Stoics' conception of the human soul. The Stoics regard the soul as a kind of body diffused throughout the perceptible body of a living being<sup>15</sup>. In human beings, the soul has distinctive rational powers, which track the divine reason immanent in the universe. This means that the human soul, or its rational part, expresses the divine mind, as Leibniz claims, though for the Stoics it is not ontologically distinct from God. It is, rather, a part of the world soul<sup>16</sup>, a view Leibniz finds uncomfortably close to Spinoza's metaphysics. There is disagreement among later Stoics on whether their cosmology entails that the human soul is mortal, or whether in the case of the sage at least there is some sort of post-mortem survival<sup>17</sup>. Either way, from the perspective of Leibniz's concerns, the immortality of an eternal, non-material soul offers a more secure basis on which to reason about the operation of divine justice than a material and potentially mortal soul.

On these three topics—the intelligibility of reality, divine transcendence and the immateriality of the soul—Leibniz's philosophy is much closer to Platonism than to Stoicism. The same cannot be said, though, of their respective views of the teleology of nature. The Stoics are as strongly committed as Plato is to the idea that god orders the universe for the best<sup>18</sup>. Conveying the Stoics' position in *De natura deorum*, Cicero writes:

Nor is there anything else besides the world which has nothing missing, and which is equipped from every point of view, perfect, and complete in all its measures and parts. As Chrysippus clearly put it, just as the shield-cover was made for the sake of the shield and the sheath for the sake of the sword, so too with the exception of the world everything else was made for

14 T 336.

15 DL 7.156.

16 DL 7.143.

17 DL 7.157.

18 On this point, see David Furley, "Cosmology", in Keimpe A. Algra *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cambridge, CUP, 1999, p. 448-451.

the sake of other things: for example, the crops and fruits which the earth brings forth were made for the sake of animals, and the animals which it brings forth were made for the sake of men [...]. Man himself has come to be in order to contemplate and imitate the world, being by no means perfect, but a tiny constituent of that which is perfect. But the world, since it embraces everything and there is nothing which is not included in it, is perfect from every point of view. How then can it lack that which is best? But nothing is better than intellect and reason. Therefore the world cannot lack these<sup>19</sup>.

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The Stoics support the claim that the world is infused with order and reason by arguing that the world is, in its active, intelligent aspect, god: “the world is wise, and hence is god”<sup>20</sup>. The contrast with Leibniz’s view is clear. For Leibniz, as for the Stoics, God is perfectly wise and produces a world that expresses his wisdom, both in its rational order and in the rational beings whose place it is to know and imitate the order God gives to things<sup>21</sup>. Yet the two positions differ fundamentally in their accounts of the intelligent principle (God) by virtue of which the world is considered the most perfect; where for the Stoics this principle is immanent in nature, for Leibniz it is transcendent. Still, and this is the point I wish to emphasize, the two parties represent the rational order of the cosmos and its significance for rational beings in similar ways. This is seen most strikingly in Leibniz’s consistent defense of the Stoic doctrine of “connection.”

## THE DOCTRINE OF CONNECTION

The Stoics conceive of the cosmos as unified by a determinate causal order. The connection of causes is the basis of “fate” (*heimarmenē*), which, according to Chryssippus, is nothing but “a certain natural everlasting ordering of the whole: one set of things follows on and succeeds another,

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19 2.37-9, LS 54H.

20 *Ibid.*

21 GP VI, 605, 621.

and the interconnection is inviolable” (LS 55K)<sup>22</sup>. Cicero expands on this account in *De divinatione*. Fate, he says, is:

an ordering and sequence of causes, since it is the connection of cause to cause which out of itself produces anything. It is everlasting truth, flowing from all eternity. Consequently, nothing has happened which was not going to be, and likewise nothing is going to be of which nature does not contain causes working to bring that very thing about. This makes it intelligible that fate should be, not the “fate” of superstition, but that of physics, an everlasting cause of things – why past things happened, why present things are now happening, and why future things will be<sup>23</sup>.

Leibniz affirms this part of Stoic philosophy. In a German essay, “Von dem Verhängnisse” (not yet published in the Academy edition), he explicitly invokes the Stoics’ idea of a chain of causes to explain the mutual dependence of all things: “this mutual dependence consists in the fact that everything is linked to everything else, like a chain [*eine Kette*], and in the fact that everything will unfailingly happen in a predestined way, as unfailingly as that something has to happen when it does<sup>24</sup>”. In the *Théodicée*, Leibniz defends the Stoics’ doctrine of connection against the criticisms of Bayle, insisting that it entails only the hypothetical necessity of all events and not their absolute necessity<sup>25</sup>. It is a form of physical determination that is consistent with the correct analysis of the will’s freedom (a point on which, he says, the Stoics are in agreement with Thomists<sup>26</sup>), and it renders clear the sense in which physical and moral evil can arise as unwilled consequences of God’s selection of the best<sup>27</sup>. Though we should not underestimate the differences that still divide Leibniz and the Stoics, we also should not minimize the significance of

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22 Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 7.2.3.

23 1.125-6, LS 55L.

24 GP VII, 117, W 570.

25 T 170, 331-336.

26 T 331.

27 T 270.

the doctrine that within the actual world (and, for Leibniz, every possible world) “all is connected<sup>28</sup>”.

The Stoic doctrine of connection is closely integrated with their physics. Beginning with Chrysippus, the connection of all things is explained by the fact that a rarefied type of matter, *pneuma* (breath), an amalgam of fire and air, acts on all bodies to organize them and guide their functions. The action of *pneuma* underwrites God’s ordering of nature; because the Stoics hold that change can occur only through the action of one body on another, the order which he gives to nature must come about through the action of a body that is, in effect, the material conveyer of the divine<sup>29</sup>. This highlights, again, the Stoics’ conception of God as the active, rational principle immanent in matter. The presence of God within the cosmos renders the world “a living being, rational, animate, intelligent<sup>30</sup>”. God is present as the soul of the world, permeating all matter and rendering the cosmos unified and orderly, its parts “sympathetic” to each other<sup>31</sup>.

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We can distinguish two theses that the Stoics may hold concerning the connection of causes. A weaker thesis, which they clearly affirm, is that any body is involved in some chain of causes, which determines its existence and through which it determines the existence of other bodies. For the Stoics, “from everything that happens something else follows, with a necessary causal dependence on it, and everything that happens has something prior to it with which it causally coheres<sup>32</sup>”. This thesis is consistent with the cosmos consisting of many separate causal chains:

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28 T 9.

29 Cf. David Furley, “Cosmology”, art. cit., p. 440: “By mixing with the whole world [*pneuma*] exercises control over everything. It is the vehicle of (perhaps more strictly, it is identical with) God’s providence.” See also *id.*, “Hellenistic Physics and Metaphysics”, in Keimpe A. Algra *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy, op. cit.*, p. 388-391.

30 DL 7.142.

31 As Alexander of Aphrodisias reports, “[Chrysippus] assumes that the whole of substance is unified by a breath which pervades it all, and by which the universe is sustained and stabilized and made sympathetic with itself” (*On mixture*, 216.14-16; LS 48C). On the Stoic doctrine of sympathy, referenced by Leibniz, see René Brouwer, “Stoic Sympathy”, in Eric Schliesser (ed.), *Sympathy: A History*, New York, OUP, 2015, p. 15-35.

32 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On fate* 192.6-8 (LS 55N).

every body is causally connected with some bodies but not necessarily with every body. A stronger thesis asserts that every body is causally connected with every other body in the cosmos, with the result that everything is determinately as it is. What support is there for attributing this stronger thesis to the Stoics? Principally, it is their view that the connection of causes is brought about by the divine “breath” that permeates all matter. Because the same active intelligent principle is responsible for the causal connection of all matter, it is reasonable to expect that any part of matter must be responsive to the condition of every other part of matter. That is, there is a universal connection of causes: changing the state of any one body exerts some influence on the state of every other body.

This is how Leibniz understands the Stoic doctrine of connection to which he gives his assent. It might be thought, though, that his defense of the doctrine takes a different form from the Stoics’. Not only does Leibniz reject God’s immanence in matter, but he appears to argue for the doctrine of connection by way of general theses about the nature of relations and truth. If something becomes true of a thing by virtue of a new relation to something else, then that truth must be reflected in a change in the thing’s intrinsic properties. In Leibniz’s words, “there are no purely extrinsic denominations, denominations which have absolutely no foundation in the denominated thing itself [...]. And consequently, whenever the denomination of a thing is changed there must be a variation in the thing itself<sup>33</sup>”. Leibniz takes it to follow from this that, “every individual substance contains in its perfect notion the entire universe and everything that exists in it, past, present and future<sup>34</sup>”. And this implies that every substance is responsive to the state of every other substance: if anything changes in the state of one, that change is reflected in a difference in the state of every other. Thus, all created substances are “different expressions of the same universe”<sup>35</sup> and they “agree” with each other in the contents of their perceptions.

33 A VI, 4, 1645-1646, AG 32.

34 A VI, 4, 1646, AG 33. Cf. *Discours de metaphysique*, sec. 9 (A VI 4, 1541-1542), and Leibniz’s letter to De Volder of 6 July 1701 (GP II 226).

35 A VI, 4, 1646, AG 33.

These statements, summarizing Leibniz's account of the "completeness" of individual substances and the "pre-established harmony" among their states, seem far removed from the Stoic doctrine of connection. On closer examination, however, they do not reveal a significant disagreement with it. Leibniz does not argue *from* the no extrinsic denominations thesis to the universal connection of things; rather, he defends the former as a consequence of the latter. In the *Nouveaux Essais*, he says that "in metaphysical rigor there is no purely extrinsic denomination (*denominatio pure extrinseca*), because of [*à cause de*] the real connection of all things<sup>36</sup>". The "real connection of all things" refers to the causal dependence that the states of any one thing have on the states of any other. "Every individual created substance exerts physical action and passion on all the others. From a change made in one, some corresponding change follows in all the others<sup>37</sup>". It is because of this dependence that extrinsic denominations must be included in a substance's perfect or complete concept. If substances existed independently of each other, then this requirement would not hold: their states would occur without relation to the states of other created substances. But, in fact, the states of different substances do depend on each other, and for this reason the complete concept of a substance must include such facts about it.

To be sure, Leibniz denies that any created substance "exerts a metaphysical action or influx on any other<sup>38</sup>". Yet this does not mean that there are not genuine causal relations among substances. According to Leibniz, "what we call causes are only concurrent requisites, in metaphysical rigor<sup>39</sup>". The dependence relations among the states of substances are causal relations in the only sense in which it is correct to think of such relations as holding between created things<sup>40</sup>. The universal connection of substances rests for Leibniz, as it does for the Stoics, on the fact that a single intelligence is the original ground of their relations.

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36 A VI, 6, 227.

37 A VI, 4, 1646-1647, AG 33; cf. A VI, 4, 308.

38 A VI, 4, 1647, AG 33.

39 *Ibid.*

40 See Michael Futch, "Leibnizian Causation", *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 56, 2005, p. 451-467.

A different mode of divine action is implicated in the two cases, but the result is the same: God orders the cosmos by regulating the active and passive states of all finite things in relation to each other<sup>41</sup>. The “reason or universal determining cause that makes things be, and makes them be this way and not otherwise, must be outside matter”, Leibniz writes. And, “this ultimate reason for things, common to all and universal because of the connection between all the parts of nature, is what we call God<sup>42</sup>”.

Leibniz’s identification of substances with mind-like monads might lead us to think that he in effect “idealizes” the Stoics’ position, translating what they take to be external causal relations among bodies into relations among monads’ perceptions of bodies. In fact, I suggest, the affinity between their views goes deeper than this. On Leibniz’s account, the most basic claim about connection concerns (as it does for the Stoics) the causal relations among parts of matter, and it is only *via* these relations that we come to understand the way in which an infinity of monads are connected within a world.

We find this line of argument developed in the *Monadologie*. In § 61, Leibniz describes the connection of the parts of matter:

For everything is a plenum, which makes all matter interconnected [*ce qui rend toute la matiere liée*] [...]. For each body is affected, not only by those

- 41 For Leibniz, God does not achieve this result through direct intervention in nature. The regulation of the active and passive states of substances is part of the representation of a world *sub ratione possibilitatis*. God has only to create a world, and the states of its substances are thereby ordered or connected.
- 42 GP VI, 507, AG 192. It is crucial for Leibniz that “although all the facts of the universe are now certain with respect to God, or (what comes to the same thing) determined in themselves and even linked among themselves, it does not follow that their interconnection is always truly necessary, that is, that the truth which asserts that one fact follows from another is necessary” (GP III, 400-401, AG 193-194). He associates the denial of this proposition with Spinoza, and it is precisely here that he finds danger in the Stoics’ position, since whether or not they claim (as Spinoza does in the *Ethics*) that God necessitates the existence of finite things, they offer no explanation of how this is not true—an explanation Leibniz gives *via* the idea that God contemplates an infinity of possible worlds and chooses to create that one which is the best.

in contact with it [...] but also, through them, it feels the effects of those in contact with the bodies with which it itself is immediately in contact. From this it follows that this communication extends to any distance whatsoever. As a result, every body is affected by everything that happens in the universe [...] <sup>43</sup>.

On the basis of this version of the doctrine of connection, Leibniz explains how a monad's perceptions "go confusedly to infinity <sup>44</sup>" and how there exist relations of connection among monads themselves. The first point is established in § 62:

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Thus, although each created monad represents the whole universe, it more distinctly represents the body which is particularly affected by it, and whose entelechy it constitutes. And just as this body expresses the whole universe through the interconnection of all matter in the plenum [*par la connexion de toute la matiere dans le plein*], so the soul also represents the whole universe by representing this body, which belongs to it in a particular way <sup>45</sup>.

Until the end of his life Leibniz defends the view that no created substance can exist without a body, which it identifies as its own <sup>46</sup>. The body of a monad is the basis of its connection to other monads in a world: "God alone is above all matter, since he is its author. But creatures free or freed from matter would at the same time be divorced from the universal connection [*la liaison universelle*], like deserters from the general order <sup>47</sup>". For Leibniz, a monad only enters a world that it shares with other monads through its representation of itself as embodied <sup>48</sup>. The body determines its spatiotemporal location, and its actions and passions, relative to other things. Likewise, the body grounds the cognitive perspective of the monad, since what it knows of the world, independently of the intellectual

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43 GP VI, 617, AG 221.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

46 A VI, 6, 221.

47 GP VI, 546, L 592.

48 For further textual evidence and discussion, see Donald Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*, Cambridge, CUP, 1995, p. 188-197.

knowledge furnished by innate ideas, is a function of how it perceives things in accordance with the spatiotemporal perspective and sensory organs of its body.

Leibniz insists that the dependence relations among monads must be analyzed as instances of “ideal” causation, meaning that they are properly understood as explanatory relations among the contents of the perceptions of monads<sup>49</sup>. Granting this, the doctrine of connection is integral to Leibniz’s account of how a plurality of monads are ordered within a single world. Furthermore, the *only* explanation he gives of this order is the Stoic one, based on dependence relations within a teleologically ordered system of bodies. One monad is said to act on another monad just in case it represents its body as the cause of changes in the body of the second monad, and that monad in turn represents its body as acted on by the body of the first monad<sup>50</sup>. Whether one takes the connection of corporeal causes to be ontologically fundamental, as some realist readings of Leibniz’s metaphysics do, or as reducible to an intelligible reality of monads, it is an ineliminable part of Leibniz’s system that aligns it with the Stoics’ philosophy of nature.

## HAPPINESS IN THE BEST POSSIBLE WORLD

The significance of this point is reinforced when we turn to Leibniz’s ethics. In the *Specimen dynamicum*, Leibniz cites approvingly the fact that his age has “saved from contempt [...] the tranquility of the Stoics arising from the best connection of things [*in optimo rerum nexu*]<sup>51</sup>”. We find this theme developed prominently in many of Leibniz’s writings, including the German essay on destiny from which I earlier quoted:

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49 “The modifications of one monad are the ideal causes of the modifications of another monad... insofar as reasons appear in one monad which, from the beginning of things, prompt God to produce modifications in another monad” (GP II 475).

50 T 66.

51 GM VI, 235, L 436.

Since nature puts everything in order, he who stands closest to that order already can most easily arrive at an orderly contemplation or orderly conception, that is, at a felt satisfaction, precisely because there can be no higher satisfaction than to consider and see how good everything is and that nothing possibly better is to be wished<sup>52</sup>.

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Leibniz offers three closely related reasons why contemplation of the order of nature is ethically valuable: (i) it is pleasing in itself, and when based on understanding it produces a pleasure that can be sustained; (ii) it supplies a standard for the correct use of reason, based on the apprehension of order, which is applicable in action; (iii) it leads us to contemplate the ground of all order, the wisdom of God.

The last two points connect Leibniz's philosophy closely with Stoicism. In light of this, it is surprising to find Leibniz challenging the Stoics along the following lines in the *Théodicée*, § 254:

It is no small thing to be content with God and with the universe, not to fear what destiny has in store for us, nor to complain of what befalls us. Acquaintance with true principles gives us this advantage, quite other than that which the Stoics and the Epicureans derived from their philosophy. There is as much difference between true morality and theirs as there is between joy and patience: for their tranquillity was founded only on necessity, while ours must rest upon the perfection and beauty of things, upon our own happiness<sup>53</sup>.

Here Leibniz endeavors to draw a line between what he earlier distinguished in the *Théodicée* as the *fatum Stoicum* and the *fatum Christianum*. In this passage, he appears to restrict the Stoics to a tranquility "founded only on necessity" rather than "the perfection and beauty of things". It is difficult to reconcile this with the evidence we have of the Stoics' views or with Leibniz's praise in the *Specimen dynamicum* of the tranquility of the Stoics arising from the "best connection of things". In describing the *fatum Stoicum* in the *Théodicée's* preface, Leibniz tellingly omits any reference to

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52 GP VII, 121, W 574.

53 GP VI, 267-268, H 282-283.

their tranquility being based on a perception of the best order, tracing it now to a kind of submission to its necessity: “what is called *Fatum Stoicum* was not so black as it is painted: it did not divert men from the care of their affairs, but it tended to give them tranquillity in regard to events through the consideration of necessity, which renders our anxieties and our vexations needless<sup>54</sup>”. Although Leibniz acknowledges that such an attitude may be part of the outlook of a Christian, he deprecates it as a “forced patience” that falls short of the “contentment” that awaits those who trust their fate to the Christian God.

How are we to understand the distinction that Leibniz draws between the *fatum Stoicum* and the *fatum Christianum*, and the preference he expresses for the latter? There are two lines of thought in the text, neither of them entirely satisfactory. A first argument is primarily metaphysical. Although Leibniz grants to the Stoics a conception of natural necessity as merely hypothetical and not absolute, he nonetheless questions their explanation of that necessity. Admittedly, the Stoics hold that the cosmos is ordered in the best way. But what account of that order’s being the best can they give? Their god is not, in contrast to Leibniz’s God, a mind that deliberates about which world to create based on representations of every possible way the world could be<sup>55</sup>. With such a God, who selects the actual world based on a comparison of the relative goodness of an infinity of possible worlds, we have a meaningful explanation of it as the best. By contrast, in the case of a god who is identified with the providential order of nature, we merely have an assertion that the best exists—a point that blurs in Leibniz’s eyes the difference between their position and the non-teleological necessity that Spinoza assigns to the “order and connection” of finite causes<sup>56</sup>.

Although this argument has some merit, making the case for Leibniz’s philosophy on the grounds that it explains the optimality of the order of nature rather than leaving it as a brute fact, it does little to explain how the Stoics’ tranquility amounts to a “forced patience” rather than true

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54 GP VI, 30, H 54.

55 Cf. T 336.

56 Cf. note 52 above.

contentment. On the face of it, this seems like a misunderstanding. As the Stoics describe him, the sage lives in agreement with nature, based on a secure grasp of its wise order, and finds joy in that life. Cleanthes' "Hymn to Zeus" is a paean to the Stoic god, whose "universal reason [...] runs through all things and intermingles with the lights of heaven both great and small<sup>57</sup>".

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Leibniz's second argument contrasts the Stoic view with the ethical outlook of Christianity. The "forced patience" of the Stoics is ascribed to the fact that for them the order of nature exhausts the means by which benefits and harms are communicated to human beings. The order of nature may be pleasing to contemplate, but it is something that we must simply accept, however we fare within it. The achievement of tranquility under these conditions requires the removal of desire, which Leibniz calls, pejoratively, "forced patience." It demands our acceptance that the only thing good in itself is virtue and what depends on it. External and bodily goods, at which our desires for the most part aim, are not of fundamental value, hence they should not matter to us. If we can discipline ourselves not to want that the course of nature should turn out one way rather than another, satisfying some human desires and not others, then we will be tranquil, otherwise not. The virtuous achieve tranquility simultaneous with their comprehension that virtue and what depends on it are the only things good in themselves, the only thing on which our happiness depends.

Leibniz holds that it is natural and fitting for human beings to assign value to goods other than virtue. We rightly value the health and safety of our body, and the well-being of those we care about. Consequently, the goodness we acquire through virtue is not, in general, sufficient for happiness, defined by Leibniz as "a state of lasting joy<sup>58</sup>". Of particular concern is the fact that in the course of nature the virtuous person may, through no fault of her own, suffer in ways that prevent her from enjoying the happiness that her virtue merits; and, conversely, the wicked person may enjoy a happy life of which he is undeserving. It is in response to such imbalances between virtue and happiness that Leibniz insists on a role for

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57 LS 54l.

58 A VI, 4, 2803.

God as a just sovereign who ensures that the virtuous receive the rewards of which they are deserving and the wicked are punished for their sins. And for this, it is necessary that there be another life in which benefits and harms owing from the present life can be enjoyed<sup>59</sup>. It is this promise of compensation for undeserved harms in the form of future benefits that principally defines the *fatum Christianum*. We are to understand ourselves as living under the rule of a God who loves us and wills our happiness, which we can be confident we will enjoy to the extent that our virtue and the good of the whole allows it:

since God, being altogether good and wise, has care for everything, even so far as not to neglect one hair of our head, our confidence in him ought to be entire. And thus, we should see, if we were capable of understanding him, that it is not even possible to wish for anything better (as much in general as for ourselves) than what he does. It is as if one said to men: Do your duty and be content with that which shall come of it, not only because you cannot resist divine providence, or the nature of things (which may suffice for tranquillity, but not for contentment), but also because you have to do with a good master. And that is what may be called *Fatum Christianum*<sup>60</sup>.

Leibniz's ethical argument against Stoicism invites three responses. First, the "other life" in which undeserved suffering is rewarded and undeserved gain punished can only be, for Leibniz, another phase within the natural existence of a created substance<sup>61</sup>. Consequently, God's compensatory justice is at bottom a manifestation of the wisdom by which he orders nature as a whole. The person who is consoled by talk of divine reward and punishment may not realize this, but this, in fact, is what is going on. Given

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59 "Since experience shows us that God permits, for reasons unknown to us but doubtless very wise, and founded on a greater good, that there be many evil people happy in this life, and many good people unhappy, which would not conform to the rules of a perfect government such as God's if it were not redressed, it follows necessarily that there will be another life, and that souls do not perish at all with the visible body; otherwise there would be unpunished crimes, and good actions without recompense, which is contrary to order" (Mo 49, R 51).

60 GP VI, 30-31, H 54-55.

61 GP VI, 622.

this, it is hard to see why Stoic “tranquility” should count as a decisive reason for rejecting their position. Instead, we might read Leibniz as proposing an epicycle on Stoic naturalism: the imperfectly virtuous person finds contentment in affirming the order of nature under the description of divine reward and punishment, but the latter is only another way in which God acts justly through the natural order (as the Stoics claim).

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Second, the compensatory account does not track Leibniz’s own description of the ethical outlook of a truly virtuous agent. In *Méditation sur la notion commune de la justice*, he is explicit in characterizing God’s compensatory justice as a mechanism adopted to ensure right action in those human beings (the majority) for whom justice, founded on *imitatio dei*, does not suffice as its own reward. Recognizing the weakness of the human will, God institutes a system of cosmic reward and punishment to motivate just action on prudential grounds. We act rightly, because we believe we will be rewarded or punished by God for our actions<sup>62</sup>. The truly just person, however, does not require this sort of external motivation. For her, virtue produces just actions even when faced with the loss of external and bodily goods. To be truly virtuous, indeed, is just for virtue to be sufficient for happiness under such conditions, which again is the Stoic position.

Finally, it is important to note that the virtuous person does not simply adopt God’s moral end of willing the greatest common good. The highest degree of justice (“piety”) requires an unqualified love of God above all things. But to love God in this way, it is necessary to affirm that, because God is a perfectly just being, everything God does is for the best. Thus, the just person must, like the Stoic sage, affirm the world as it is, without imagining that it could be any better. As Leibniz writes to the Electress Sophie:

One displays one’s trust in God when one is content with everything that happens, and is convinced that there is nothing better, not even for

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62 “The goodness of the author of things has thus [supplied] [...] a motive more within the reach of all men [...]. After this, it must be imprudent not to be just, because no one will fail to derive good or evil from what he will have done, according as it is just or unjust” (Mo 61-62, R 58-59).

ourselves, and one displays at the same time a true charity when one tries to do everything in one's power to do good insofar as it depends on us. In a word, it is necessary to do good and to believe that God does good<sup>63</sup>.

The "contentment" of which Leibniz speaks here is distinct from that which depends on the promise of reward and punishment. It is a contentment arising from one's submission to divine wisdom as furnishing the best order that could be given to the world regardless of how one may be affected by it. Though there are again differences of detail, a charitable reading of the Stoics' position would see this as an emendation of their view rather than a decisive rejection of it. That Leibniz does not frame his remarks in this way suggests that he was not, in contrast to his reaction to other ancient and modern authors, a charitable reader of the Stoics.

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My aim in this essay has not been to argue for Leibniz as a Stoic *malgré lui*. Rather, it has been to highlight points of affinity between Leibniz's philosophy and Stoicism and to make some suggestions about their relevance for the interpretation of his thought. I have also raised, though not adequately answered, the question of whether Leibniz was inclined to downplay, or even mask, the Stoic tendencies of his ethics. While he openly praises the Stoic doctrine of the connection of all things, a view that plays a central role in his theory of nature, he criticizes the Stoics for advancing an ethics that limits human happiness to a "forced patience": a grudging acceptance of the necessary order of nature. This obscures the degree to which the Stoic end, to live in agreement with nature, is realized in the sage as a joyful affirmation of the providential order that a wise god gives to nature: if one lives in agreement with nature, which includes fulfilling the duties proper to a rational being, one is happy. Allowing for relevant differences in their conceptions of God and happiness, this is, to a first approximation, also Leibniz's position. One is happy to the extent that one identifies one's will with God's, and that will is fundamentally the rule of wisdom within created nature.



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