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UBC Phil314 2017 Winter Session1

Takehome Assignment 2

Leibniz's deduction is dependent mainly on two of his principles, law of necessary truth and principle of sufficient reason (p.678). Both principles are for two kinds of truths, fact and reasoning. Law of necessary truth (LNC) means that for necessary truth, there is no true contradiction, and principle of sufficient reason (PSR) stipulates that for every fact or truth, there is a sufficient (which means "complete" in Leibniz's context) reason for its existence. Particularly, for PSR there are two kinds of truths, necessary and contingent. For necessary truth, the sufficient reason for its existence is LNC. For contingent truth, the reason for its existence must eventually be traced back to and dependent on some prior necessary truth.

To understand the strength of the two principles here, he defines contingent truth as something whose opposite does not involve contradiction, and necessary truth as something that must hold true in every possible world, or in other words whose opposite does involve contradiction (In Class Discussion). For example, the existence of the author of this essay is a contingent truth (fact), which means the world is totally fine without his existence, so to speak, and he may or may not exist without true contradiction. On the other hand, arguably $1+1=2$ is a necessary truth, and it is impossible for it to be false, or formally speaking its opposite, e.g. $1+1=3$, involves truth contradiction.

Then, since PSR applies to all truths, what Leibniz is really saying is that for every contingent truth, its existence itself is not a sufficient reason for its existence, as all contingent truths must ascribe its existence to something necessary. For example, the existence of the author depends on the existence of his father, which is another contingent truth. Though the family line can be traced back again and again, in Leibniz's framework the fact of the existence of his ancestors does not give his existence sufficient reason. Some necessary truth must be present to grant the reason sufficiency. Thus, no contingent truth exists solely in and on itself. Also, there must be at least one necessary truth.

Based on these two principles he proves the existence of God. What is God? In Leibniz's framework, God is firstly a concept of a necessary, perfect being, who has all properties that have a highest degree (section 11). Now here is the legendary proof, the perfection argument (section 31-41). Since "God" is a concept of necessary, perfect being, then one of the perfection is that of existing necessarily. Thus, if such a being possibly exists, it necessarily exists and is absolutely perfect.

Now with LNC and the perfection argument, God is deduced to exist. With PSR and the facts of the existence of contingent beings, it is likely God is the prior necessary truth which is the reason of all contingent beings - There must be something which is N, and there is a being G that is N. This does not prove the God to be the ultimate reason for all existences. One objection is the plurality argument. To summarize, there can also be many Gods (or whatever can also be said to exist necessarily given Leibniz's definition) that are the ultimate being and ultimate reason of all contingent truths. In response

Comment [JB1]: ?

Comment [JB2]: ? not sure how I'm supposed to understand this.

Comment [JB3]: Not quite precise. And, why LNC?

Comment [JB4]: ?

Comment [JB5]: if we accept PSR,

Comment [JB6]: which can function as a sufficient reason because ~

Comment [JB7]: why not just "contradiction"

Comment [JB8]: when or if?

Comment [JB9]: Thus?

Comment [JB10]: being

Comment [JB11]: As a necessary being(s)?

Comment [JB12]: Where do you think he got this?

Comment [JB13]: ? better to specify

Comment [JB14]: ditto

Comment [JB15]: nice point to note, though this could be read as favoring one conclusion over the other (so, let's say, we can see the asserter or presenter's opinion, aim or further plan, etc). The cosmological argument simply has no argumentative efficacy concerning the number of necessary beings.

Leibniz gives his unicity argument in Monadology (p.278). Since everything in the world is “utterly interconnected” (p.278), it is rational to believe in one necessary being. Once this is accepted, the whole framework becomes clear.

It is already shown that how Leibniz proves that there is one God exists, which is the ultimate reason for all contingent beings and is a necessary perfect being. The remainder of the path towards the purpose of the world and humans relies on the interpretation of the perfection of God.

First of all, God always acts perfectly. The perfection is interpreted as “the best of all possible”, or “nothing better is possible”. In this sense, the expression “God acts perfectly” means “no better way for God to act is possible”.

Hence, since God (the ultimate reason) creates this world, the world created by God, our world, must be perfect, the best of all possible worlds. Particularly, God’s actions conform to a universal order (section 6). Since there is a final cause for the world, which is God, there must be final end. What is the end then? The end is to achieve the most perfect world (section 7). This means that the purpose of the world is toward its perfect state, which is set by God. This is set by God because the world is created by God, and God must create a perfect world. At first glance it tells nothing, because of the expression of the purpose here is not as clear as common purpose. An example is this essay. The purpose of this essay is do philosophy. This seems understandable. But if we examine where the purpose comes from, the answer must be the author, which is the cause of the essay. To say that “purpose of this essay is do philosophy” gives an illusion that the purpose of one thing is in itself, but it is actually dependent on the cause. If the cause, the author, is philosophical, then the purpose of the creature is philosophical. Meanwhile, the author can also be stupid, and more than that, always be stupid. In this sense, it can also be said that the purpose of this essay is to reveal the stupidity of the author. In other words, the purpose is to achieve its stupid state as set by the cause, the stupid author. Thus, the purpose of the world is to achieve its perfect state, as set by the cause, the perfect God.

For humans, or every individual human, the purpose is similar to the purpose of the world. In Leibniz’s framework, “every substance is like a complete world and like a mirror of God or of the whole universe, which each one expresses in its own way” (p.229). For an individual, the status as a substance depends on haecceity, to have a notion in which is contained all the predicates that hold true of it. Namely, a substance is something that can be distinguished from others via its properties. For example, the author and his TA Jiwon are both humans, and they cannot be distinguished in respect to the property of humanity. But meanwhile, they have different properties, e.g. Gender, age, stupidity, etc. Then each of them is an individual substance, as they both have their haecceities. In this manner, the purpose of an individual is to express perfection in its own way.

Commentary

Comment [JB16]: Explain further how this reasoning is supposed to work.

Comment [JB17]: Justifies?

Comment [JB18]: Nice summary

Comment [JB19]: Because...?

The deduction is valid but not convincing. Specifically, while the logic of the deduction is coherent, some premises cannot easily be granted as true. One premise of problem is when proving the existence of God, the proposition that the notion of God presupposes the existence of God, because the perfection involves necessary existence. According to Leibniz, the existence of God is a necessary truth if there is no true contradiction, that the non-existence of God is impossible. Since the only aspect of the perfection discussed here is existence, it is preferred to be shown as follow:

1) God does not exist.

2) God must exist.

Since 2) rules out the possibility of 1), 1) cannot be true, then

3) God exists.

To show that 1) can hold, it must be shown that 2) does not hold. In order to prove the problem 2), God is now called "a perfect being", according to the definition of Leibniz, and the only meaning of "perfect" to be examined here is "necessary exists". Then, it can be exhibited as follow:

1a) A perfect being does not exist.

2a) A perfect being must exist.

In this case, the contradiction between 1) and 2) seems to be much less vigorous. The real difference between two cases is the proper name "God", and the indefinite object "a perfect being". If the indefinite article "a" is replaced with definite article "the", then the contradiction between the new propositions "The perfect being..." seem to be as vigorous as in the case of "God...". Thus, it seems the strength of the original proposition relies on the meaning of "God" as a definite object. If God is a definite object, of course the object cannot have properties that are contradictory. However, if God is discussed as a definite object, we are already committed to admit the existence of the object, God. Thus, if God is addressed in such manner, the problem of circular reasoning is involved - there is no need to prove the existence of something that is already admitted to exist. Therefore, the object must be an indefinite object, "a perfect being".

It seems safe to confine the perfection of God to a indefinite object, but the proposition is not yet shown to be wrong. The central problem is that the perfection statement itself is a general statement. In other words, the property "necessary exists" applies to a perfect being, if such perfect being exists, but the general statement itself cannot grant the existence of the object, otherwise fallacy of circular reasoning is involved.

Consider:

1b) A perfect being must exist.

2b) There must exist a perfect being.

Doubtless from the notion of perfect being 1b can be said to be true. However, the leap from 1b) to 2b) is fallacious. A demarcation between "God" and "Notion of God" is needed. This kind of ontological problem is well examined in Quine's paper, "On What

Comment [JB20]: ? Not sure.. Would L say that? Or, here "must" is equivalent to "necessarily exists"? (modality) as opposed to, say, necessity in terms of command?

Comment [JB21]: ?
A perfect being does not exist.
A perfect being necessarily exists.

Comment [JB22]: The perfect being does not exist.
The perfect being must exist.

The perfect being does not exist.
The perfect being necessarily exists.

Comment [JB23]: I can see what you're saying, though it seems to be that L uses a concept of God and moves from possible existence to actual existence via the story about perfection.

Your concern may be about the following. Here you address only one argument and its main issue is if a perfect being exists or not. As you know, L builds up, say, an entity, from being a necessary thing, and adds more. Your concern may ask how L can make sure all of his arguments refer to the same thing. Sometimes he seems to add "god" as an extra point (there must be a necessary being/s which can be called "God.") but sometimes he starts with a concept of God (ontological argument).

Comment [JB24]: ?
1b is "The notion of a perfect being exists"?

There Is" (1961). To summarize his idea, proper names e.g. Pegasus, always cause illusions that they must refer to an object, which makes statements like "Pegasus does not exist" look paradoxical. The solution is to deprive the reference from these proper names and treat them as modifiers. In this way, "Pegasus does not exist" should be reshaped as proposition that "There is no such thing that has the properties of Pegasus".

What makes Leibniz's perfection proposition special here is the property of a perfect being - necessary existence. This leads to the misunderstanding as shown by from 1b) to 2b). To address the issue, the notion of perfect being should be correctly treated as a general statement for any entity that fits the object, a statement of properties or modifiers, but not a statement that functions independently and by itself commands, manipulates, or influences the real world. In this sense, the following statements should be correct forms of the perfection proposition:

1d) A perfect being has the property of necessary existence if there is such perfect being.

2d) Unfortunately however there is no such perfect being.

Then, there is no real contradiction between 1d) and 2d), and God cannot be said to exist because a perfect being must exist. On the contrary, God achieves all the properties of a perfect being, if there is such thing as perfect being God.

This is still not the full response to the perfection proposition. In the original version, the proposition is that "if God possibly exists, then he must necessarily exist, because of the definition of perfect being". The problem of "possibly" is not settled yet. This essay does not aim to fully examine this kind of modality question. Based on the clarification on indefinite object already given, a short answer can be given. For objects with property of necessary existence, there is no such thing as possible existence, either it exists and gets the full credit of necessary existence, or it does not exist, period. The general properties as modifiers do not make the existence necessary, neither possible. If the object exists, or possibly exists, it must exist or possibly exist in its own right, and cannot have recourse to general properties. The name "God" itself does not presuppose the possible existence of God.

Comment [JB25]: the property of existence as its perfect form – necessarily existing.

I can see your point, though I'm not sure if it is fair to describe what L does as a "mistake" or "misunderstanding." Your point uses Quine's view on existence (we should say that something exists only when we can quantify it, so to speak). But, you know that L's view on existence is just different. And, so, L's view on predication is so different from that of Quine. L's PNC involves not only logical impossibility but also conceptual impossibility, but Quine is "the" figure who opposes to conceptual impossibility based on the analytic/synthetic distinction. Also, you may recall Quine's criticism of de re modality.

I consider myself a naturalist, though I'm not so sure about justification for the minimalistic conceptualization of existence. Have you seen any good defense for Quinean metaphysics? (except for the justification charged with technically logical motivation). I'm not even sure in what sense it is bad to multiply entities without a good reason. But, I think I can take your point as a philosophically well motivated point. We might be better off if we can find some reason for "blocking" from one mode of existence to the other, without getting rid of "possible bald men" from ontology.

Comment [JB26]: If your point above (the "central" one regarding existence, not about the "definite" issue) is taken, yeah, this "possibly" condition wouldn't work.

Reference

Quine, W. V. (1961). On what there is. In Tim Crane & Katalin Farkas (eds.), *From a Logical Point of View*. Harvard University Press. pp. 21--38.

This essay shows deep understanding of the material and active, critical engagement with it, though there is room for improvement. The pace of explaining is good enough, but some work on precision would improve this essay. This would also help clarify a line of thought. The discussion regarding the second part of the exam is interesting and well-crafted. Some clearer identification of the nature of the worries and their impact (e.g. on the thesis that “there is purpose in the world and human life” in the question) would help make your worries more convincing and relevant. See my memo comments. Some of them are rather high-level – pickier – concerns (regarding precision and argumentation) and can be seen as harsh comments for a 300-level course assignment, but I thought, given the good quality of this essay, you might want to know about what I have to say.

85 A