



---

Leibniz on Determinism and Divine Foreknowledge

Author(s): ENDRE BEGBY

Source: *Studia Leibnitiana*, Bd. 37, H. 1 (2005), pp. 83-98

Published by: [Franz Steiner Verlag](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40694476>

Accessed: 11-03-2015 05:22 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Franz Steiner Verlag* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Studia Leibnitiana*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# Leibniz on Determinism and Divine Foreknowledge<sup>1</sup>

By

ENDRE BEGBY (PITTSBURGH)

## Zusammenfassung

Nach Michael J. Murrays Aufsatz „Leibniz on Divine Foreknowledge of Future Contingents and Human Freedom“ ist Leibniz nicht als Kompatibilist zu verstehen. Die göttliche Vorhersehung beruhe nicht darauf, dass menschliche Handlungen mechanischen Gesetzen von Ursache und Wirkung (*causa efficiens*) gehorchen, sondern auf den für diese Handlungen spezifischen geistigen Gesetzen (*causa finalis*, moralische Gesetze, etc.). In diesem Aufsatz argumentiere ich, dass Murray die Tragweite des Grundsatzes vom hinreichenden Grund in Leibniz' Philosophie nicht richtig versteht. Des Weiteren zeige ich, dass die Unterscheidung zwischen *causa efficiens* und *causa finalis* nicht, wie Murray nahelegt, mit der Unterscheidung zwischen physikalischen und geistigen Ereignissen zusammenfällt. In diesem Zusammenhang mache ich deutlich, dass die prästabilisierte Harmonie nicht als Beziehung zwischen unterschiedlichen Arten von Substanzen, Geistern und Körpern, verstanden werden kann. Zuletzt skizziere ich kurz, worin m. E. die eigentliche Auffassung von Leibniz mit Blick auf die behandelte Problematik besteht.

## 1. Freedom, foreknowledge, and the question of compatibilism

The widespread and manifest existence of evil typically causes problems for thinkers who hold, as did Leibniz, that God is at the same time benevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient. For this conjunction quite naturally raises the suspicion of divine complicity in malfeasance, an escape from which appears possible only at the expense of one or more of these attributes. A trade-off between them can take many forms, but quite often the question comes to centre on the nature and source of God's omniscience – specifically his foreknowledge – and its consequences for the exercise of human agency. From our theodicial starting point, we thus quickly arrive at two familiar philosophical questions: i) whether foreknowledge entails determinism, and ii) whether determinism rules out free will.

There were, in particular, two lines of response to this problem which were instrumental in shaping Leibniz's own stance. On the one hand, the Dominicans, following the lead of St. Thomas, held that God foreknows because he is causally involved in sundry ways in human actions, an involvement which they would give the technical name 'concurrency'. On the other hand, Jesuits such as Francisco Suarez and Luis de Molina held that such involvement would rule out human freedom. Hence, if God is not to be the author of sin, his foreknowledge

1 Chris Frey and Nicholas Rescher, in particular, have provided invaluable input on various drafts of this essay, as have Holly Andersen, Georg W. Bertram, Jo-Jo Koo, and an anonymous *Studia Leibnitiana* referee.

would have to be ‘prevolitional’. They therefore looked to define some form of *scientia media* – middle knowledge – ; a divine knowledge of pure possibles, quite independent of any volitional contribution of God’s own<sup>2</sup>.

In this dispute, as in many others, Leibniz was unafraid to take on the role of mediator, hoping to effect a rapprochement between the two sides. He agreed with the Jesuits that the Dominican view leaves precious little space for spontaneity, and hence gives rise to the problem of evil in a particularly virulent form. However, the libertarian model proposed by the Jesuits – often paraphrased in terms of a *freedom of indifference* – fails, on his view, even to constitute a coherent view of free will. In particular, it jeopardizes one of the pillars of Leibniz’s philosophical system, namely the principle of sufficient reason. In short, the Dominicans and the Jesuits fail in their different ways to provide a plausible account of free human action – the former by leaning toward necessitation, the latter by leaning toward the chimera of indifference.

Many scholars hold that Leibniz opted for what is called a compatibilist approach to this problem, i. e., to argue that free will and determinism are not in conflict, thus leaving us free to endorse both. Prominently, Robert M. Adams states that “Leibniz was a compatibilist, maintaining to the end of his life [...] that every event is determined but some acts are nonetheless free”<sup>3</sup>. Not surprisingly, others demur from this reading. Among these is Michael J. Murray, whose article “Leibniz on Divine Foreknowledge of Future Contingents and Human Freedom”<sup>4</sup> will provide my main foil in this paper. Murray’s paper is rich and rewarding, and stakes out a potentially attractive position on the problem, not least by connecting Leibniz’s writings with issues in contemporary action theory. This notwithstanding, I will try to show how Murray gets Leibniz’s approach to the problem wrong, and ends up attributing to him a position which would jeopardize many of the other structural elements characteristic of his philosophy. Showing this will be the main burden of my argument in this paper. For I take it that, ultimately, what holds our interest is not which of the two epithets – compatibilism or incompatibilism – we end up applying to Leibniz’s position, but the way in which either attribution comes to shape our understanding of his distinctive philosophical doctrines.

2 A good introduction to these debates and their role in shaping Leibniz’s thoughts on the matter can be found in Didier Njirayamanada Kaphagawani: *Leibniz on Freedom and Determinism in Relation to Aquinas and Molina*, Aldershot 1999.

3 Robert M. Adams: *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, Oxford 1994, p. 11. Bertrand Russell seems to hold the same opinion (see *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, London <sup>2</sup>1937, pp. 191ff), as does Robert C. Sleigh, Jr., in *Leibniz & Arnauld: A Commentary on Their Correspondence*, New Haven – London 1990 (hereafter: Sleigh: *Leibniz & Arnauld*), p. 29, and “Leibniz’s First Theodicy”, in: *Metaphysics (= Philosophical Perspectives 10)*, ed. by James E. Tomberlin, Cambridge, MA 1996, pp. 481–499, at p. 484.

4 Michael J. Murray: “Leibniz on Divine Foreknowledge of Future Contingents and Human Freedom”, in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LV (1995), pp. 75–108 (hereafter: Murray).

## 2. Requirements on a theory of freedom and foreknowledge

According to Murray (pp. 83-84), Leibniz held up three criteria that an account of free will and divine foreknowledge must meet. First, the grounds of God's foreknowledge must be disentangled from any actual volitional involvement on his part. Second, free will must be grounded in sufficient reason, not in indifference. Third, the sufficient reason must be of a sort not violating the agent's spontaneity.

One account of divine foreknowledge frequently associated with Leibniz is what we may call the "conceptual containment theory", forcefully expressed in *Discourse on Metaphysics* § 8:

"God [...], seeing the individual concept, or *hæcceity*, of Alexander, sees there at the same time the basis and the reason of all the predicates which can be truly uttered regarding him; for instance that he will conquer Darius and Porus, even to the point of knowing *a priori* (and not by experience) whether he died a natural death or by poison, – facts we can learn only through history. When we carefully consider the connection of things we see also the possibility of saying that there was always in the soul of Alexander marks of all that had happened to him and evidences of all that would happen to him and traces even of everything which occurs in the universe, although God alone could recognize them all"<sup>5</sup>.

Murray claims that this doctrine, which he refers to as Leibniz's "innocent view", fails to meet any of these three criteria. Specifically, it makes no mention either of sufficient reason or of the volitional/prevolitional distinction. In short, this model is inadequate, according to Murray (p. 85), in that, while it tells us *that* God foreknows, it remains silent on the crucial question, namely *how* God foreknows<sup>6</sup>.

But Murray also finds the sources of a different account in Leibniz, one which holds significantly more promise. On this "sophisticated" account, the relevant antecedent conditions satisfying the principle of sufficient reason as well as

5 A VI, 4 B, 1540-1541: "[...] Dieu voyant la notion individuelle ou hecçeté d'Alexandre, y voit en même temps le fondement et la raison de tous les predicats qui se peuvent dire de luy veritablement, comme par exemple qu'il vaincroit Darius et Porus, jusqu'à y connoistre à priori (et non par experience) s'il est mort d'une mort naturelle, ou par poison, ce que nous ne pouvons sçavoir que par l'histoire. Aussi quand on considere bien la connexion des choses, on peut dire qu'il y a de tout temps dans l'ame d'Alexandre des restes de tout ce qui luy est arrivé, et les marques de tout ce qui luy arrivera, et même des traces de tout ce qui [se] passe dans l'univers, quoyqu'il n'appartienne qu'à Dieu de les reconnoistre toutes". The translation is in: *Discourse on Metaphysics, Correspondence with Arnauld, and Monadology*, with an introduction by Paul Janet, trans. by George R. Montgomery, La Salle 1902.

6 Still, to say that the conceptual containment theory is by itself insufficient to provide a full analysis of the problem of divine foreknowledge is not yet to say that it played no part in Leibniz's mature position on the matter. There is, in fact, good reason to think that it did, even though Murray never considers the issue. Specifically, Murray has provided no reason to think that Leibniz's "innocent view" and his "sophisticated view" are incompatible. The connections between the conceptual containment theory and the important notion of infinite analysis will be explored briefly in the final section of this paper.

providing the grounds for God's foreknowledge are to be found in dispositional factors such as intellect, will, and passions. This route promises the fulfillment of all three criteria mentioned above. First, God is absolved from the suspicion of direct causal involvement in human actions, since the relevant antecedent factors are located squarely within the agent's own psychological domain. Second, the principle of sufficient reason is preserved, inasmuch as these dispositions are instrumental in bringing about the action. Finally, far from violating the agent's spontaneity, these dispositions are precisely what underwrite it. We are thus, Murray holds, provided with a more rewarding account of freedom, in the sense that we avoid indifference – our actions are determined by dispositions that are not of our choosing – yet without falling over on the side of necessitation. For as Leibniz says: “men choose the objects through will, but they do not choose their present wills, which spring from reasons and dispositions. It is true, however, that one can seek new reasons for oneself, and with time give oneself new dispositions”<sup>7</sup>. In short, Murray's Leibniz argues that

“God knows subjunctive conditionals of freedom in virtue of knowing what dispositions the agent had immediately prior to any free choice, dispositions which sufficed to ‘determine’ the choice ‘infallibly’ while leaving the agent free. In doing so, Leibniz believes he keeps the human free act separate from external determining influences while preserving the Principle of Sufficient Reason” (Murray, p. 91).

### 3. Forms of causality and levels of law

As Murray sees it (p. 91), these considerations belie the “near-universal opinion of recent Leibniz scholarship”, viz. that Leibniz endorsed a form of compatibilism. Or more precisely, they suggest that Leibniz may certainly have held what we could call a *physical compatibilism*, allowing for the compatibility of physical determinism with free will. This, however, leaves the very different question of *mental compatibilism* untouched<sup>8</sup>. While Murray's Leibniz allows that human actions are determined by antecedent conditions, “the *modality*

7 GP VI, 391-392: “[...] les hommes choisissent les objets par la volonté, mais ils ne choisissent point leur volontés presentes; elles viennent des raisons et des dispositions. Il est vray cependant, qu'on se peut chercher de nouvelles raisons et se donner avec le temps de nouvelles dispositions”. The translation is in: G. W. Leibniz: *Theodicy. Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, trans. by E. M. Huggard, La Salle 1985 (hereafter: *Theodicy*), “Reflexions on the work that Mr. Hobbes published in England on ‘Freedom, Necessity, and Chance’” § 5, pp. 396-397.

8 It is worth noting that a similar argumentative strategy has been employed in a parallel debate about Kantian compatibilism. Ralf Meerbote, in his “Kant on the Nondeterminate Character of Human Actions”, in: William Harper and Ralf Meerbote (eds.): *Kant on Causality, Freedom and Objectivity*, Minneapolis 1984, pp. 138-163, suggested that Kant's position on the problem of free will and determinism anticipates the compatibilist position that Donald Davidson came to call ‘anomalous monism’ (see Davidson's “Mental Events”, reprinted in his *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford 1980, pp. 207-225). Following up on a suggestion from Allen W. Wood (“Kant's Compatibilism”, in: Allen W. Wood (ed.): *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy*, Ithaca, NY 1984, pp. 73-101), Henry Allison has argued

governing the relation between antecedents and action in human choice is *sui generis* to free actions” (Murray, p. 93). Murray draws attention to the following paragraph from the *Theodicy*:

“No agent is capable of acting without being *predisposed* to what the action demands; and the reasons or inclinations derived from good or evil are the dispositions that enable the soul to decide between various courses. One will have it that the will is alone active and supreme, and one is wont to imagine it to be like a queen seated on her throne, whose minister of state is the understanding, while the passions are her courtiers or favourite ladies, who by their influence often prevail over the counsel of her ministers. One will have it that the understanding speaks only at this queen’s order; that she can vacillate between the arguments of the minister and the suggestions of the favourites, even rejecting both, making them keep silence or speak, and giving them audience or not as seems good to her. But it is a personification or mythology somewhat ill-conceived. If the will is to judge, or take cognizance of the reasons and inclinations which the understanding or the senses offer it, it will need another understanding in itself, to understand what it is offered. The truth is that the soul, or the thinking substance, understands the reasons and feels the inclinations, and decides according to predominance of the representations modifying its active force, in order to shape the action”<sup>9</sup>.

In short, the determination of human action is yielded not in terms of *causal* necessitation, as contemporary compatibilists claim, but in a specific form of *moral* necessitation. This moral necessitation, “*sui generis* to free actions”, yields a sequence of events which is of course *harmonized* with the causally necessitated sequence of physical events, but that is a different matter altogether. For although the two realms unfold in pre-established harmony, the agent is driven by *final causes*, whereas the physical body is driven by *efficient causes*.

that this approach is “fundamentally wrongheaded”, inasmuch as “Kant’s problematic begins just at the point at which the compatibilist analysis typically ends, namely, with the recognition that rational agency is integrated into the law-governed order of nature” (Henry Allison: *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, Cambridge, MA 1990, p. 81). (Hud Hudson subsequently developed Meerbote’s proposal to greater detail in his *Kant’s Compatibilism*, Ithaca, NY 1994, where he also addresses Wood’s and Allison’s misgivings.)

- 9 GP VI, 416: “Il n’y a point d’acteur qui puisse agir sans être *predisposé* à ce que l’action demande; et les raisons ou inclinations tirées du bien ou du mal sont les dispositions, qui font que l’ame se peut déterminer entre plusieurs partis. On veut que la Volonté soit seule active et souveraine, et on a coutume de la concevoir comme une Reine assise sur son trône, dont l’Entendement est le Ministre d’estat, et dont les Passions sont les courtisans, ou les demoiselles favorites, qui par leur influence prevaient souvent sur le conseil du Ministere. On veut que l’Entendement ne parle que par ordre de cette Reine, qu’elle peut balancer entre les raisons du Ministre et les suggestions des favoris, et même rebuter les unes et les autres, enfin qu’elle les fait taire ou parler, et leur donne audience ou non, comme bon luy semble. Mais c’est une prosopopée ou fiction un peu mal entendue. Si la Volonté doit juger, ou prendre connoissance des raisons et des inclinations que l’entendement ou les sens luy presentent, il luy faudra un autre entendement dans elle même, pour entendre ce qu’on luy presente. La verité est, que l’Ame, ou la Substance qui pense, entend les raisons, et sent les inclinations, et se determine selon la prevalence des representations qui modifient sa force active, pour specifier l’action”; *Theodicy*, “Observations on the book concerning ‘The Origin of Evil’, published recently in England” § 16, p. 421.

This Aristotelian distinction, which Leibniz tried to salvage from the mechanistic philosophy of his contemporaries (and to which he would appeal also in other contexts), thus forms the basis on which Murray will say that Leibniz was not a compatibilist in the contemporary sense of the term. Murray bolsters this claim by reference to a famous but enigmatic line in *Necessary and Contingent Truths*, where Leibniz urges that

“[...] free or intelligent substances [...] in a kind of imitation of God [...] are not bound by any certain subordinate laws of the universe, but act as it were by a private miracle, on the sole initiative of their own power, and by looking towards a final cause they interrupt the connexion and the course of the efficient causes that act on their will”.

Thus, “no subordinate universal laws can be established (as is possible in the case of bodies) which are sufficient for predicting a mind’s choice”<sup>10</sup>.

This claim points toward a distinction essential to Leibniz’s thought; namely that between laws of nature, discoverable by human minds, and the ‘laws of general order’, unknown to any but God, whose decree it embodies<sup>11</sup>. These “private miracles”, presumably, fall outside the scope of laws of nature<sup>12</sup>, but not of the divine decree. For this decree is by definition exceptionless, since, in the words of Robert C. Sleigh (*Leibniz & Arnauld*, p. 51), it simply “yields the sequence of events for the world in which it applies”. “On this account”, writes Murray,

“causal laws would be laws of the ‘subordinate maxim’ or law-of-nature type. [...] However, laws governing the relation between dispositions and choice would not be subject to such subordinate maxims, although they could be known by one who knows the ‘first essential laws of the series’<sup>13</sup>. As a result, free choices admit of prediction by God alone who knows the relevant ‘first essential laws of the series’, but they cannot be known to creatures” (Murray, p. 100).

10 A VI, 4 B, 1519: “[...] Substantiae Liberae sive intelligentes [...] aliquid habent, [...] ad quandam Dei imitationem; ut nullis certis Legibus universi subalternis alligentur, sed quasi privato quodam miraculo, ex sola propriae potentiae sponte agant, et finalis cujusdam causae intuitu efficientium in suam voluntatem causarum nexum atque cursum interrumpant”; “[...] sic ut nullae quemadmodum in corporibus possunt, ita et in mentibus leges subalternae universales ad praedicendam mentis electionem sufficientes constitui queant”. The translation is in *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*, ed. by G. H. R. Parkinson, trans. by Mary Morris and G. H. R. Parkinson, London 1973, pp. 100-101.

11 Actually, Leibniz works with three levels of law, distinguishing also between levels of natural law according to their generality. However, commentators seem to agree that the relevant distinction is that between laws of general order and laws knowable to created minds.

12 See R. Cranston Paull: “Leibniz and the Miracle of Freedom”, in: *Nous* 26 (1992), pp. 218-235, at p. 223, for the claim that free human actions are not in breach of laws of nature, but simply above them.

13 I. e., what I, following Leibniz, called “laws of general order” above.



#### 4. Determinism and predictability by created minds

Murray's reconstruction is not without its attractions. It promises to pull Leibniz's thoughts away from the form of metaphysical extravagance with which they are popularly associated, and to connect them with the sorts of issues that, writing today, we are typically looking for in an account of agency. Moreover, in doing this, it utilizes an Aristotelian undertow to Leibniz's thought, which is also the source of much contemporary action theory. Nonetheless, I find that Murray on several scores misdiagnoses Leibniz's approach to these matters, and with what follows I hope to bring out how.

First, we should query exactly how the "private miracles"-passage from Leibniz's *Necessary and Contingent Truths* is meant to support the incompatibilist reading of Leibniz. Now at first glance, it is clear why the language of the passage would confound traditional Leibniz-interpretations, and perhaps suggest an underappreciated incompatibilist strand to Leibniz's thought<sup>14</sup>. The problem, as is nicely brought out in a paper by Jack Davidson<sup>15</sup>, is that the first glance reading comes at a price which no serious Leibniz-interpreter should be willing to pay<sup>16</sup>. In particular, Davidson warns against a literal reading of the claim that "free or intelligent substances [...] by looking towards a final cause [can] interrupt the connection and the course of the efficient causes that act on their will". The reason is obvious: such a reading would undermine the core idea underwriting the thesis of pre-established harmony<sup>17</sup>. And in particular, a literal acceptance of the idea that human actions can miraculously interrupt the course of efficient causality would threaten the orderliness and predictability of the physical world (a point of great importance to Leibniz), and thereby also undermine the contrast on which the unpredictability of human action relies. Yet, as Davidson goes on to observe, "it is only the strict or literal reading that supports the incompatibilist interpretation"<sup>18</sup>. Specifically, we must observe that the claim that "a mind's choice" is not predictable by any subordinate laws of the universe has absolutely no bearing on the question of God's foreknowledge, and

14 Thus, for instance, Robert M. Adams (*Leibniz: Determinist* (see note 3), p. 44), who advocates a compatibilist reading of Leibniz, speaks of this passage as being of an "experimental character". Murray is not alone in seizing on the passage as problematizing the standard reading of Leibniz. Others include R. Cranston Paull ("Leibniz and the Miracle of Freedom" (see note 12)) and Clive Borst ("Leibniz and the Compatibilist Account of Freedom", in: *Studia Leibnitiana* XXIV (1992), pp. 48-59).

15 Jack Davidson: "Imitators of God: Leibniz on Human Freedom", in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36 (1998), pp. 387-412.

16 Instead, Davidson suggests that it is the other central metaphor of the passage – that of human agents freely acting in an imitation of God – that we should scrutinize for hints about Leibniz's theory. See Davidson: "Imitators of God" (see note 15), pp. 395-408, for his illuminating analysis of human freedom based on this concept.

17 Cf. Davidson: "Imitators of God" (see note 15), pp. 393-394; and also Adams: *Leibniz: Determinist* (see note 3), p. 44.

18 Davidson: "Imitators of God" (see note 15), p. 394.



is thus of no consequence for the form of determinism that we started out with. For our choices are no less known to God for being unpredictable by us<sup>19</sup>.

All of this is effectively conceded by Murray, who nonetheless persists in saying that the admission of unpredictability by finite minds marks a significant difference between Leibniz and contemporary compatibilists. Before moving on, it thus bears remarking that predictability by scientific laws is not generally thought to be a consequence of the contemporary compatibilist program. In fact, it is repeatedly stressed by prominent compatibilists such as Donald Davidson and Daniel Dennett that we have good reason to suppose that mental events, although caused, and in this sense, determined by physical events, will never be fully predictable within the parameters of physical theory. For instance, Donald Davidson claims that his position is

“not committed to the view that psychological events are predictable in the way that physical events are; nor that psychological events can be reduced to physical events; nor that we [...] can explain psychological events as we can explain physical events. [...] It should be easy to appreciate the fact that although every psychological event and state has a physical description, this gives us no reason to hope that any physical predicate, no matter how complex, has the same extension as a given psychological predicate – much less that there is a physical predicate related in a lawlike way to a given psychological predicate”<sup>20</sup>.

On this topic, then, it would appear that Murray’s Leibniz is, in fact, perfectly in line with contemporary compatibilism.

## 5. The principle of sufficient reason and the source of God’s omniscience

So far, then, we have found little in the private miracles-passage to support the incompatibilist reading of Leibniz. Moreover, our original problem remains: insofar as the unpredictability of human minds by subordinate laws has no bearing on God’s omniscience, we may still assume that human choices are determined in the relevant way. Consequently, assuming that these choices are still thought to be free, compatibilism remains the default position. Murray does not deal directly with this issue, but seeks another way of making the point. For what matters to the question of determinism, and hence to the compatibilism/incompatibilism-issue, is not whether God foreknows, but the manner in which, in each case – mental and physical –, his foreknowledge is administered. Thus, presumably, while God foreknows physical events through the mechanical connection of cause and effect, he foreknows mental events through the connection between disposition and choice. This distinction sets Leibniz at odds with contemporary compatibilism, for it entails the denial that the connection between disposition and choice is “*causally necessary*” (Murray, p. 95). Thus, as we have seen, “the *modality* governing the relation between antecedents and action in human choice is *sui generis* to free actions” (Murray, p. 93).

19 Cf. Cranston Paull: “Leibniz and the Miracle of Freedom” (see note 12), p. 222.

20 Donald Davidson: “The Material Mind”, reprinted in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (see note 8), pp. 245–259, at pp. 248–249.

This strategy has its own problems, however. Murray, as we have seen, frames the question in terms of what God could know that would allow him to predict human actions with infallible accuracy. His answer is dispositions: “Not only do such dispositions determine the future act of the agent but they allow God to calculate what a free agent will do in the world of which it is a part” (Murray, p. 89). As is made clear by the stress on “a free agent”, Murray is here looking for some way of securing God’s foreknowledge without actually making him complicit in the act itself. A notable upshot of this way of addressing the issue, though, is that it suggests that God somehow does not really foreknow the action as such, but is able to infallibly infer from his knowledge of an agent’s dispositional state at a given time what that agent will do. By introducing dispositions as an intermediary between perception and action, Murray hopes to secure a basis for God’s predictions without jeopardizing free will.

This, however, is to suggest that God’s foreknowledge, though infallible, is indirect, based as it is on dispositions as an epistemic intermediary. It is far from clear, however, that Leibniz would endorse this view. Quite the contrary, this seems to be precisely what he is denying when he writes, in *Theodicy* § 360 (GP VI, 329), that “God sees all at once the whole sequence of this universe, when he chooses it, and [...] thus he has no need of the connexion of effects and causes in order to foresee these effects”. This, he goes on to say, is indeed “one of the rules of my system of general harmony”. Indeed, to think of God’s foreknowledge as flowing in real time, alongside the free choices of agents, gives a very peculiar view of his omniscience. For in settling on the *best* of all possible worlds, God is presumably making an *informed choice*. By that token, we must presume that he knows already and “all at once” what will happen in that world and thus has no need to “predict”, on whatever epistemic grounds, how an agent will act on a given occasion. And in this, one would think, the mental and the physical are on equal footing: God has no more need of predicting a mind’s choice by recourse to his knowledge of the agent’s dispositional state than he has of predicting physical events by relying on natural laws. Put simply, if God really knows the laws of general order by decree and not by discovery, then prediction would be a superfluous exercise on his part<sup>21</sup>.

These observations highlight another peculiarity with Murray’s argument, having to do with his presentation of the principle of sufficient reason. The two

- 21 This raises another, more general question about the cogency of Murray’s description that I cannot go further into here. He leans on the notion of a “disposition” to secure both human freedom and divine foreknowledge. However, it seems that in at least one fairly standard philosophical usage, dispositional predicates are ones we turn to precisely when we do *not* license an infallible inference from antecedents to conclusion, but rather wish to signal various, perhaps inscrutably many, *ceteris paribus*-clauses. In the study of human behaviour, for instance, there are regularities whose general validity we do want to hold on to even in the face of apparent counter-examples. The disposition-concept is helpful here in that it gives us the desired leeway between antecedent and conclusion. For God, however, the inference is infallible, thus raising questions about whether Murray’s usage is really sincere.

problems are not unrelated: we recall that it was the failure of the libertarianism of Molina and the Jesuits to satisfy the principle of sufficient reason that underlay Leibniz's rejection, and, correspondingly, it is that very principle which the dispositional model of choice is designed to secure.

However, on Murray's reconstruction, the principle of sufficient reason is made to sound as if it applies principally and paradigmatically to the individual choices of creatures in the world to which they belong. We recall that Murray held it against what he called "Leibniz's innocent view" – i. e., the conceptual containment theory – that it failed to satisfy the principle of sufficient reason. "What Leibniz must explain", he writes in this connection, "is why the substances in these worlds perform the acts that they do, or have the properties that they have, as opposed to their negations" (Murray, p. 85). But surely, it cannot be the case that for any *possible* world, sufficient reasons must exist for the actions of its sundry denizens. Indeed, precisely not. The principle of sufficient reason is a factor in *God's choice* of a world, and in no way constrains the set of possibilities. So, for instance, surely there is a possible world in which Molinian libertarianism reigns and people would act for no reason at all.

Possibility is certainly constrained by *necessity*, but necessity pertains to the other half of Leibniz's so-called "principle of perfection", i. e., the principle of contradiction. To this bifurcation of the principle of perfection corresponds the bifurcation of truths into truths of reasoning and truths of fact<sup>22</sup>. Truths of reasoning find their sufficient reason in the impossibility of their negation, whereas truths of fact (i. e., contingent truths) find their sufficient reason in their contribution to the overall good of the world. So, certainly, the principle of sufficient reason does apply to individual actions in the actual world, but it does so only in virtue of God's choice. The principle of sufficient reason is thus a *summum bonum* kind of notion and applies only derivatively to individual actions, in the sense that we know, as a matter of metaphysical principle, that they contribute in one way or another to the overall good and therefore find their sufficient reason in God's purposes. This will create various other problems for Murray that we shall explore shortly. For now, though, we need only note that it is *in virtue* of God's choice of the best of all possible worlds, best in terms of the sum total of perfection brought about through the sequence of events that *is* that world, that the principle of sufficient reason applies. To say that God foreknows what occurs in that world *by relying on* the principle of sufficient reason is misleading.

## 6. The status of the mental-physical distinction

Leibniz repeatedly makes claims of the form "the present is pregnant with the future"<sup>23</sup>, thereby indicating that he is, in this or that sense of the term, a

22 On this, see *Monadology* §§ 31-33 (GP VI, 612). Consult also Nicholas Rescher: *Leibniz: An Introduction to His Philosophy*, Totowa, NJ 1979, pp. 23-27, p. 118.

23 *Monadology* § 22 (GP VI, 610). Translation by Nicholas Rescher, in: N. Rescher (ed.):

determinist. The state of the universe at any given time follows from its previous state as surely as the next state follows from the present. In this sense, it is no surprise that many commentators sense that Leibniz, in virtue of his passionate defense of the freedom of the will, would somehow have to be a compatibilist. And, indeed, textual evidence to that effect is bountiful in Leibniz's writings. In *Theodicy* § 360 (GP VI, 329), he writes "[t]here must [...] be no doubt that effects follow their causes determinately, in spite of contingency and even of freedom, which nevertheless exist together with certainty or determination". In the *New Essays*, we are told that "thoughts are as determined as the movements which they represent"<sup>24</sup>. And perhaps even more conspicuously in the present context, here is a quote from an August 1692 letter to Pellison: "I am of the opinion of St. Augustine and of St. Thomas and their followers with respect to the consistency of predetermination with freedom and contingency"<sup>25</sup>.

To recapitulate, Murray grants that Leibniz may have been a determinist with respect to physical events, but urges, as we saw, that different considerations apply as we move our focus to mental events. As he sees it, "[w]hat sets Leibniz [...] apart from contemporary compatibilists is that [he] refuses to endorse the claim that the relationship between dispositions and actions is *causally necessary*" (Murray, p. 95). The gap between the two sorts of events is captured in the above-mentioned Aristotelian distinction between final causes and efficient causes. Thus Leibniz conceded to the mechanists that events in the physical world permit of capture in the vocabulary of efficient causes, but held that human actions fall under the province of final causes. Murray accordingly speaks of a distinction between *mechanistic* laws and *moral* laws; only the former capture causal relations in the sense considered by contemporary compatibilists.

The point is well taken, but there is reason to question whether this distinction can be made to carry the metaphysical weight that Murray saddles it with. For as we have seen, the principle of sufficient reason, which underwrites the moral laws that Murray speaks of, apply only in virtue of God's choice and God's purpose in choosing. As such, they apply indiscriminately to *all events* – mental or physical – in the world so chosen. Indeed, as Leibniz argues in the *New Essays*: "There is even a moral and voluntary element in what is physical,

*G. W. Leibniz's Monadology: An Edition for Students*, Pittsburgh 1991. See also *Theodicy* § 360: "It is one of the rules of my system of general harmony, that the present is big with the future, and that he who sees all sees in that which is that which shall be" (GP VI, 329: "C'est une des regles de mon systeme de l'harmonie generale, que le present est gros de l'avenir, et que celui qui voit tout, voit dans ce qui est ce qui sera").

24 *G. W. Leibniz: New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, trans. and ed. by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Cambridge 1981 (hereafter: *New Essays*), II, XXI § 13, p. 178; A VI, 6, 178: "[...] les pensées estant aussi déterminées que les mouvemens qu'elles representent, [...]".

25 Cited in Sleight: *Leibniz & Arnauld*, p. 29; A I, 8, 158: "[...] je suis du sentiment de S. Augustin, de S. Thomas, et de leur sectateurs à l'égard de la predetermination sauf la liberté et la contingence, [...]".

through its relation to God, since the laws of motion are necessitated only by what is best<sup>26</sup>.

Indeed, it is perhaps the most puzzling part of Murray's argument that he attempts to use just this notion to bolster his case for an incompatibilist reading of Leibniz. For many will hold that it is precisely here that we can find the ultimate expression of Leibniz's compatibilism. While Leibniz was enthusiastic about the advance of the mechanistic physics of his time, at the same time he chastised his contemporaries for assuming that the laws of physics were in any sense basic. He claimed instead that these laws themselves derived ultimately from God's purposes – orderliness being an aspect of perfection – albeit in ways which might be inscrutable to finite minds such as ours. In other words, Leibniz holds that also physical events can be explained by reference to final causes, even if, in practice, such explanations are rarely going to be very informative, inasmuch as we lack detailed insight into God's purposes<sup>27</sup>.

That such explanations are appropriate and informative with respect to beings such as us, however, is *not* because of any principled distinction between two kinds of events, mental and physical. Indeed, to saddle the efficient cause/final cause-distinction with that kind of metaphysical significance is to lose one's grip on one of the most distinctive features of Leibniz's thoughts on this matter. For the two vocabularies yield parallel and equally true, if unequally significant, explanations of the *same* domain of events<sup>28</sup>. And this, indeed, seems to be one way of expressing the core commitment of compatibilism, whether in its historical or its present day guise. While Murray never tells us specifically who he intends by the epithet 'contemporary compatibilists', it seems safe to assume that writers such as Donald Davidson and Daniel Dennett would fall under that description. Now, Davidson's argument is precisely that a single ontology of events may permit of equally true, yet irreducible forms of explanation treating these events in mental or physical terminology respectively. Dennett's outline of different 'explanatory stances' we might assume toward a single set of phenomena is clearly an expression of the same general idea<sup>29</sup>.

Nonetheless, there is a significant difference between Leibniz's stance and that of the contemporary compatibilists, and the difference, as would be clear by now, is that the relation of supervenience is turned on its head<sup>30</sup>. Contemporary

26 *New Essays* II, XXI § 13, p. 179; A VI, 6, 179: "[...] le physique même ayant quelque chose de moral et de volontaire par rapport à Dieu, puisque les loix du mouvement n'ont point d'autre nécessité que celle du meilleur".

27 For a good exposition of this side of Leibniz's philosophy, see Daniel Garber: "Leibniz: Physics and Philosophy", in: Nicholas Jolley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 271-352, especially pp. 325-328.

28 Cf. Garber: "Leibniz: Physics and Philosophy" (see note 27), p. 331.

29 See, for instance, Davidson: "Mental Events" (see note 8), and Daniel C. Dennett: "Intentional Systems", reprinted in his *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology*, Cambridge, MA 1978, pp. 3-22.

30 While the concept of supervenience is widely used in the contemporary debate, it may seem like something of a stretch to apply it to Leibniz's position. Nonetheless, in a survey article, Jaegwon Kim conjectures that Leibniz may have been the first to employ the concept in

compatibilists typically hold that everything is physical, and that mental events are merely a subset of physical events. In Leibniz's thought, by contrast, we may rather say that "everything is mental"<sup>31</sup>, and that physical events are merely a subset of mental events. While this is, of course, a notable and important difference, it is quite independent of the question of compatibilism. Moreover, this way of putting the point, while it does expose a real and fundamental difference between Leibniz and contemporary compatibilism, nevertheless also suggests a substantial doctrinal overlap between the two, an overlap which suffices to undermine a central idea underlying Murray's interpretation. For no matter which vocabulary we choose to supply the base of the supervenience relation, if that relation is suitably described as one of superset to subset, then it is clear that there are not, in the final analysis, two *kinds* of events at all, mental and physical. Really, there is only one kind of event, which may be seen as either mental or physical. Thus, while it is probably true that the *mental aspects* (or properties) of some event may only come into view by way of the final cause-vocabulary, and hence remain unexplained by the efficient cause-vocabulary, this does not prevent the fact that *the same event*, now seen under its physical guise, can be perfectly predicted by the latter vocabulary. In fact, this is just what the idea of pre-established harmony should lead one to expect. Thus, Leibniz: "All bodily phenomena can be explained mechanically or by corpuscular philosophy [...] without troubling whether souls exist or not"<sup>32</sup>.

To tie this up with what transpired in the previous section, while it is clear how and why the distinction between final causality and efficient causality matters *to us* – a point echoed also in the theories of contemporary compatibilists – what remains fundamentally obscure is why it should matter to God. Since God, presumably, foreknows all events by way of the laws of general order, there is no reason to suppose that he should take heed of any distinction between the mental and the physical. In short, if God has "no need of the connexion of causes and effects" in foreseeing the choices of free human agents, he has, *a fortiori*, no need of that connection couched in the vocabulary of final causes.

Nor is Murray's case improved if we shift our focus from events to substances. Murray gives the impression that Leibniz invokes the doctrine of pre-established harmony primarily to solve the problem of mind-body interaction, understood in an almost Cartesian fashion. This is simply not the case. Pre-established harmony is certainly a relation between substances. But for Descartes, the relation in question was one between two fundamentally different *kinds* of substances; on the one hand, nature conceived as thoughtless, mechanical matter – *res extensa* –,

something resembling its current technical usage. On this, see Kim: "Supervenience as a Philosophical Concept", in his *Supervenience and Mind*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 131-160, at pp. 135-136.

31 I owe the formulation to R. Cranston Paull. See his "Leibniz and the Miracle of Freedom" (see note 12), p. 225.

32 *The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence*, ed. and trans. by H. T. Mason, with an introduction by G. H. R. Parkinson, New York 1985, p. 96.



and on the other, a thinking, immaterial substance – *res cogitans*. By contrast, we may say that on Leibniz's picture, nature is organic substance all the way down, and fundamentally the *same kind* of substance all the way down<sup>33</sup>. So, to be sure, like Descartes, Leibniz is trying to answer a question about the interaction of substances, but his answer could scarcely be more different. Specifically, Leibniz will have no truck with ontological dualism of his predecessor, with its attendant supernaturalistic interactionism. As he writes in the Preface to the *Theodicy* (p. 66):

"[T]here will be no cause for surprise that God has so made the body that by virtue of its own laws it can carry out the intentions of the reasoning soul: for all that the reasoning soul can demand of the body is less difficult than the organization which God has demanded of the seeds. [...] But I admit the supernatural here only in the beginning of things, in respect of the first formation of animals or in respect of the original constitution of pre-established harmony between the soul and the body. Once that has come to pass, I hold that the formation of animals and the relation between the soul and the body are something as natural now as the other most ordinary operations of Nature"<sup>34</sup>.

Thus, the doctrine of pre-established harmony is indeed intended to solve worries about the interaction of substances. But the substances in question are monads, not Cartesian minds and bodies. And unlike that of Descartes, Leibniz's answer is, as we have seen, going to be stark and simple: they do not interact<sup>35</sup>.

## 7. Infinite analysis and two forms of necessity

So far, then, our conclusions indicate that the distinction between final causes and efficient causes, while making all the difference to us, has no bearing on God's foreknowledge. Thus, our original problem remains, now placing Murray in a

33 Note, for instance, how Leibniz seeks to explain the changes undergone by any monad in terms of perception and appetite. In *Monadology* § 14, he thus derides the Cartesians for their belief "that 'spirits' alone are monads, and that there are no souls of beasts nor other entelechies" (GP VI, 609: "[...] que les seuls Esprits étoient des Monades, et qu'il n'y avoit point d'Âmes des Bêtes ny d'autres Entelechies, [...]"). Here he also dismisses as a "Scholastic prejudice" the notion that souls can exist independently of bodies.

34 GP VI, 42: "[...] on n'aura pas sujet de trouver étrange que Dieu ait fait le corps en sorte qu'en vertu de ses propres loix il puisse executer les desseins de l'ame raisonnable, puisque tout ce que l'ame raisonnable peut commander au corps, est moins difficile que l'organisation que Dieu a commandée aux semences. [...] Mais je n'admets le surnaturel icy que dans le commencement des choses, à l'égard de la première formation des animaux, ou à l'égard de la constitution originaire de l'harmonie préétablie entre l'ame et le corps; apres quoy je tiens que la formation des animaux et le rapport entre l'ame et le corps sont quelque chose d'aussi naturel à present, que les autres operations les plus ordinaires de la nature".

35 *Monadology* § 7: "Monads just have no windows through which something can enter into or depart from them" (GP VI, 607: "Les Monades n'ont point de fenêtres, par lesquelles quelque chose y puisse entrer ou sortir").



double bind, insofar as he has been relying on a notion of “moral necessitation” which “infallibly determines” an agent’s choice supposedly without jeopardizing the freedom of that choice. Since, as we have seen, the distinction between forms of causality leaves determinism intact, we are so far left quite in the dark as to how moral necessitation differs from any other form of necessitation. And necessitation, we know, Leibniz did think incompatible with freedom.

In light of this, it is worth noting that Murray hardly ever refers to what Leibniz himself apparently thought of as his chief tool for making room for the freedom of the will. Leibniz held that all that was required for the possibility of free will was a demonstration of *contingency*. This he tried to secure by prying apart certainty and necessity, thereby taking us back to the principle of sufficient reason, with its two components, the principle of perfection and the principle of contradiction. God, at the moment of creation, surveys a set of worlds. The members of this set, clearly, are all possible. Moreover, the set is exhaustive – only the impossible is ruled out. The construction of the set of possibles, Leibniz will say, proceeds from God’s intellect, as rooted in the principle of contradiction. By contrast, his ensuing choice of the best of these possible worlds is a function of his will, as rooted in the principle of perfection. *That* God created a world, and that he created *this* world, are in this sense contingent facts. Once God has settled on his choice, what happens is surely certain to happen, but, equally surely, not necessary, since, plainly, other worlds were possible. Leibniz thus intends to preserve contingency by drawing a distinction between *absolute* and *hypothetical* necessity.

Spelling out this distinction will bring us right back to the conceptual containment theory which Murray summarily dismissed as Leibniz’s “innocent view”. As Rescher notes<sup>36</sup>, on Leibniz’s view all true propositions are analytic, and in this sense necessary. That is to say, all predicates truthfully ascribed to an individual substance are contained within the complete concept of that substance. Hence it is that God knows, by virtue of knowing the complete individual concept of Alexander, that he will conquer Darius and Porus, and, moreover, knows this “*a priori* (and not by experience)” (*Discourse on Metaphysics* § 8). However, there is a distinction to be drawn also among analytic truths. Some truths are finitely analytic – i. e., they resolve into an identity statement after a finite number of steps. These truths are absolutely necessary, true in all possible worlds, and knowable by all creatures possessed of reason. By contrast, some truths are infinitely analytic – i. e., they are true, but not demonstrably so in a finite number of analytic steps. These truths are contingent; i. e., there are possible worlds in which they do not hold. That they hold in this world, however, is necessary, but only hypothetically so – i. e., they are necessary only *given* God’s choice of this world, which is itself a contingent fact. Thus, that hypothetical necessity obtains in the actual world is a simple expression of the fact *that* God foreknows every event in that world. As such, as Leibniz neatly notes (*Theodicy* § 37; GP VI,

36 Cf. Rescher: *Leibniz* (see note 22), p. 23.

123), this is simply a question of the nature of truth, of what it means to correctly foreknow something, and so “cannot injure freedom”<sup>37</sup>.

But how can God foreknow every occurrence in the world? He knows it because he *chose* it. This is not, however, because he chooses, as if in real time, every single event, and thereby becomes complicit in sin at the same time as depriving us of free will. Rather, he *allows* certain events to happen, because the world in which they occur is over all the best possible.

Leibniz holds, then, with the Dominicans, that the principle of sufficient reason is key to understanding the freedom of the will, while holding with the Jesuits that God’s foreknowledge is prevolitional in the requisite sense. For the principle of sufficient reason distributes primarily over the whole world; its derivative application to single, individuated events in that world might occasionally lead us astray, as is evidenced by Murray’s argument.

In sum, Leibniz holds that while logical necessitation is not compatible with freedom, determination, or rather, determinateness, is. That this *form* of determinateness obtains follows immediately from God’s omniscience; that whatever so determined does in fact obtain is an expression of his wisdom and grace upon creating the world.

Endre Begby, Department of Philosophy, 1001 Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA, enb1@pitt.edu

37 Leibniz illustrates the distinction between finitely and infinitely analytic truths by appeal to the division of rational and irrational numbers, thus giving rise to one of his most memorable dictums: “[T]here are two labyrinths of the human mind, one concerning the composition of the continuum, and the other concerning the nature of freedom, and they arise from the same source, infinity” (“On Freedom”, in: *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Indianapolis – Cambridge 1989, pp. 94-98, at p. 95; A VI, 4 B, 1654: “Duo sunt [...] Labyrinthi Humanae Mentis, unus circa compositionem continui, alter circa naturam libertatis, qui ex eodem infiniti fonte oriuntur”). That God, unlike human beings, can know these contingent truths a priori is not because he sees the analysis to its end, for there is no such end. Rather, he sees the whole sequence in a single instant. This may certainly seem like a tall order, but such is, after all, the prerogative of an infinite intellect.