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The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy

The “Essais” of Leibniz

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Contents

Part I The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy. The “Essais” of Leibniz

1 Introduction	3
1 Theodicy	3
2 Philosophical Theodicy.....	7
3 The Theodicy of Leibniz.....	10
2 True Piety	17
1 Truth and Appearance.....	18
2 The Fundamental Truths of Faith.....	23
3 Light and Virtue	29
4 The Love of God.....	34
5 <i>Fatum Christianum</i>	45
3 Faith and Reason	57
1 The General Terms of the Controversy.....	58
2 Reason.....	63
3 Truth Over and Against Reason: Mystery	71
4 Faith and Apologetics: Comprehending and Upholding	79
5 The Antagonist of the Theodicy: Scepticism.....	84
4 Apologetic Arguments in the <i>Theodicy</i>	89
1 The Brief.....	90
2 The Legal Arguments.....	94
3 The Apologetic Arguments.....	101
4 The Antagonist of the Theodicy: Gnosis	107
5 Predetermination and Free Will	119
1 Absolute Necessity vs. Hypothetical and Moral Necessity	119
2 Contingency	124
3 The Will	131
4 Freedom	139

6	Evil and the Best of All Possible Worlds	149
1	The Principle of “the Best”	150
2	The Best of All Possible Worlds	158
3	Evil	168
4	Evil in the Best of All Possible Worlds.....	182
7	God and the Reason Principle	189
1	Divine Attributes: Faculties and Values	190
2	The Central Role of Wisdom	196
3	The Existence of God.....	201
4	The Necessary Being and the Supremely Perfect Being	206
5	God and the Reason Principle.....	214
8	Conclusion	229
1	The Theodicy of Leibniz.....	229
2	Philosophical Theodicy.....	231
3	Theodicy	233
 Part II Appendices		
9	Appendix One: The Metaphor of the “Two Labyrinths” and Its Implications in Leibniz’s Thought	239
1	The Metaphor and Its Meaning.....	239
2	Geometric and Mechanical Curves.....	244
3	Natural and Artificial Machines.....	248
4	Necessity and Contingency.....	250
5	Hypothetical and Moral Necessity.....	259
6	The Calculus of Variations.....	262
7	The Best of All Possible Worlds	268
8	Conclusion	276
10	Appendix Two: The Reasons of Reason According to Leibniz	279
11	Appendix Three: From Ontology to Ethics: Leibniz vs. Eckhard	289
12	Appendix Four: Moral Necessity in Leibniz	299
1	Possibility and Necessity: Non-existent Possibles.....	300
2	Certain Determination.....	306
3	Moral Necessity	309
Name Index		315

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Cum Deo”

1 Theodicy

The term “theodicy” was coined by Leibniz, and is commonly held to indicate an aspect of religious apologetics with far more ancient origins. This commonly held view notwithstanding, Paul Ricoeur, a philosopher of notable authority where these matters are concerned, has argued that we can only legitimately refer to “theodicy” with reference to those systematic doctrines of divine justice, founded on an ontotheological system of reference, which belong specifically to the modern age and for which Leibniz’s *Essais de Théodicée* provided the prototype.¹ I believe that some light can be shed on this difference of opinions by stating that the term “theodicy” refers indistinctly to two types of discourse which, whilst doubtless connected, are not identical. On the one hand, it indicates the *justification* of God against the accusations levelled against Him due to the existence of evil in the world and, on the other, a *doctrine* of divine justice. Although both discourses address the same

¹ Cf. P. RICOEUR, *Le mal. Un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie*, Labor et Fides, Genève 1986, pp. 13 f., 26. H. HÄRING, *Das Problem des Bösen in der Theologie*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1985, presents an approach similar to that of Ricoeur, from this point of view. Although he presents three distinct definitions of ‘theodicy’, he nonetheless argues that the term “understood in its strictest sense” indicates “an attempt to present a systematic justification of God in the face of objections levelled at Him due to the existence of evil (and above all of suffering) in the world, inasmuch as it is His creation.” “Such an attempt,” continues Häring, “rests on a rigorously defined conception of God, which does not concur unconditionally with the biblical and Christian conception.” From now on, for brevity’s sake, I will refer to Leibniz’s *Essais de Théodicée* with the shorter title *Theodicy*. I will use the same term without an initial capital letter to refer to theodicy in general, as a literary genre or philosophical problem.

issues, they occur under different circumstances and adopt different points of view, to the extent that it would be possible for either to occur without the other. When Ricoeur limits the legitimacy of the definition of “theodicy” to the ontotheological doctrine of divine justice, he clearly has the second significance in mind. Indeed, he too refers to the precedent and more ancient “levels” (myth, wisdom, gnosis) of mankind’s intellectual endeavours in the face of the enigma of evil.²

Since, however, the defence and justification of God against the accusations brought against him as a consequence of the existence of evil is also encompassed by the term “theodicy,” let us first of all consider this significance. It would be impossible to determine when, in the history of human culture, the first such theodicy was attempted, and it would be an arduous task to follow its manifestations back through time to its most ancient religious and mythic manifestations. We must say, however, that theodicy was not born together with the first emergence of mythical belief or of religious faith. Neither did it coincide with the appearance of evil in the world. It rather originated with the first occasion on which a human being made accusations against divine justice regarding the presence of evil in the world. This, obviously, tells us nothing about the origins of theodicy from a chronological point of view. However, if it sheds little light on the “when” of theodicy, it does prove significant when we come to consider the “how” and, thus, the very definition of theodicy. Theodicy is an apologetic response to accusations levelled against God due to the existence of evil in the world.

The meditation and prayer of the believer in the face of evil therefore have nothing to do with theodicy. Such meditations may, at times, be uncertain and dramatic in their expression of pain suffered or of nostalgia for a lost ideal, of bitter disappointment or moral frustration, but they are always respectful of the divine mystery and divine justice which they address. Even when they take on an apparently provocative character, even their most drastic assertions mask an interrogatory, imploring, prayerful inner meaning, which does not impede adoration, but rather serves as its prelude. Judaeo-Christian tradition provides some extremely illustrious examples of this kind of dramatic meditation on divine mystery, such as, for example, the Psalms, several of St. Paul’s Epistles and St. Augustine’s *Confessions*.

The accusation of God is a completely different matter. Even when it assumes the interrogatory form of a sceptical doubt – *si Deus est, unde mala?* – it implies an assertion: God does not exist. In this case, there is no meditation, albeit tortured and difficult, on the mystery of divine justice, but rather an outright rebellion. God comes under accusation or His existence is denied. In the face of these accusations, believers cannot but take up the gauntlet and engage in apologetics in favour of God, in theodicy. The sceptical objection against divine justice, in which ever of its formulations, be it the famous epicurean argument or the more practical form recorded in the Psalms – “Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself ‘He will

² Cf. *ibi*, pp. 18 ff. Ricoeur, too, already perceives in the “biblical domain” that God is, on some level, on trial (cf. *ibi*, p. 20).

not call me into account'?"³—moves believers to apology. They themselves are unable to comprehend the mystery of divine justice, but their adoration fuels the impulse to proclaim that justice wherever it is challenged: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."⁴

There is another, more radical objection against God, besides scepticism: gnosis. Gnosis does not challenge God because He is unjust, but rather because he is just. God is the demiurge of the cosmic order which gnosis perceives as the root of all evil and the prison of elect spirits. If the sceptical objection can be summed up with the formula: *si Deus est, unde mala?* The gnostic objection can be expressed with another question: *nisi a Deo, unde mala?* The gnostic accusation is more radical than that of the sceptics, because it does not conclude by denying God but rather with hostility and rebellion against the divinity, Whose power is recognised. It is true that gnosis counterpoises the evil demiurge to an unknown, good and redeeming God. Yet this latter is separate from the world, distant and unapproachable, while the demiurge is the creator and lord of the world and the accusations levelled against Him imply a radically and definitively negative judgement of the meaning of the world and of history. The theodicy of antique pagan traditions, like that of Judaism and of Christianity, arose in answer to the sceptic and, to an even greater extent, to the gnostic objections.⁵

We might ask ourselves whether theodicy is still necessary in the present day. On the basis of what has been said so far, we should answer that, for as long as accusations, be they sceptic or gnostic, are levelled against divine justice, believers must continue to confront the necessity of theodicy. It is true that nowadays, in various narrow and elite sections of our culture, nihilism seems to have put down such profound roots that the problem of God has been removed to the extent that even to criticise Him would appear an exercise in futility. It is difficult to believe such an attitude entirely novel in human history and custom, as soon as we observe that it is already clearly figured forth in Psalm 14. Nevertheless, even in such extreme circumstances, the necessity of theodicy remains for the believer, since the very situation whereby the problem of God has been removed to such an extent that He is no longer even subject to accusations is clearly the fruit – clearly presupposes – the substance of the accusations in question. Even if they are not pronounced, they are nonetheless professed.

³ *Psa* 10:13.

⁴ *1Pet* 3:15.

⁵ The following studies, among many others, treat of the theme of theodicy from various different cultural points of view: H. GOITEIN, *Das Problem der Theodicee in der älteren Jüdischen Religionsphilosophie*, Teil I, Diss., Mayer & Müller, Berlin 1890; K. GRONAU, *Das Theodizeeproblem in der altchristlichen Auffassung*, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1922; A.-D. SERTILLANGES, *Le problème du mal*, 2 vols., Aubier, Paris 1948, 1951; G. GRUA, *Jurisprudence universelle et Théodicée*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1953, pp. 346–357; F. BILLICHSICH, *Das Problem des Übels in der Philosophie des Abendlandes*, 3 vols., A. Sexl, Wien-Köln 1936, 1952, 1959; M.B. AHERN, *The Problem of Evil*, Schocken Books/Routledge & Kegan, New York – London 1971; G.L. PRATO, *Il problema della teodicea in Ben Sira*, Biblical Institute Press [Ænalecta Biblica 65], Roma 1975; H. HÄRING, *op. cit.*

There are those who deem theodicy impious, inasmuch as it assumes to justify God, who needs no human justification. These suggest instead that believers should accept suffering in silence, without any attempt at justification.⁶ To these we cannot but respond that impiety indeed lies at the origin of theodicy, but it is the impiety of the accuser of God, not of His defence. In his intimate moments of meditation before God, the believer might indeed elaborate upon the scandal of evil and the mystery of divine justice, but he is here confronted with an accuser of God, who will not limit himself to uttering curses, but will raise objections, expounding at length upon justifications and argumentations, throwing down the gauntlet of refutation. Under such circumstances the believer cannot remain silent: out of loyalty to God, to Whose glory he is duty-bound to bear witness; out of loyalty to mankind, whose hope is put to the test by the accuser of God; out of loyalty to the accuser himself, who, perhaps, in some more-or-less hidden recess of his mind, is concealing a hope for an answer which will set him free. For all of these reasons, believers have always attempted theodicy, an endeavour which, due to their incomprehension of the divine mystery which they are experiencing, will always appear imperfect, perhaps even impossible, but nevertheless indefeasible: an endeavour to bear witness to their faith and hope.

This task has been approached in various different ways. The most essential and concise response is surely that of simply restating, in words and deeds, the creed. Such a choice, however, leaves no space for explicit apologetics. We are here treating of a practical testimony to the positive outcomes of a moral conduct based on faith and hope. As I will suggest later, such a practical manifestation is, without a doubt, of great importance. Indeed, herein lies the very culmination of theodicy, the moment at which it is truly understood and manifests itself as a *practical theodicy*. Yet matters are somewhat different if such a response is perceived as an alternative and even a refutation of theodicy itself, based on the presupposition that every argumentation is impious and doomed to defeat in the face of the stronger arguments of the adversary. Such is the case with fideism, in all of its forms, including that supported by Bayle, which presented the most immediate stimulus for Leibniz's *Theodicy*.

Yet the profession of faith can also be more or less amply justified and argued, thus assuming the form of an *apologia*. Both the pagan thought of the Greeks and the Romans and Judaeo-Christian traditions have developed along these lines. The motivations put forward may refer to axioms or dogmas on the assumption that they are self-evident and universally accepted. In Graeco-Roman traditions these refer primarily to the cosmic order or to the conception of evil as privation of being. In early Jewish traditions, the fundamental principle is the goodness of creation. The Christian tradition assumes and interweaves all of these themes. Where there exists a written revelation, as in the case of Judaism and Christianity, arguments often refer back to or offer an exegesis of the sacred text in order to shed light on the

⁶This thesis is maintained in manifold forms, for example, by J. SPERNA WEILAND, *La Théodicée, c'est l'athéisme*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, "Archivio di Filosofia," LVI (1988), n. 1–3, pp. 37–50; A. PEPPERZAK, *Dieu et la souffrance à partir de Leibniz*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 51–74; H. LÜBBE, *Theodizee una Lebenssinn*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 407–426.

enigmas of the present situation.⁷ All of these forms of apologia have been tried and tested: they have shown themselves legitimate and effective and retain these qualities to the present. At times, however, apologetics has also supplemented the authority of revelation and tradition with the persuasive power of rational argument. This is surely partly due to the fact that sometimes objections themselves are expressed and justified with rational arguments. Since he finds himself in a debate situation, the apologist will be strongly conditioned by the dialectical attitude adopted by the accuser. Nonetheless I believe that, in addition to this latter, apologists have been moved by far deeper motives in choosing to include rational and philosophical argumentation amongst their defence strategies. Going back as far as patristic and medieval dialectics, and yet more vigorously in the modern age, there existed a perception in the accusation of divine justice and the denial of the meaning of the world of an implicit threat to the very substance of reason. Thus, as Kant pointed out,⁸ any conclusion about divine justice is inevitably a conclusion about reason itself: any theodicy is also a logodicy.

2 Philosophical Theodicy

When a theodicy assumes the form of rational argument, it presents itself as a philosophical theodicy. Leibniz was by no means the first to adopt such a path. Ricoeur himself identifies a precise ontological conception at the basis of St. Augustine's "exclusively ethical vision of evil."⁹ Nonetheless, Leibniz's *Theodicy* is without a doubt one of the clearest and most elaborate examples of philosophical theodicy, to the extent that it has become, for many, paradigmatic. Philosophical theodicy, then, consists in the defence of divine justice through philosophical argumentation. That such an argument may consist exclusively in a philosophical doctrine of divine justice is taken for granted by many (including Ricoeur). For the time being, I would ask my readers to suspend their judgement on this point. I would ask that my readers have the patience to wait until the end of the present study before drawing any conclusions on this matter. Indeed, we already come across a rejection of such an identification in Kant. In a draft fragment of the essay *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*, Kant presents the following definition of theodicy:

What we do not imply when we refer to 'theodicy' is the automatic repulsion of objections levelled against a supreme goodness and wisdom as a consequence of the physical evils and vices to be found in the world on the part of a faith in that goodness and wisdom and

⁷ A good example of this kind of theodicy, which refers exclusively to the revelation, is *The Wisdom of Sirach*. Cf. G.L. Prato's accurate analysis (*op.cit.*).

⁸ Cf. I. KANT, *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee*, Akademie Ausgabe, vol. 8, p. 255; Eng. trans. *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, in I. KANT, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. by A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 17.

⁹ Cf. P. RICOEUR, *op. cit.*, pp. 23 f.

founded on aims of a highly universal nature, set out in the world and united with the moral law within us, which is absolutely admirable and elevates our own selves above nature. We refer rather to a methodical process of justification whereby divine order and government of the world are justified, that is to say evidently demonstrated, taking worldly considerations as a starting point, on the basis of a sufficient sense of coherence with divine wisdom inasmuch as we can conceive of it.¹⁰

However, in the definitive text of the 1791 essay, this definition is significantly muted:

By “theodicy” we understand the defense of the highest wisdom of the creator against the charge which reason brings against it for whatever is counterpurposive in the world.¹¹

The very difference between the definition given in the essay and that in the draft permits Kant to oppose to “doctrinal theodicy” an “authentic theodicy” *which is also philosophical*.¹²

Let us then leave aside, for the time being, the question as to whether philosophical theodicy must necessarily consist in a doctrine of divine justice and turn our attention to this latter significance of “theodicy.” That this notion of theodicy as a doctrine of divine justice is not identical with the former definition of theodicy as the justification of God should already have been made clear above: the justification of God is also possible without a doctrine of divine justice. Although it may, at first sight, appear somewhat more surprising, we should also venture to add that a doctrine of divine justice can, in a certain sense, also be formulated in the absence of the justification of God. This thesis underpins the arguments of those who describe modern philosophy of history as a secularised theodicy. As before, I will here examine the position adopted by one exemplary thinker: Odo Marquard.

Marquard, too, whilst recognising the antiquity of the questioning of God’s goodness, considers theodicy as a peculiarly modern product: “where there is theodicy, there is modernity and where there is modernity, there is theodicy.”¹³ He gives two reasons for this. First of all, theodicy is only possible in the modern era during which, due to an improvement in living conditions, “impotence and pain are no longer obvious and normal.”¹⁴ Secondly, it is only since the modern era that theodicy has become a necessary means to refute Marcionism, in the wake of the failure of the medieval refutation on the basis of the theme of free will.¹⁵ Modern theodicy would be of a paradoxical or, to use Marquard’s term, “ambivalent” character.¹⁶ To clear God of charges of injustice due to the evil in the world, it eliminates God

¹⁰ I. KANT, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie Ausgabe, vol. XXIII, p. 85.

¹¹ I. KANT, *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee*, cit., p. 255; Eng. trans. cit., p. 17.

¹² This difference was observed, albeit in a somewhat different sense, in G. CUNICO, *Da Lessing a Kant. La storia in prospettiva escatologica*, Marietti, Genova 1992, pp. 191 f.

¹³ O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, in IDEM, *Apologie des Zufälligen. Philosophische Studien*, Reclam, Stuttgart 1986, p. 14.

¹⁴ *Ibi*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibi*, pp. 15 f.

¹⁶ Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Idealismus und Theodizee*, in IDEM, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie. Aufsätze*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1983, pp. 63, 65.

altogether and imputes exclusive responsibility to the autonomy of mankind.¹⁷ The denial of God's existence in the modern age thus has theodical roots, aiming to clear God's name. To this end, Marquard cites Stendhal's assertion that "God's only excuse is that he doesn't exist" and Nietzsche's declaration that "God has died of his pity for man."¹⁸ What we are dealing with here, in Marquard's words, is a "methodical atheism *ad maiorem gloriam Dei*."¹⁹

Modernity would thus consist in the passage from theodicy to the philosophy of history, in the sense that a transition is made from "theodicy through optimism," such as that of Leibniz, to a "theodicy through autonomy," i.e. in the absence of God.²⁰ We are left with the problem of where Leibniz fits into this conception of the relationship between theodicy and modern philosophy of history, since it seems that Marquard considers him to participate in modernity inasmuch as he takes part in the "tribunalisation of the modern reality of life"²¹ but to be excluded from modernity inasmuch as he is exemplary of "theodicy through optimism."²² Aside from this, what interests us here is the fact that Marquard presents a conception of theodicy as a doctrine of divine justice without justifying God in the face of accusations of injustice. The very existence of God is denied, but this does not cancel out the doctrine of divine justice. This latter is de-theologised, but continues to stand in support of the enduring meaning of the world despite the existence of evil – i.e. inasmuch as it constitutes a philosophy of history.

Marquard's position has the great merit of clearly tracing the relationship between modern philosophies of history and theodicy, of unveiling many of the former as being, at heart, secularised and atheist theodicies. It also, rise to a doubt: does the only difference between theodicy in its true sense and philosophies of history understood in the terms of Marquard's reading lie in the displacement of the accusation from God to man, in the "acquittal"²³ of God at the expense of man, or is there a more radical difference? It seems to me that Marquard underestimates the significance of *mystery*. Theodicy, in the traditional sense of the term, defends God against accusations of injustice in the constant awareness that the presence of evil in a world created by a just and good God is a facet of mystery. By eliminating the transcendent figure of God, lord of history from their horizons, modern "secularised" philosophers of history, remove this sense of mystery.²⁴ Right from the start of his

¹⁷ Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., pp. 18 ff.; IDEM, *Idealismus und Theodizee*, cit., pp. 57 ff.

¹⁸ Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., p. 20.

¹⁹ O. MARQUARD, *Idealismus und Theodizee*, cit., p. 65; cf. IDEM, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., p. 18.

²⁰ Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Idealismus und Theodizee*, cit., p. 62.

²¹ Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., pp. 11 ff.

²² Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Idealismus und Theodizee*, cit., p. 62.

²³ Cf. O. MARQUARD, *Entlastungen. Theodizeemotive in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*, cit., p. 13.

²⁴ I here abstain from dealing with the question as to whether Kant, who Marquard certainly places amongst the developers of modern theodicy, effectively dispenses with any sense of mystery – a supposition regarding which, nonetheless, I have my doubts.

argument, and in a manner fully coherent with his sceptical standpoint, Marquard tends to exclude any consideration of mystery. For example, as I have already indicated, he attributes the appearance of theodicy to the new and modern experience of the non-obvious and non-inevitable nature of evil. Whilst such a consideration is no doubt correct and telling, it is far from exhaustive. It seems to me, rather, that it is the awareness of evil as a mystery which induces mankind to confront the problem in religious terms and thus also to engage in theodicy. On the other hand, the elimination of mystery which sometimes, if not always, characterises modern thought, permits a philosophy of history without any reference to the transcendent divine (naturally, whether such philosophies of history are capable of reaching any satisfying conclusions is another matter). To recapitulate and conclude, a consideration of theodicy as a philosophical doctrine of history in the face of the problem of evil, detached from the justification of God, demonstrates that the two meanings of “theodicy” are not identical – that they can, rather, be disconnected completely. Yet it has also emerged that, in a doctrine of history without the justification of God, we lose not only reference to God, but also all sense of mystery, since these two elements are inextricably connected.

3 The Theodicy of Leibniz

The elimination of mystery, however, is also the fundamental accusation which Ricoeur can ultimately be said to level at Leibniz’s theodicy. Indeed, Ricoeur’s criticism rests, not so much on Leibniz’s reference to onto-theology, as on the extent to which his discourse is based on the “logic of non-contradiction and systematic totalisation,” which assumes to reconcile propositions which are irreconcilable: God is omnipotent; his goodness is infinite; evil exists:²⁵

Theodicy thus appears to represent a struggle for coherence, in response to the objection that only two of these propositions can be compatible, and never all three at the same time [...]. The author fails to take into account [...] the fact that the task undertaken of *thinking* – yes of thinking about *God* and of thinking about *evil* in the face of God – may not be exhaustively pursued by means of our anti-contradictory reasonings and our inclination towards systematic totalization.²⁶

The optimism of Leibnizian theodicy would represent an alternative to faith in mystery:

Its failure lies in this very pretension that one might attain to a positive balance in the scale of good and evil on an almost aesthetic basis. It fails because we are faced with a degree of evil, of pain for which no known perfection seems able to compensate.²⁷

²⁵ Cf. P. RICOEUR, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 26.

²⁶ *Ibi*, pp. 13 f.

²⁷ *Ibi*, pp. 27 f.

Expressing a viewpoint very close to that of Ricoeur, Virgilio Melchiorre highlights yet more clearly the inadequacy of Leibniz's philosophical theodicy in the face of evil as mystery:

If evil is an undeniable reality, the ways of theodicy, at least as they are outlined by Leibniz, are impracticable. If, indeed, evil is defined in terms of contradiction – as an assertion or presence of something which cannot ultimately constitute itself in being – only two equally impossible pathways remain for theodicy: the first leading us to attribute the contradiction to the very being of God, the second, in order to avoid such an absolute contradiction, leading us to deny the existence of evil. Leibniz's *Theodicy* can be read as an emblematic case of this impossibility.²⁸

This criticism of Leibniz is remarkably acute and consistent. It is essentially identical with the arguments put forward by those who accuse Leibniz in underestimating, or even ignoring the gravity and the drama of the scandal of evil. Amongst those who, acutely aware of the awful reality of evil and of the necessity that mankind, for the sake of honesty and truthfulness, should in no way undervalue this reality, at least two particular tendencies can be identified. On the one hand there are those such as Sergio Quinzio who, out of loyalty to humanity and to the human condition of evil and suffering, maintain that a denial of divine justice is inevitable:

Due to the very fact that God, inasmuch as the believer can know Him through the revelations of His works afforded to us through history, is not perfectly omnipotent, true justice eludes even God.²⁹

Not even after the final day, when our tears will be dried by the hand of God and those who mourn will be comforted, will justice be perfectly served [...]. There will remain an overwhelming backlog of incidences of “useless suffering” endured by man and beast. Some faults will be forgotten, others punished. Some good works will be awarded, others forgotten.³⁰

On the other hand, there are those, such as Luigi Pareyson who, out of the same sense of the necessity of honesty in the face of suffering, call into question not God's justice, but the philosopher's ability to understand it: “Philosophy has sought to ‘understand’ evil and suffering but, partly due to the radically incomprehensible nature of both and partly due to the type of reasoning with which they are approached, it has only succeeded in wilfully overlooking them or cancelling them out altogether.”³¹

Theodicy conceives of God and suffering as mutually exclusive, without recognising the fact that they can only be truly perceived if we recognise that they can only be truly affirmed

²⁸ V. MELCHIORRE, *Per una teodicea simbolica*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., p. 115.

²⁹ S. QUINZIO, *La giustizia impossibile*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., p. 685. The article is reprinted in IDEM, *radici ebraiche del moderno*, Adelphi, Milano 1990, pp. 131 ff.

³⁰ S. QUINZIO, *La giustizia impossibile*, cit., pp. 687 f.

³¹ L. PAREYSON, *La filosofia e il problema del male*, in “Annuario Filosofico,” 11(1986), p. 8; cf. p. 10. M. Van Overbeke (*Le pari optimiste de la meilleure des communications possibles*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 75–83) presents a critical discussion of these kinds of position, which contains some telling observations.

together. In this way, theodicy loses sight of the incandescence and virulence of evil and a veil of oblivious, torpid disinterest falls over the whole issue.³²

The first of these two attitudes, taking the negative reality of evil as its starting point, challenges divine justice itself and, only indirectly, every attempt at the theodicy which seeks to defend it. The second, instead, challenges not divine justice but only and specifically philosophical theodicy precisely because its rational instruments render it unable to defend God without cancelling out evil.³³

This objection that philosophical theodicy, due to the rational instruments on which it depends, would be unable to truly comprehend the mystery of divine justice and the reality of evil without cancelling out the latter is to be taken very seriously. It is far more serious than the other objection, already cited, that theodicy is presumptuous, since God does not seek human justification. This latter thesis in fact expresses a radically fideistic conception of religion. Such a conception is far from common and, besides this, can surely not be considered uniquely legitimate. Indeed, the very fact that it denies any possibility of dialogue with non-believers casts serious doubts as to the relevance that such a religion might have in the broader cultural context. The former objection, instead, does not depend on a specific and debatable conception of religion, but calls philosophical reasoning and its ability to confront mystery directly into question. This is a challenge from which philosophy cannot afford to shy away. For philosophy to grant unconditional recognition to such an assertion would be to concede its absolute defeat.³⁴ Herein lie the origins of a great part of the diffidence which afflicts Leibniz's *Theodicy* and which makes it so exemplary as a model for any philosophical theodicy of a rational kind at the present day.

We must still recall one more type of criticism levelled at Leibniz's theodicy. Unlike the others, this critique belongs exclusively to the field of philosophy and it is more widely upheld implicitly than its limited number of explicit declarations would give us to believe. This critique can be best summed up as an accusation of philosophical irrelevance. Such a criticism is often implied in the emphasis that many place on the *Theodicy's* occasional origins and the assumption that it was written for a non-specialised audience. They stress the origins of the work in a series of conversations between Leibniz and the queen of Prussia, Sofia Carlotta, who invited Leibniz to write down his arguments against Bayle and others. This is certainly historically true – it is, indeed narrated by Leibniz himself – and does not per se

³² L. PAREYSON, *Filosofia della libertà*, il melangolo, Genova 1989, p. 17.

³³ In addition to the authors already cited (Ricoeur, Melchiorre, Pareyson), many others adopt a similar stance. Cf., for example, J. GREISCH, *Faut-il déconstruire la théodicée?*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 647–673; P. HENRICI, *Von der Ungereimtheit, Gott zu rechtfertigen*, in AA.VV., *Teodicea oggi?*, cit., pp. 675–681.

³⁴ I here refer to “philosophy” in the sense in which Leibniz himself understands it – that is to say, as critical rationalism. Different thinkers conceive of “philosophy” in different ways: Pareyson himself maintained that philosophy could, even in modern times, continue to serve a useful function in interpreting religious experience.

represent a criticism. Nonetheless, such a criticism is implied when these facts are recalled in order to suggest that the *Theodicy* is nothing more than a work of *philosophie pour dames*, without philosophical relevance.

From a rather different standpoint and as part of an analytical discussion of theodicy in the seventeenth century, Sergio Landucci, in his interesting study of *Theodicy in the Cartesian Age*,³⁵ also accused Leibniz's *Theodicy* of irrelevance. He argued that the modern debate on theodicy had taken inspiration from various irreconcilable issues present in Descartes, had been developed by various authors, with Malebranche playing a decisive role, and had been brought to a definitive, negative conclusion by Bayle:

Of the period spanning from Descartes to Bayle, we may well suggest that it was the critical moment in the history of this millennia-old problem. At the very centre we come across Malebranche, with his unprecedented new insights, which immediately underpinned the final outcome with which, by now, we are all familiar. Bayle brought us what is doubtless one of the greatest modern cases against any form of 'Christian philosophy,' whether it takes on a rationalised form or even that of mere 'deism.'"³⁶

With Bayle, then, the case was closed so definitively that any attempt to reopen the argument – and Landucci is here referring above all to that of Leibniz – would be nothing more than a restating of old arguments which had already been refuted, devoid of any philosophical relevance. As Landucci writes:

There is one omission which I should here take the time to specifically justify: that of Leibniz. This choice was based on the fact that, although the *Theodicy* brings together much of Leibniz's thought *en masse*, with regard to our specific theme, i.e. his response to Bayle, he limits himself to posing once again, albeit in a form somewhat altered in accordance with his personal inclinations, the very arguments which Bayle had already completely demolished. Indeed, he even raises points which had already been undermined by Malebranche. In this sense, Leibniz's response does nothing more than bare witness to the manner in which the Bayleian outcome represents a point of no return in the Western intellectual tradition. Kant would solemnly bear witness to this fact a hundred years later, with his aptly entitled essay *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*.³⁷

In the face of all of these problems and criticisms which plague theodicy in general and Leibnizian theodicy in particular, the present study aims to present a reading of Leibniz's work which will question his arguments without prejudice but also, at the same time, leave the space for Leibniz to offer us an authentic expression of his own philosophical thought. I began work on this study because I had the impression, in which I have since been confirmed, that Leibniz's *Theodicy* offers a treatment and development of the issues in question which is of far more interest than commonly held critical opinion has given us to believe and that, when read without presumption or prejudice, it often emerges as a remarkably different text from that which it is stereotypically assumed to be. I was driven, on the one hand, by a theory that, if philosophy can prove itself able and entitled to seek out truth, it cannot be

³⁵ S. LANDUCCI, *La teodicea nell'età cartesiana*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 1986.

³⁶ *Ibi*, pp. 11 f.

³⁷ *Ibi*, p. 13.

excluded from the exploration of such fundamental issues of faith as that of theodicy, nor can faith do without the assistance of philosophical apologetics, if it does not wish to isolate itself from language, communication and cultural dialogue. On the other hand, I was moved by the historical fact that, even if the Marburg School, who represents a key point of reference in my own philosophical research, did not, generally speaking, appreciate this aspect of Leibniz's philosophy, the School nonetheless considered Leibniz's thought as a cornerstone in the history of critical idealism. I would thus assume that, if not the letter, then at least the spirit of that critical idealism which, at least in Kant and Cohen, paved the way to theodicy could be traced back to Leibniz.

The present study, then, is by no means intended as a general study on Leibnizian thought. Indeed, many of the most important themes of Leibniz's philosophy are only briefly touched upon, or even omitted entirely. It has no particular objectives of a historiographical or philological character, to the extent that you will find that Leibniz's works are here cited, by and large, without any attention being paid to chronology and to historical evolution of the author's thought. Similarly, unpublished passages are normally quoted without any indication being given of corrections, deletions and addition. I have not even attempted to provide an exhaustive and systematic analysis of all of Leibniz's works on the themes with which I am concerned. In approaching the various topics, I have sought to provide, from time to time, the broadest possible indication of cross-references in Leibniz's oeuvre for the purposes of comparison and in order to afford the greatest possible range and depth to the present reading of the *Theodicy*. Notwithstanding this, I lay no claims to exhaustiveness. My true objective has been to offer an organic reading of Leibniz's *Theodicy*, situating it in the broader context of the author's thought as a whole. For this reason, the *Theodicy* is my key text of reference, although I constantly refer back to other works in the Leibniz canon, where they may serve to support, clarify or further develop my readings. Of course a critical reading is impossible without questioning the substance of the text studied. The questions which I intend to ask have been gradually developed over the course of the present introduction: what, exactly, is the meaning of Leibniz's *Theodicy* and how does he set out to express it? What is its aim and what methodological approach is adopted? To what extent is it still relevant? Furthermore, is theodicy in general, and philosophical theodicy in particular, to be considered a valid and effective exercise? If this is the case, under what conditions? To answer these questions, I have presented a systematic reading of the *Theodicy* whereby, after having first investigated, in accordance with the order set out by Leibniz himself, the objective of theodicy, the "true piety" (Chap. 2) and its main instrument, reason (Chap. 3), I then move on to treat of the apologetic arguments with which the main body of Leibniz's work is concerned (Chap. 4). I have sought to identify the foundations and justifications, first of the metaphysical arguments (Chaps. 5 and 6) and then, in a somewhat more radical step, of the existence of God and the reason principle (Chap. 7).

Having thus presented my research, outlining its limits and its intentions, I can do no more than entrust it to the reader, in the hope that (s)he, without neglecting to engage in a careful and rigorous critical exercise, will nonetheless follow Leibniz's benevolence towards the text being read: "I am naturally inclined," he writes, "to latch on to that which is praiseworthy, almost without paying any attention to that which is blameworthy, above all when the former aspect is prevalent. I do not read books to censure them but rather to profit from them. It is for this reason that I find good everywhere, although not always in the same quantity."³⁸

I wish to take this opportunity to thank professor Giuseppe Riconda for providing me with a set of philosophical theoretical and historical perspectives which have profoundly influenced the research presented here. He was also so kind as to discuss each and every aspect of the current study with me at length and in depth right through the gradual process of its evolution. Finally, I would thank him once again for accepting the Italian version of this study for inclusion in the series of volumes of which he was editor in chief.

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In publishing this book in English, I have added several essays which have been published elsewhere in Italian, which delve further into the matters in question.

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Last but not least, I am grateful to Springer, and am proud to see this book included in their prestigious catalogue.

³⁸ *GRUA* 103.