

## **A Critique of the Best Possible World in the Philosophy of Leibniz and its Implications for our Existential Reality**

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### **Abstract**

The notion of the best possible world faces several challenges when confronted with the existence of evil. The problem of evil and suffering in the world is an aged significant challenge in philosophy. There have been various theories, aiming to solve the problem of evil. However, these theories have been criticized by many philosophers and theologians. Leibniz also attempted to reconcile the existence of evil with his belief in the best possible world by positing that evil is a necessary part of the world and is outweighed by the good in it. He posits that the world we live in is the best possible world that God could have created. His view is based on the idea of God as a perfect being, who created the world with the intention of maximizing the amount of good in it. Thus, if God is a perfect being and created everything to be good, how then do we explain existence of evil? One can also ask, is the idea of best possible world an illusion or is it real? If it is not real, is being optimistic the best state of mind one can have especially in this world plagued by evil? To what extent is man free? By analyzing his texts through the hermeneutic method, this research elucidates Leibniz's belief in a pre-established harmony, wherein all elements of the world interconnect perfectly to manifest the best feasible state of affairs. This investigation highlights the inherent shortcomings of Leibniz's philosophical stance when confronted with the gritty realities of existence. Also pointing out its implication in the modern world. The hermeneutic analysis uncovers discrepancies between the idealized "best possible world" and the empirical world marked by suffering, moral dilemmas, and inherent imperfections. This research concludes that there is tension between Leibniz's metaphysical optimism and the complex, often unpredictable, nature of human experiences and therefore emphasizes that purely metaphysical interpretation of the suffering in the world, is limited, being that it neglects the existential aspect of human existence.

**Keywords: Evil, Free-will, Monads, Being, Theodicy.**

### **Introduction**

Evil is said to be having bad and harmful intentions towards a being. Evil is usually seen as the opposite of good. There is the philosophical question of whether morality is absolute or relative; this would then lead to questions about the nature of evil, of which there are various views and theories like Moral absolutism, amoralism, moral relativism, and moral universalism. (Johns,1994). Evil has been categorized into three kinds by some scholars. They include moral evil, physical evil, metaphysical evil or harms perpetrated by some agent, and natural evil, (harms resulting from natural disasters, disease, or other agentless causes).

By this definition, the problem of this research comes to light. How can there be evil in a world, said to be created by a good God? If God is infinitely good, then whatever he creates should be good. Why then is there evil in the world? Epicurus presents this argument in form of a trilemma as:

is God willing to prevent evil, but is not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able but unwilling? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then where does evil come from? Why is there evil in a world created by him? (Omoregbe, 1993).

It is on this that the atheists and agnostics base their arguments for the non-existence of God. Leibniz argues that the world we live in is the best possible world God created. He does not posit that the world is perfect, as God is the only perfect substance, and every other substance, possesses a smaller degree of perfection. But God did not abolish "the metaphysical evil", because it is a necessary part of the 'best possible world'. Whatever God does, there is a sufficient reason behind it. Therefore, God chose the best out of an infinite number of worlds. If wanted to, he would have created a world without these evils – but he did not. He created a world with all the natural and moral evils, because of its contributing factor to the realization of a greater good or the avoidance of a greater evil. Therefore, evil exists for us to appreciate the good. As good things would not be appreciated - it would seem as something ordinary if there was no evil for us to appreciate the good things one has in life. There have being

various philosophers who have reviewed Leibniz's work - some criticizing him, some agreeing with him. We shall explore some of these philosopher's reviews here.

Voltaire in his work; *Candide*, criticizes Leibniz's theodicy. Voltaire claims that this world is not the 'best possible world, that if it was the best possible world - there would be no evil in the world. He uses the characters of Candide and his teacher; the philosopher Pangloss to ridicule Leibniz's philosophy of optimism. Pangloss being so mindlessly optimistic is absurd as against the backdrop of numerous injustices, natural disasters (like the 1755 earthquake of Lisbon), and the grave personal tragedy that befell his student Candide (losing his love interest Cunegonde). Pangloss continues to maintain optimism that this is the best possible world and that everything that happens, happens for a good reason. (Voltaire, 1998). In *Candide*, Voltaire was reiterating the Epicurean trilemma, which has been presented previously in this work.

Kam Weng Ng in his work; *Leibniz on the Problem of Evil and The Best of all Possible Worlds*, posits that Leibniz's theodicy, does not provide a comprehensive answer to the trilemma. It merely explains why the existence of some evil in the world is compatible with God's power and goodness. In particular, it proposes that God provisionally allows evil in the world in the process of optimizing maximum perfections for the world. (Kam Weng Ng, 2022). Kam Weng berates Voltaire for accusing Leibniz's theodicy of being the reason why Candide suffered the tragedies he did because he thought that since this is the best possible world, it will eventually bring him a felicitous life. However, for Kam Weng - Leibniz does not suggest that everything will turn out for the best for Candide or for anyone else in particular. Leibniz does make his claim to soothe any particular individual. His claim is all about the overall balance between the conflicting goods of moral and physical perfection for this world as a whole, regardless of the fortune of any individual. In short, this world is a package deal and since God necessarily wills the best, then this is the best of all possible worlds. (Kam Weng Ng, 2022). Continuing, Kam Weng claims that:

"With Voltaire being an atheist, he should be honest enough to admit that if the world is a result of blind chance, then he has no moral or spiritual grounds to complain about his unfortunate lot in this world. At best, he may maintain a stoical determination in the face of inscrutable evil, but having denied himself of hope in a God who wills the best, he will have to go through life with a grimace". (Kam Weng Ng, 2022).

Charlie Dunbar Broad in his book; *Leibniz: An Introduction*, claims that Leibniz was only interested in saving God's character than developing an optimistic view of the existing world. He claims that the basis of Leibniz's theodicy, which is 'the philosophy of the best possible world' is faulty. He claims that the best possible world is an abstract thought, and the presence of evil in the world makes it impossible to accept Leibniz's thought. (Broad, 1975).

Vasile Gluchman in his work; *Leibniz's and Herder's Philosophy of Optimism*, expresses Bruce Silver's opinion on Voltaire's criticism of Leibniz. Silver claims that Voltaire's criticism is exaggerated and unjust. For him, Leibniz's best of all possible worlds is the richest in its opportunities which become reality while simplest in the laws that govern its essence and further development. Such a world is, according to him, much richer, although not perfect. He points out that Leibniz never claimed the best world of all is faultless since the only thing perfect is God and nothing else can come near Divine excellence. (Gluchman, 2021).

Steinberg also asks the question of whether God could abstain from creation if there was no such thing as the best world of all. He concluded that either the existing world is the best of all or God is not its creator. (Gluchman, 2021).

This research, aims to add its own thoughts to the problem of evil in the world. With the central problem being the problem of juxtaposing the philosophical optimism inherent in Leibniz's conception of the "best possible world" and the stark realities of existential experience. While Leibniz's theory, asserts that the universe is meticulously designed by a benevolent being, characterized by perfect reason and perfect order, the question arises: how possible is it that this idealized notion of the "best possible world" aligns with the complexities, imperfections, and suffering that individuals encounter in reality. It also aims to delve into the intricacies of Leibniz's philosophical writings, employing the method of hermeneutics, as the method of exploration, to expatiate on Leibniz's concept of the "best possible world." Through this inquiry, the research would examine critically, the extent to which Leibniz's optimistic theory can account for and address the existential realities that individuals grapple with, identifying ultimately the shortcomings of his philosophy when it is confronted with how unexpected and complex the lives of humans are. It raises some questions such as, what is truly the nature of God. If God created everything, can one say that evil was created by God? If not, what then is the source of evil? Why is evil in the world? Is this truly the best possible world or are there other potential best possible worlds?

What is Monad? Also, what needs justification is God's allowing of suffering. Eventually, it will highlight the implication the philosophy of Leibniz would have in the modern world, and later on draw its conclusions.

### **Concept of Evil**

The word 'evil', although seeming easy to explain, is a very ambiguous term hence difficult to define. It is ambiguous because; people tend to explain it from their own different experiences in life. Thus, there are no universal definitions that can explain its complex nature since human experiences are quite distinct, relative and unique. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, evil is the fact of suffering, misfortune and wrongdoing. It is something that brings sorrow, distress or calamity. The Bahá'í religion, proposes that evil does not exist, and that it is a concept that just reflects a lack of good - just as cold reflects the state of no heat, darkness reflects the state of no light, forgetfulness the lack of memory, ignorance the lack of knowledge. All of these are states that reflect the lack of another thing or what does not really exist. Evil, therefore, is more of an intellectual concept than a true reality. Since God is good, and cannot create an evil world, evil cannot have a true reality. In Christianity, particularly in the Old Testament, evil is seen as an opposition to God, particularly the leader of the fallen angels (Satan). (Menn, 2002). The Catholic church, however, has its understanding of evil from the philosophies of St. Augustine and other saints and doctors of the church.

Augustine was of the view that God could not be the creator of evil nor can it exist within him. Evil is instead a by-product of God's creativity. (Schwarz, 2001). He rejects the notion that evil exists in itself, proposing that it is instead a privation of good, and a corruption of nature. For Augustine, everything in the world which God created, is inherently good. However, man has free-will, and with this free-will, one can choose to turn away from God, bringing about a perversion of good (evil). This wrong use of one's free-will can be traced back to Adam and Eve's original sin (Svendsen and Pierce, 2010), which is something inexplicable; as both Adam and Eve were created with perfect natures. Augustine therefore shares the belief that suffering is a punishment given by God as a result of choosing to turn away from him. (Menn, 2002).

St. Thomas Aquinas continues in the same way with his *Summa Theologicae*, asserting that evil is a result of man's free-will – man choosing to turn away from God. After being confronted with the question: Wouldn't humans have been better without free-will? He continues with the view that evil is necessary for a perfect world but man is the cause of it. (Svendsen and Peirce, 2010). That is to say that evil exists, side by side with good - but it is man through his free-will that brings it forth. It still leaves the question of who created evil unanswered. However, Aquinas opines that; to say that something is evil means it lacks good but God's creation cannot be lacking in anything. He also notes that although evil exists side by side with good, does not mean that it is God that brings it into being. He therefore, attempting to absolve God from the responsibility of the occurrence of evil, states that God merely allows it to happen, that does not mean he wills it to happen. Like Augustine, he claims that humans bear the responsibility for evil, due to the abuse of free-will. However, Aquinas view begs the question; why does God allow it, is he not as benevolent as he is believed to be? To answer this, one can look at the situation of a parent punishing his/her child. The punishment does not mean that he/she does not love that child, rather, it shows love, in the sense that in correcting that child at that moment, the child would not commit those crimes again, which in turn would make the child grow to be a productive member of the society.

The discussion above leaves one with the view that Leibniz's philosophy encompasses different kinds of evil that arise out of the imperfection of the world. In his writings, Leibniz categorizes different kinds of evil; including physical evil, moral evil, and metaphysical evil. Physical evil is evil that is beyond human control. It arises from natural disasters like Earthquakes, Volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, floods, cyclones, death, etc. He argued that this type of evil is part of the imperfections of the universe that is necessary to achieve perfection and it contributes to the order and harmony of the universe. Leibniz explains that since the world is filled with many imperfect things, evil cannot be avoided, and it is essential to help us understand the good and achieve eudaimonia. (Leibniz, 1985).

Moral evil, on the other hand, is evil that arises from human actions. Concerning moral evil, they are occasioned by acts perpetrated by man out of his own free-will. According to Alvin Plantinga, they are "evils which result from human choice or volition" (Plantinga, 1997), and are hence, borne out of human stupidity, arrogance, and cruelty. Put differently, they inhere in the wicked actions of moral agents and the bad consequences they produce. It is more intentional and purposeful and it is man's inhumanity to man. Instances of man's inhumanity to man are expressed in the suffering and savagery that go with war, violence, armed robbery, rape, killing, corruption, genocide, embezzlement, etc. Leibniz argues that moral evil occurs as a result of man's misuse of his free will. Individuals are free to make choices in life and can choose good or evil. However, when individual agents act in

ways that conflict with the moral law established in the world, moral evil arises. Moral evils, however, can only be corrected with the moral education of the individual.

Metaphysical evils on the other hand, is the imperfection of beings. This imperfection in beings is what makes evil possible. It then begs the question: Why did God make imperfect beings? Why did he not make them perfect? Leibniz responds, saying that God could not have made beings perfect, without making them Gods. For only God is perfect, and to create other creatures as perfect, means creating other Gods like himself, which is impossible. The only way would have been not to create at all since creatures are by their very nature imperfect. But it is better to exist as imperfect creatures than to not exist at all. Thus, as long as there are imperfect creatures, metaphysical evil will continue to exist. (Omogbe, 1993). Leibniz's classification of evil shows that he recognizes that the world we live in is filled with suffering, pain, and imperfections. However, he raises a theodicy of optimism, proposing that there is a reason for all the pain, suffering, and evils in the world; which is either man's fault (misuse of his free-will) or just nature's fault. However, the problem of evil creates another big problem of having to prove the existence of God.

### **Leibniz's Theodicy: The Philosophy of the Best Possible World**

In the philosophy of religion, theodicy is an argument that attempts to answer the question of the problem of evil and whether God is all good and righteous. (Philip, 2000). Unlike a defense, which merely tries to demonstrate that the coexistence of God and evil are logically possible, a theodicy additionally provides a framework wherein God and the existence of evil is considered plausible. (Rea and Pojman, 2015). Leibniz, coined the term 'theodicy' in his work *Théodicée*. Although, there have been arguments, proposed previously, attempting to resolve the problem of evil. To understand Leibniz's theodicy, it is pertinent to first understand his philosophy of monadology.

### **Monads in Leibniz**

According to Leibniz, monads are indivisible, unchangeable, and self-contained entities that cannot be created or destroyed. They are similar to atoms, but unlike atoms, monads do not interact causally with each other, instead, they interact with each other only through a "pre-established harmony", set in motion by God. This means that any changes in one monad are mirrored in all other monads, without any direct causal connection between them. (Leibniz, 1991). Leibniz says that the monad is the fundamental being, the primordial principle, and the very beginning of the universe. Leibniz also states that there are an infinite number of monads that exist, which means that there is the existence of a multiplicity of beings. Monads represent the basic and immaterial elementary particles, or simplest units, that make up the universe. (Panovski, 2023).

In light of the above, God is said to be the Monad of all monads, who is the supreme monad, "a necessary substance which represents the final cause of things". (Leibniz, 1991). For Leibniz, while other Monads are attached to a body and perceive each other with varying degrees of clarity, God is the only monad without a body attached and perceives all other monads. (Robert, 1999). He (God), is the only monad that knows the potentiality and the actuality of other monads – so his thoughts, his perspectives are simply monads. (Brandon, 2008). Perfect monads are created, the imperfections are a cause of nature; "metaphysical evil".

### **Theory of the Best Possible World**

The objective of Leibniz's theory is to solve the problem of evil in the world; trying to solve the why problem of a world, created by an all-knowing, all-powerful, and benevolent God. Leibniz aims to provide a justification for God; to vindicate him from the charges brought of injustice brought against him by such evils. (Antognazza, 2016). Proving that this is the best of all possible worlds, would exonerate God from these charges, brought against him, showing that no matter how reasonable it may appear to us that there may be another world; presumably one without evil, Leibniz would aim to convince us that this is the best possible world there is and other worlds may be the worst of all the other possible worlds there is. (Antognazza, 2016).

Leibniz's arguments for the best possible world may be gathered from his work: *Monadology*, which runs as follows:

Now as there are an infinity of possible universes in the ideas of God, and but one of them can exist, there must be a sufficient reason for the choice of God which determines him to select one rather than another. And this reason is to be found only in the fitness or in the degree of perfection which these worlds possess, each possible thing having the right to claim existence in proportion to the perfection which it involves. This is the cause for the existence of the greatest good; namely, that the

wisdom of God permits him to know it, his goodness causes him to choose it, and his power enables him to produce it. (Leibniz, 1991).

The above text, explains that that are many possible worlds in the idea of God, but only one of them, can exist at a particular time. For God to select this world to exist there must be a sufficient reason - and this reason lies in the degrees of perfection in this possible world. An infinitely perfect being as God, cannot choose a less perfect world. For this world to be chosen, means it is perfect. Possible worlds are a combination of beings that can exist together, (Brandon, 2013). For Leibniz, a being is possible, when it is logically possible; when it contains no contradiction. (Leibniz, 1680). For example; a married spinster is impossible because a spinster is by definition an unmarried woman, which contradicts the word 'married'. But if a unicorn, is described as a horse with a single horn, it is possible as it does not contain any contradiction, even though such a being does not exist in actuality. Beings or events are possible together, in as much as they do not contradict each other. But when they come into contradiction with each other, such a being or event is not possible. For example, Mr. Anthony Wills was born with a broken hand, and Mr. Anthony Wills was not born with a broken hand cannot coexist together as they contradict each other – although, Mr. Anthony Wills, could or could not be born with a broken hand, they cannot both occur at the same time. God which is all-knowing and all-powerful cannot create a contradictory world. Therefore, the world that we are in is the best of all the infinitely possible worlds that exist in the mind of God, because of the principle of “sufficient reason”. (Brandon, 2013). This principle, which he coined, is the principle that nothing happens without a reason. Leibniz describes this principle as thus:

Our reasoning is based upon two great principles: first, that of contradiction, by means of which we decide that to be false which involves contradiction and that to be true which contradicts or is opposed to the false. And second, the principle of sufficient reason, in virtue of which we believe that no fact can be real or existing and no statement true unless it has a sufficient reason why it should be thus and not otherwise. Most frequently, however, these reasons cannot be known by us. (Leibniz, 1991).

Leibniz claims that the reason, by which this world was chosen to be created ahead of other worlds, is measured by the degree of fitness or perfection. The philosophers; Michael Murray and Sean Greenberg, interpret, Leibniz’s position, claiming that the ‘sufficient reason’ Leibniz gave to which this world is the best possible world, is the best reason which he can give, as to base the reason on any other quality, would have been arbitrary and contrary to the ‘principle of sufficient reason’. (Murray and Greenberg, 1998). God’s choice in creating this world is not only because it is the best possible world, but also because of the absolute goodness of God. (Antognazza, 2016).

### **Evil in the Best Possible World**

Leibniz claims that this world is the best of all the possible world that exists. This claim begs the question of why then is there evil and suffering in the world. His claim, follows an age-long philosophy, stemming from the time of St. Augustine – that the universe is the best world, created out of infinite goodness and perfection from the creator. (Antognazza, 2016). It follows also from this claim that though evil is real, it is not a ‘thing’, rather it is a direction away from God. (Justo, 2016). Evil is the absence of good, therefore, it is technically wrong to say that created evil and that the world is evil. Rather what should be said is that the world is an “imperfectly good world”. According to the privation theory of evil, evil is said to exist in the absence of a good that is meant to be there, or is natural to a thing. Just as blindness is the absence of sight, poverty is the absence of riches, sickness is the absence of health, and vice the absence virtue. Just as a hole cannot exist without the doughnut, evil is parasitic on good, since it corrupts a good nature.

Leibniz, however, did concede that God has created a world with evil in it, and could have created a world without it. He also claims however, that the existence of evil, does not necessarily mean that the world is a bad, or a worse world – that this is the best world that God could have made, and the presence of evil in the world, may even make the world a better place, as “it may happen that evil is accompanied by a greater good..... An imperfection in the part may be required for the perfection of the whole.” (Leibniz, 2008). Leibniz, goes on to make certain analogies to emphasize his point that evil could increase the good and make it more discernable. He states that:

Use has ever been made of comparisons taken from the pleasures of the senses when these are mingled with that which borders on pain, to prove that there is something of like nature in intellectual pleasures. A little acid, sharpness or bitterness is often more pleasing than sugar; shadows enhance colours; and even a dissonance in the right place gives relief to harmony. We wish to be terrified by rope-dancers on

the point of falling and we wish that tragedies shall well-nigh cause us to weep. Do men relish health enough, or thank God enough for it, without having ever been sick? And is it not most often necessary that a little evil render the good more discernible, that is to say, greater? (Leibniz, 2005).

Leibniz, claims that it is technically wrong to say “I would be better off” in another world, other than this one because each individual is world-bound, therefore, if God had not created this specific world, one would not exist at all. And even if, I think that I am suffering greatly, that it would be better for me to not exist, it would nevertheless be worse for the rest of the universe, since this world is the best possible world, as was proved. (Antognazza, 2016).

I would agree with Leibniz here - on the view that evil makes the good more visible. I am of the view that evil exists for us to appreciate the good. For example; A rich man is happy that he is rich because there is someone poor. A healthy person is proud of his health because there are sick people. The promise of heaven sounds appealing because there is a hell to be afraid of, and the knowledge that 'not everyone will enter the kingdom of God'. Without evil, there would be no appreciation of the good - good would just seem like something normal. Following the thought of George Herbert, captured in his poem; *The Pulley*, evil acts as a pulley, to draw us back to God - for if there is nothing we want, there would be no need for us pray to God anymore. Something has to draw us to him, that is why evil exists. However, one pertinent question Leibniz fails to address or maybe avoiding, is the question of who created evil?

### **Critique of the Best Possible World**

One of the primary criticisms of Leibniz's theory is that it does not account for adequately, the pervasive existence of evil and suffering in the world. Leibniz was of the view that evil is necessary in to bring about a greater good or to maintain a balance in the world; completing the overall perfection of the world. However, when confronting this justification of Leibniz, with the suffering and evils in the world, we find it lacking and contradictory. The sheer quantity and intensity of suffering in the world challenge the notion of a benevolent God presiding over the best possible world, thereby, contradicting Leibniz's claims. (Smith 2017).

Arthur Schopenhauer, claims that this is the worst of all the possible world, that ‘the Optimism of Leibniz conflicts with the rather obvious misery of existence’. (Schopenhauer, 1966). He states:

If we conduct the most hardened and callous optimist through hospitals, infirmaries, operating theatres, through prisons, torture chambers, and slave hovels, over battlefields and to places of execution; if we were to open him to all the dark abodes of misery, where it shuns the gaze of cold curiosity, and finally were to allow him to glance into the dungeon of Ugolino where prisoners starved to death, he too would certainly see in the end what kind of a world Is this meilleur des mondes possibles. For whence did Dante get the material For his hell, if not from this actual world of ours? (Schopenhauer, 1966).

In response to Schopenhauer's claim, and the claims of others like him (Philosophers, who claim that the world has too much evil, to be called the best of all possible worlds). Strickland, states that they must first determine how much evil (or what ratio of good to evil) is consistent with a particular notion or definition of ‘best world.’ Second, they must supply an accurate calculation of the amount of evil (or ratio of good to evil) in this world which is beyond the threshold consistent with the notion of the best world. Neither of these requirements is peculiar to the case in question; such requirements must obviously be met by any claim of the kind ‘X has too much (or too many/few) Y to be Z.’ For example, suppose one were to claim that ‘this creature has too many legs to be an arachnid.’ To establish that this is so, one must state the maximum number of legs that a creature can have to qualify as an arachnid and show that the creature under consideration has more legs than the maximum number allowable. If either of these requirements is not met then there is no reason to take seriously the claim that the creature has too many legs to be an arachnid. Similarly, the claim that this world is not the best because it contains too much evil. To get their objection off the ground, then, proponents of the ‘too much evil’ objection need to quantify evil, both in our world and in the best world. If this seems like an unfeasibly tall order, it is, as I have noted, merely a direct consequence of the style of objection used. Needless to say, no proponent has ever attempted such a feat, nor are we likely to take seriously the calculations arising from such an attempt, were one to be made. (Strickland, 2010). For Leibniz therefore, the only being that can make such a calculation a tell the characteristics of the best possible world, is God.

Since other critics, (I. E. The ‘too – much – evil’ proponents), cannot give an adequate characteristic of the best possible world, then they have no right to claim that this world is the worst there is. However, must I know the characteristics of something before I can tell whether it is good or not? Is there not a place for common sense knowledge? Can’t I tell if an object is beautiful or not, even if I’m just seeing the object for the first time?

Leibniz believes that there are two reasons why humans consider evil in the world more than good. He claims that; first, evil attracts our attention, more than good, and second: Man likes to see things holistically, and if he is suffering, he includes it in the whole universe, arguing that the whole universe is full of evil and misery, while he is carrying only his own difficulty and hardship over the whole universe. (Leibniz, 2005). Leibniz did not claim that there is no evil in this world – although the amount/extent of evil in the world, is more than Leibniz acknowledged in his works. As he (Leibniz) is adamant that the good in the world, is far greater than the evil in the world, and that the talk of evil being in the world is grossly exaggerated. But I would reject both claims of Leibniz and the ‘too -much – evil’ proponents, by claiming that evil and good in the world are at a balanced scale. Both Leibniz and the ‘too – much – evil’, proponents seem to forget the other qualities of God, over-flogging only his quality of benevolence and kindness. If God is the all-powerful and Supreme Being, we must accept that he is capable of causing pain as well as good. (see Deuteronomy chap 28, in the Bible). This all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God would have known that if evil outweigh good, and vice versa, the world would be in an imbalance, the balance and order for me, makes any world the best possible world. Moreover, this is the only world I know, and it is not certain that there are other worlds out there. Therefore, the world I know and live in - for me is the best possible world.

Another criticism of Leibniz’s view – is that Leibniz’s theodicy (most times called optimism), seduces people to believe that since the world is arranged in the best way possible, and that everything that happens in the world, happens for a reason and out of a necessity, then people would be relaxed, as there would be no reason to try and stop evils from occurring since it is pre-determined and it must happen. This view is illustrated in Voltaire’s *Candide*; it tells the story of when James the Anabaptist falls into a river (Lisbon Harbour), Candide wants to go after him and save him from drowning. However, the philosopher Pangloss, stopped Candide, managing to prove to him that the river (Lisbon Harbour) which the Anabaptist fell into had done what it was designed to do and that it was the fate of the Anabaptist James to fall into that river and drown. (Voltaire, 1947). Voltaire then presents the question of how humans are supposed to react to events that bring about evil if the optimism of Leibniz is true. For if Leibniz is right, and events occur exactly as God has premeditated them to happen, then there should be no reason to obstruct, avoid, or remove them. After all, God has foreseen their existence and the role they will play in the grand scheme of things. Therefore, wouldn’t it be somewhat arrogant of us to try and do something to change or prevent it? If so, then Pangloss, advocating for inactivity (Pangloss in Voltaire’s work), would be valid - despite its initial surface absurdity. It is this view that Haydn Mason calls ‘useless a passivity’ complaint against optimism. (Mason, 1975).

Leibniz, well aware of this criticism, called it ‘lazy sophism’. He believed that although, events in the world are fixed, predetermined, and will certainly happen as God has foreseen them, however, we do not know the future; and we should always act as though the future is unwritten. (Leibniz, 1989). Strickland supports Leibniz, revealing that there is a fallacy in the argument of ‘lazy sophism’. Pointing out that the argument moves from; “all things are determined” to “all things are determined irrespective of what we do”. He believes that the activities of beings in the world, contribute to the merits and demerits of the world. (Strickland, 2010). Leibniz then recommends that we act in a way that we think God would want us to act. If we succeed in bringing about a good event, then it should give us joy, and if not, we have the consolation that it would not have turned out differently otherwise.

For my part, I have two maxims: one, to make use of everything in order to contribute towards some good, the other to be perfectly content when I am not successful, being persuaded that in the latter case it is for the best, as currently God does not want it. I do my part so long as there is hope, and I am pleased with his part when there is hope no longer (Leibniz, 1923).

Another criticism of Leibniz’s optimism is that; it is a barren philosophy that offers no hope. John Hick states that: “if this world, with its evils, is the best that is possible, there is no scope or hope for improvement” (Hick, 1985). Strickland, in his defense of Leibniz, claims that these critics’ philosophies, do not even inspire any hope, but with Leibniz’s philosophy, we can be able to establish that (a), God has ordered the universe providentially, that is, for the best, and (b) that God is concerned for the welfare of the citizens of the universe (which includes humans). If we acknowledge only (a), the best we can achieve, in Leibniz’s view, is a Stoic-like tranquility, whereby one conforms one’s will to divine providence by accepting that events unfold as they do on account of

God's providential ordering of things. But if we acknowledge (b) as well, we can go beyond mere tranquility to achieve true satisfaction or contentment. Assuming one is virtuous, one draws comfort from the knowledge both that the trials and tribulations one endures could not have been otherwise and are good for the whole, and that on account of God's supreme justice, all imbalances will ultimately be corrected, if not in this life, then in the next. (Strickland, 2010). Strickland, points out the examples of people who have claimed that Leibniz's philosophy has given them peace of mind and hope. There is Queen Sophie Charlotte of Prussia, who thanked Leibniz; "You have so well convinced me of this, Sir, that I will be obliged to you for my peace of mind" (Leibniz 1923). There is also Rousseau, who informs Voltaire; "this optimism which you find so cruel yet consoles me amid the very pains which you depict as unbearable" (Rousseau, 1997).

### **Implications of Leibniz's Theodicy in the Modern World**

Leibniz's theodicy has significant implications in the modern world, particularly in the areas of theology, ethics, and metaphysics. This theory has implications, particularly on how the modern world addresses issues of suffering, evil, justice, and the nature of existence. These are some of the implications I explore.

The theory offers more resources, answering the argument of why there is evil in a world created by a good God. It gives religious leaders, theologians, and philosophers more tools to teach and answer questions based on the problem of evil. Suggesting that all evils, suffering, and pain are part of the divine plan; aiming for a greater good. This idea can especially be good to boost the morale of people who think that the world is against them. It can cause them to keep going strong, and never give up thereby eliminating many reasons and cases of psychological depression that lead to suicidal thoughts. It also raises potential questions about the rationality behind some evils that do not seem to bring about any greater good – like large-scale wars, natural disasters, famine, etc. Many philosophers have also used the event of the holocaust, to challenge the adequacy of Leibniz's theory, questioning the rationale behind such an event. Leibniz's theory may cause moral complacency, owing to the reasoning that 'if the world is already the best possible world, what then is the need to strive to live a moral life. I can just love as I please, whatever I do has already been determined, and this is the best possible world, so nothing can be wrong or bad', thereby making the combating of poverty and injustice unnecessary or futile.

On the other hand, some may interpret Leibniz's theodicy, as emphasizing on human responsibility. Since the world is the best possible world only by logical and metaphysical reasoning, human beings have a role to play in realizing this logical-metaphysical potential of the world, by striving to improve conditions and alleviate suffering where possible. This interpretation therefore aligns with modern pragmatic and progressive ethical frameworks, which advocate for proactive efforts to make the world a better place. Leibniz's theory has influenced metaphysical discussions about the plurality of worlds, and the scientific discussions of the multiverse theories. It also continues to inform debates about free-will, determinism, and the nature of reality in general. It also invites a reflection on the limits of human understanding and the nature of divine justice. Many philosophers continue to grapple with whether we can truly understand our world or quantify how good or evil the world may be. It therefore calls for epistemic humility when dealing with metaphysical issues and problems. Leibniz's views remain a strong Philosophical framework, that has significant implications on the modern-contemporary world. It challenges modern-contemporary thinkers to grapple with complex questions about the nature of suffering, the role of humans, and the limits of human understanding of metaphysical and ethical issues.

Leibniz's theodicy will raise questions like; will having optimism bring me comfort? Am I just rationalizing suffering, so as not to go against my strong belief in God and blaspheme? Even if I eventually get rid of my fear to blaspheme and decide to blame God, would it bring me any comfort? Is it rational to blame anyone (anyone including myself) for my suffering? Isn't suffering just a part of life, and I'm just a rower, trying as much as possible to row against the tides of life instead of allowing the tides to take me? What exactly is my place in life? What is all the struggle for? Is it worth anything to struggle amid difficulties?

While these questions arise from Leibniz's theodicy, we must understand that our knowledge of the world and life in general is limited. Therefore, whatever life throws at us, we should take it and continue to move on bravely. Life is tough, but we must be tougher.

### **Conclusion**

The unpleasant and devastating occurrence of evil in our world is an indubitable fact. Its consequence is reckoned as the parasite that deteriorates nature, destroys life, frustrates one's ambition, and inhibits human progress and existence. Its undeniable reality poses a serious intellectual problem for the theistic belief in an omnipotent and perfectly good God upon whose influence reality strives. This problem has been advanced by atheistic scholars who argue that God's divine attributes of omnipotence and infinite perfection are contradicted by the reality of evil in our world. To refute this claim, some theistic thinkers came up with some arguments to justify God's creation of a world that contains evil. Leibniz argues that God's supreme perfection is translated in his creating

the best possible world for he must have weighed the importance of various possible worlds before choosing to create the one in which we live. As stated earlier, humans, have a limited understanding of metaphysical issues. There is no telling whether this might be the best possible world or not. However, it is imperative as humans to live life in the best way possible, also limiting selfishness, and trying to do good and help others.

This research's ambitious goal of engaging in a hermeneutic appraisal of Leibniz's philosophy on the best possible world and its compatibility with existential reality holds great potential for intellectual exploration. However, it must be cognizant of the challenges it faces, such as the contextual limitations of Leibniz's ideas, the discrepancies between the proposed perfect world and the reality of human existence, the subjective nature of hermeneutics, and the need to consider alternative philosophical perspectives. By addressing these shortcomings and incorporating relevant scholarly literature, the project can provide valuable insights into Leibniz's philosophy and its relevance to our understanding of the world we live in.

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