

## Leibniz: Draft preface to the *Theodicy* (early 1707?)

[Gr p495]

### THEODICY<sup>1</sup>

#### OR APOLOGY FOR THE JUSTICE<sup>2</sup> OF GOD BY THE NOTIONS WHICH HE HAS GIVEN US

We have just been deprived of one of the most learned and ingenious authors of our times,<sup>3</sup> the loss of whom I regret all the more since I had benefited from his insights while conferring with him about the system of pre-established harmony, and I hoped to benefit from them further in matters just as difficult and important, matters which I have tried to go further into for a number of years, and which he had started to examine with a great deal of care since he had been attacked by persons of reputation. I had written a *system of freedom and matters related to it*, the form of which will be able to have something new, but the materials of which are old; and I had been delighted to submit it to the criticism of this excellent man as well as to those in dispute with him. He has just been taken from us, but as the matter is on the table, and as able people still work on it and the public are still interested in it, I thought that the occasion should be used to publish thoughts whose principal aim is the knowledge of God such as is required to stimulate piety and nourish virtue. I hope that they will also serve to illuminate the thorny questions which have troubled people for a long time on the conformity of faith with reason and of the usage of philosophy in theology. I use the title of *Theodicy* since the justice of God is the principal subject of this work, or the questions of his goodness and his holiness which naturally enter into it. I intend to show that we have good and true notions of these attributes of God,<sup>4</sup> [Gr p496] without which we would have no grounds to recognize them in him and to praise him for them.

I know that there are several distinguished theologians and philosophers who think that we do not have any idea of divine goodness and justice. *His laws are for those above*, said the poet. It is on account of this view that they respond to embarrassing difficulties on evil, on sin, on the sufferings of good men, on the prosperity of bad ones, and on predestination, as if the greatness and independence of God placed him above what we call justice and reason.

Those who use what they call strict methods with regard to grace sometimes speak in that way, and Mr Bayle<sup>5</sup> seems favourable to them. I have always believed that this is to cut the Gordian Knot rather than to unravel it.<sup>6</sup> It even seems that it would follow that we should only fear God, and that there is no way to love him, if the perfections

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<sup>1</sup> Leibniz originally wrote the title as follows: 'THEODICY, OR APOLOGY FOR OUR NOTIONS OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAST DISPUTES BETWEEN MR BAYLE AND SOME OTHER VERY ABLE PEOPLE.' Leibniz then deleted everything after 'OCCASION' and replaced it with this: 'OF THE LAST WRITINGS OF MR BAYLE', which he subsequently deleted too.

<sup>2</sup> Leibniz wrote and then deleted here: 'AND OF THE RELATED ATTRIBUTES'.

<sup>3</sup> Leibniz wrote and then deleted here: 'i.e. Mr Bayle, who died in Rotterdam'.

<sup>4</sup> Leibniz wrote and then deleted here: 'or, which is the same thing, that we are right to attribute justice and goodness to him, which would be unfounded if these words meant nothing at all when applied to God'.

<sup>5</sup> Leibniz wrote and then deleted here: 'has declared himself in favour of them'.

<sup>6</sup> Leibniz wrote and then deleted here: 'But evil is...'

which can make him loveable to us are absolutely unknown; if his power and greatness remain, and if the goodness, justice and wisdom of his government mean nothing: for how will we be able to have grounds to attribute them to him if we do not even have some idea of them? I believe those of another view are very well intentioned.<sup>7</sup> Their aim is doubtless to inspire men into a perfect submission to God's orders, but it seems to me that this is through the motive of forced patience which would hold good even if one were faced with a tyrant who is feared and completely unloved; thus this motive is not in any way sufficient. Yet I do not accuse these authors of distancing men from the love of God. They would have grounds to fear him if they acted in that way, but fortunately their speculative principles do not turn into practice. Mr Jurieu himself declared that, when in the pulpit, we should approach those whom he calls Pelagians. The supralapsarians write books about devotion that are as edifying as those of others. I even find in these authors who appear so strict something great, elevated, and worthy of God, by looking at things in a certain way, and I have always had a liking for those who emphasised the sovereign independence of the divine nature. It is absolutely certain that God depends only on himself, but his will is ruled by his understanding, and his power by his wisdom, and this [Gr p497] independence does not make God independent of the sovereign reason which is himself.

Scarcely<sup>8</sup> had I learned to understand the Latin authors when I began leafing through not only the historians and the poets but also the books on meditation, and I was especially charmed by the work of Laurentius Valla against Boëthius, and by that of Luther against Erasmus, which was the most profound one he ever wrote - it is true that these two books have need of mitigation, but they nevertheless contain great and beautiful ideas. From that time I considered what had been said on either side by Theodore of Beze and Jacques André in the symposium of Monbeliard which rekindled these disputes; and I have since consulted the writings of many other theologians and philosophers, but particularly that of the celebrated Hobbes against Bishop Bramhall,<sup>9</sup> which appeared only in English; not to mention Bradwardine, Archbishop of Canterbury in the fourteenth century, and many others who have supported an absolute necessity of all things, or who set themselves apart by exalting the rights of God over creatures so far as to say that he has the right to damn innocents. It is therefore not without knowledge of the cause, nor by any prejudice or passion, that I believed [Gr p498] another position had to be taken. It appeared to me that these rigid dogmas were not always founded in reason, and even less in

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<sup>7</sup> Leibniz wrote and then deleted here: 'and I do not blame them at all'.

<sup>8</sup> Leibniz wrote and deleted much before settling on this paragraph. He first wrote: 'And being still a small boy...', which was then deleted in favour of this: 'I had hardly learned to understand the Latin authors when I was charmed by the book of Laurentius Valla against Boëthius, and by that of Luther against Erasmus, in my view the most profound of those he ever wrote, although these books are in need of mitigation. I also read carefully the ingenious book by the celebrated Hobbes against Bishop Bramhall which appeared only in English, not to mention many other authors who set themselves apart by exalting the rights of God over creatures. It is therefore not for lack of knowledge of the cause, nor by any prejudice or passion, that I believed another view had to be taken; it appeared to me that these rigid dogmas were not always founded in reason, and even less in revelation, and that they could be harmful if practice was too much in accordance with the theory in them.' After deleting that, Leibniz then wrote, and afterwards deleted, this: 'I have nevertheless benefited from the profound meditations of these authors, whose view is not in any way mine, and I have found that one can preserve much of them by accommodating them to common notions, and that one can humanize what is true in their austerity.'

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity, And Chance. Clearly Stated and Debated Between D. Brahmall Bishop of Derry, and Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* (1656).

revelation, and that they could be harmful if the practice of those who follow them became too much in keeping with the theory, since the idea of an absolute power of a substance which is indifferent to the happiness and misfortune of intelligent creatures is hardly able to inspire charitable feelings in men, who must propose the idea of God as the most perfect of all models.

Some inflexible people have thought that they had revelation on their side, and when they are made to see the problems with their doctrine they remonstrate against reason, while on the other side their opponents maintained that it was the curiosity of corrupt reason which brought about opinions which are extravagant and completely removed from what Holy Scripture teaches us about the goodness of God.

The question of the conformity of faith with reason has always been a great and much discussed problem...

### **Leibniz: Letter on the difficulties sparked by reason with regard to the compatibility of the attributes of God with evil (before May 1708)<sup>10</sup>**

Sir,

You remember that I often had the honour to converse with a great princess<sup>11</sup> on some entries of Mr Bayle's *Dictionary* which tended to show the conflict of reason and religion. He made it known that his intention was to silence reason after having made it speak, and he made the triumph of faith consist in that. I emphasised that I was not of his opinion, but that I was nonetheless delighted that such a great genius had given occasion to go further into matters which are as difficult as they are important. I admit that I have also examined them since my early youth. I have resolved more than once to put my thoughts in writing, for this incomparable princess exhorted me to do it.

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<sup>10</sup> Grua notes of this letter that 'The text sent to Basnage on 1 June 1708 included the preface, §§ 7-33.'

<sup>11</sup> Sophie Charlotte.