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# LEIBNIZ ON DIVINE LOVE

Lucy Sheaf

This paper considers two objections which can be levelled against Leibniz's account of divine love. The first is that he cannot allow that divine love is gracious because he is committed to the view that love is properly proportioned to the perfection perceived in the beloved; the second is that God is cruel to those who are damned and so cannot be said to love all. I argue that Leibniz has the resources to rebut—or at least blunt—each of these objections.

Leibniz is committed to the view that properties can be attributed to God and to human beings univocally; he also takes it for granted that the property “(perfectly) loving” can be attributed to God. Notable discussions of love in his writings from the 1670s are situated in a broader investigation into the nature of justice; in these early writings, the just person is defined as one who loves all, with love generally being defined as delight in the happiness of another. In the *Confessio philosophi* (1672–1673) this scheme is explicitly related to God: both speakers in the dialogue agree that God is (perfectly) just, and that this entails that God loves all, i.e., that God is delighted by the happiness of all (CP 29–33). I will start section I with an outline of Leibniz's general account of love, before turning to the particular case of God's love for human beings. With this background in place, I consider two objections which can be levelled against Leibniz's account of divine love. The first is that his suggestion that love is properly proportioned to the perfection perceived in the beloved is inconsistent with the view that divine love is gracious; the second is that God is cruel to those who are damned and so cannot be said to love all. These objections are discussed in sections II and III respectively. I conclude that Leibniz has the resources to meet each objection. The fourth and final section addresses the question of whether Leibniz should do more to pre-empt these two objections. I suggest that his reticence should not be judged too harshly, as it can plausibly be ascribed to his commitment to promoting *Amor Dei super omnia*—the love for God above all things which he takes to constitute our greatest possible happiness.



## I. Divine Love

Leibniz's account of divine love<sup>1</sup> must be understood in the context of his general account of love, which in turn must be seen in the light of his characterisation of the just person [*justus*]. First, we should recall that from his youth, Leibniz espouses the view that acting justly is consistent with acting out of self-interest. Indeed, in an important early text, the *Elementa juris naturalis* [henceforth: EJN<sup>2</sup>], he endorses the stronger claim that being motivated by self-interest is a necessary condition of an act's being just.<sup>3</sup> However, Leibniz is also committed to the view that the just person is loving, and that (genuine) love entails willing the good of the beloved for its own sake. He recognises that these two fundamental commitments appear to be mutually inconsistent. But he maintains that once we accept his own definition of love, we can see that the difficulty is merely *prima facie*. The definition is as follows: To love is to be delighted by the happiness of another person.<sup>4</sup> As Leibniz sees things, to delight in the happiness of another person is to value their happiness as an end in itself, and this is sufficient for "genuine" or "disinterested" love. The definition which has just been cited is first introduced in EJN, and in this context it is clearly intended to serve as a kind of shorthand for a rather subtle account of the loving person [*amans*]. The crucial point for present purposes is that Leibniz does not think that love demands an occurrent delight in the happiness of another, as a face-value reading of the definition might suggest. He certainly seems to think that the paradigm case of love involves precisely such an occurrent delight. But he also clearly indicates that those who are not happy can nonetheless be loved, because willing to bring about some good for such persons—i.e., to contribute to their happiness—is sufficient for love.<sup>5</sup>

It should now be clear that on Leibniz's account, to say that God loves all is to say that God delights in each person's happiness, taking this definition in the broad sense outlined above. To gain further insight into the nature of divine love, we must address the question of God's motivation

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<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this paper, "divine love" refers to God's love for all human beings. Leibniz himself often uses "divinus amor" or "amour de Dieu" to refer to our love for God.

<sup>2</sup>There are 6 drafts of EJN. Where "EJN" is followed by a number, it refers to a particular draft, as numbered in the *Akademie* edition. Where no number is given, "EJN" refers to the set of six drafts as a whole.

<sup>3</sup>See EJN.5 (A VI.i.473). This draft was probably written in 1671.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, A VI.i.461; CP 28; A VI.iv.1357; A VI.iv.2892; A VI.xvi.602. Leibniz's attempts to solve the problem in question are discussed in Brown, "Disinterested Love: Understanding Leibniz's Reconciliation of Self- and Other-Regarding Motives," and Goldenbaum, "It's Love! Leibniz's Foundation of Natural Law as the Outcome of his Struggle with Hobbes' and Spinoza's Naturalism." For a detailed treatment of Leibniz's engagement with the "pure love" controversies of the 1680s and 1690s, see Naert, *Leibniz et la querelle du pur amour*.

<sup>5</sup>See EJN.5, A VI.i.479. Cf. A VI.iv.2793.

for creating human beings. In the *Aphorisms concerning happiness, wisdom, charity, justice* (1678/79), Leibniz asserts:

God's aim or goal is his own gladness [*laetitia*] or love for Himself.  
God created creatures—and above all those endowed with a mind—for the sake of His glory, or out of love for Himself. (A VI.iv.2804)

Further detail on the connection between the creation of rational beings and God's glory can be found in an earlier text, EJN.2:

[W]e all seek glory [*laus*]. And there is no wise person who does not seek it, since they seek harmony. Glory is a reflection and duplication of harmony, a certain echo of it, as it were. If God did not have rational creatures in the world, he would have the same harmony, only with no echo, the same beauty but with no reflection and refraction or multiplication. Hence the wisdom of God demanded rational creatures, in which things multiplied themselves (A VI.i.438).<sup>6</sup>

Both the emphasis on wisdom and on harmony are significant. In Leibniz's scheme, God is morally necessitated by His perfect wisdom to actualise the best, or most harmonious possible world.<sup>7</sup> Rational creatures are an indispensable element of this world because they "echo" or "reflect" its harmony, thereby "multiplying" it, and thus glorifying God.<sup>8</sup> In his later writings, Leibniz captures this feature of rational creatures by characterising them as "living mirrors"—*living* because their cognitive capacity allows them to apprehend the underlying harmony of our world.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, then, the creation of human beings must be explained by reference to God's wisdom. Thanks to His perfect wisdom, God both seeks glory, and also knows that this glory is best served by the creation of rational beings.

We must also recall Leibniz's commitment to two claims relating to the best possible world, or "universal harmony," which God in His perfect wisdom wills to actualize. First, Leibniz consistently espouses a thoroughgoing determinism: he thus holds that both the degree and the kinds of divine grace which are bestowed on any given human being, and which can be said to be a concrete expression of divine love for that individual, are determined. Second, Leibniz is committed to a denial of transworld identity: he holds that each inhabitant of a possible world can be a member only of that particular world.<sup>10</sup> As we shall see, Leibniz's endorsement

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. A IV.i.532. The suggestion that God would have "the same harmony" even if He did not bring any creatures into existence raises the spectre of monism. For a rich discussion of Leibniz's general vulnerability to the charge of monism, see Newlands, "From Theism to Idealism to Monism: A Leibnizian Road Not Taken."

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Tdp 2/ GP VI.50; T 128/ GP VI.181. Leibniz's understanding of "moral necessity" is elucidated in Adams, "Moral Necessity."

<sup>8</sup>Leibniz's conception of "the glory of God" is discussed in Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 304–305.

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, *Monadology* §83/ AG 223. Leibniz's use of this term is traced in Natchomy, *Living Mirrors*, 137.

<sup>10</sup>See Adams, *Leibniz*, ch. 4; Sleight, *Leibniz and Arnauld*, ch. 4.

of these two claims exacerbates his vulnerability to the charge which will be discussed in section III; namely, that he presents us with a God who is cruel. For now, though, I turn to the objection that Leibniz cannot accommodate the view that divine love is gracious.

## II. Is Divine Love Gracious?

In asking whether Leibniz allows that divine love is gracious, I am using “grace” in the sense articulated by Robert Adams in chapter 6 of *Finite and Infinite Goods*:

[G]race is love that is not completely explained by the excellence of its object. Within certain wide parameters, at any rate, it is not proportioned to the excellence of its object, nor conditioned on the degree of that excellence. To the extent that that degree can be measured, grace typically outruns it.<sup>11</sup>

As Adams notes, grace is an attribute of divine love in all the main theistic religions: they all hold that “God is merciful, compassionate . . . [and] forgives sin, not because that’s God’s job, as the famous cynical remark would have it, and not because sinners deserve it, but out of free and gracious love.”<sup>12</sup> Importantly, Adams denies that graciousness can be attributed only to divine love. He argues that “grace is rooted in the nature of love as such, and that any attitude toward a person that is not gracious in certain ways falls short of the ideal of love, and may thereby fail to be real love at all.”<sup>13</sup> To support this claim, he presents us with a case involving an avowedly loving human parent:

Suppose a parent said, “Diane and Daniel are great people and very happy; they’ve been wonderful children to me, and I love them very much; but I’d rather I’d had somewhat better and happier children instead of them,” we would be puzzled, because there is a glaring contradiction between the love professed and the preference stated . . . This example is interesting, in the first place, because it shows a point at which we think love should have some of the character of grace, inasmuch as its preferences should *not* be calibrated in accordance with objective value.<sup>14</sup>

Given that grace is rooted in the nature of love as such, we might naturally hope that Leibniz’s account can accommodate the view that divine love is gracious—a view which, after all, is upheld by the mainstream Christian tradition. On the face of it, however, it seems that Leibniz must deny this. To see why, it will be helpful to consider passages from two texts relating not to God’s love for us, but to *Amor Dei super omnia*, or our love for God (above all things):

God being the most perfect and the happiest substance—and consequently the most lovable—and pure, genuine love consisting in the state which

<sup>11</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 151.

<sup>12</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 150.

<sup>13</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 151.

<sup>14</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 157.

makes us take pleasure in the perfections and in the happiness of the one we love, this love must give us the greatest pleasure of which we are capable when God is its object (*Principles of Nature and of Grace*, 1714, §16, AG 212/GP VI 605).

Love for God [*divinus amor*] surpasses other loves, because God can be loved with the most success [*cum maximo successu*], since at the same time nothing is happier than God, and nothing more beautiful and more worthy of happiness can be apprehended [*intelligi*]. (Preface to the *Codex juris gentium diplomaticus*, 1693, A.IV.v.61)

Leibniz's earlier writings suggest that *Amor Dei super omnia* is not a special case, but that love in general is properly proportioned to the degree of perfection perceived in the beloved. In his earliest and most extensive discussions of the nature of love, in EJN, he asserts: "Although it is characteristic of the just or good person to love everyone, love nonetheless has its degrees" (A VI.i.481). This suggestion is developed in a couple of pieces from the 1680s:

[O]ne who is wise will love everyone, but the more the traces of divine virtue shine forth in somebody . . . the more she will love them (A VI.iv.2863).

Other things being equal, the more a person excels in perfection of the mind, or in true virtue, the more we will love them (A VI.iv.2891).

Taken together, these passages indicate that Leibniz is committed to what I shall call the "proportionment thesis"—the claim that love is properly proportioned to the excellence or perfection perceived in the beloved.<sup>15</sup> The crucial question for our purposes is whether Leibniz takes the proportionment thesis to extend to divine love. The following assertion in the final draft of the *Aphorisms concerning happiness, wisdom, charity, justice* seems to suggest that he does:

God loves rational beings [*mentes*] in proportion to the perfection which He has given each of them. (A VI.iv.2804)<sup>16</sup>

In light of this assertion, must we accept that on Leibniz's account, divine love is not gracious? At the outset it should be emphasised that Leibniz himself would no doubt object that he takes grace to be central to divine love. He insists that all the goods which we enjoy—notably the goods which are conducive to our happiness, and which can thus be seen as concrete manifestations of God's love for us—fall under the heading "grace."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup>It is worth noting the parallel with Malebranche. See Grua, *Jurisprudence universelle*, 192–194.

<sup>16</sup>In the earlier (second) draft, Leibniz writes: "Deus amat unumquemque proportionem suae perfectionis [. . .] Deus amat mentes pro gradu perfectionis quam cuique earum dedit" (A VI.iv.2799). He prepared a German translation of the *Aphorismi*; the sentence from the final Latin draft cited above is translated "Gott liebet die verständigen Creaturen nach maße der Vollkommenheit so er jeden geben" (A VI.iv.2807). Cf. A VI.iv.583.

<sup>17</sup>Leibniz espouses a broad construal of grace. In an early piece, *Von der Allmacht und Allwissenheit Gottes und der Freiheit des Menschen* (1670–1671), such things as "advantageous opportunities," "sensible parents," and "diligent teachers" are all described as "grace"

Furthermore, Leibniz holds that “sufficient grace,” i.e., grace which is sufficient for our eternal happiness, or salvation, is given to all.<sup>18</sup> He could thus be said to uphold the view that divine love is a form, or expression, of grace. But whatever the merits of Leibniz’s own construal of grace, in the present context that construal is of only peripheral concern; as I have indicated, Leibniz’s account of divine love is being assessed in relation to the sense of “grace” articulated by Adams. The crucial point is that on this latter construal, love cannot properly be proportioned to the excellence of the beloved. But we must now examine Adams’s account a little more closely.

First, we should note that Adams is not claiming that divine love is completely arbitrary. Given Leibniz’s vehement opposition to any suggestion that God acts arbitrarily,<sup>19</sup> it would hardly be fair to expect Leibniz to accept such a conception of grace. Adams holds that the excellence of created persons is constituted by their resemblance to God, and he takes it that this excellence gives God (defeasible) reasons to love them.<sup>20</sup> To this extent, he implies that there is *some* proportionment involved in divine love. What Adams insists on—to return to the passage cited at the start of this section—is that (divine) love “is not *completely* explained by the excellence of its object”; that grace “*outruns*” this excellence [emphasis mine]. He thus rules out only *strict* proportionment.

The crucial question, then, is whether Leibniz holds that God’s love is *strictly* proportioned to our excellence or perfection. With this question in mind, we can return to the texts I cited earlier in support of the claim that Leibniz is committed to the proportionment thesis. Let us start with the texts relating to *Amor Dei super omnia*. First, it is worth noting that the passages in question clearly point towards Leibniz’s conception of God as *Ens perfectissimum*, a being of unlimited perfection(s),<sup>21</sup> but that there is no suggestion that our love for God should therefore be proportioned in such a way that it is *infinitely* greater than our love for our fellow human beings. Similarly, the assertion in the *Aphorisms* that “God loves rational beings in proportion to the perfection which He has given each of them” need not be taken to imply strict proportionment: it could simply be read as the claim that God’s love for us is properly grounded.<sup>22</sup>

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[Gnade] (CP 17). Cf. A IV.ix.629. Leibniz’s account of grace is discussed in Echavarria, “Leibniz on the Efficacy and Economy of Divine Grace.”

<sup>18</sup>Cf. A VI.iv.2369; A IV.ix.668.

<sup>19</sup>See CP 33; A IV.ix.635; GP VI.36/H 60; GP VI.219–220/H 237. For an insightful discussion of Leibniz’s position, and key texts, see Riley, “Leibniz on Justice as ‘The Charity of the Wise,’” 143–149.

<sup>20</sup>“Love seeks and finds things to prize and celebrate in the beloved, and regards them as good. Even divine love would be the richer rather than the poorer for finding such value in the beloved.” Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 165. Cf. *ibid.*, 35–37.

<sup>21</sup>See Adams, *Leibniz*, ch. 4 for an analysis of Leibniz’s conception of *Ens perfectissimum*.

<sup>22</sup>Perhaps the point that there need not be a *strict* proportionment is more clearly implied in another passage. In the Preface to the *Initia scientiae generalis* (1679), Leibniz writes: “Nos igitur omnes alios *pro* cuiusque perfectione amabimus” (A VI.iv.369; emphasis mine). “Pro” can be translated “in proportion,” or “according to,” but it can also be translated “because of,” or “on account of.”



I cited two further texts in the earlier discussion, both of which include the assertion that the just person loves the virtuous more than the non-virtuous. On the face of it, these passages suggest that Leibniz does indeed endorse the kind of strict proportionment which we are rejecting. But we should not be too quick to assume this. First, we must recall that when Adams speaks of love being (strictly) proportioned to the excellence of the beloved, he clearly has *actual* excellence in mind. As we have seen, Leibniz generally uses “perfection” in this context, rather than “excellence.” Up to this point, there has been a tacit assumption that Leibniz is concerned only with the *actual* perfection of the beloved. It is now important to note that there are compelling textual grounds to reject this assumption. For example, in “Von dem Höchsten Gute” (after 1692) Leibniz clearly uses “perfection” both to refer to an actual quality, and also to a capacity to attain further perfections. After recalling that perfections are found in God “in the highest degree,” Leibniz writes

but the perfection of creatures—and so, our perfection—consists in an unimpeded, powerful progression to new and new perfections (DS II.36).

In several other writings Leibniz indicates that one who loves is responsive not only to the actual perfection evinced by the beloved, but also to their potential for further perfection. For instance, in the Preface to the *Initia Scientiae generalis* (1679), shortly after asserting that we should love everyone in proportion to their perfection, he writes:

and we will bear in mind that we can find scarcely anyone so stupid, so dishonourable, and so unhappy who is not *capable* of greater perfection than what we ourselves now experience. And generally they will also have some actual [perfection] which is lacking in us. (A VI.iv.369; emphasis mine)

In a similar vein, in a dialogue composed between 1679 and 1681, Leibniz makes the following observation:

[L]et us remember that true charity includes all human beings, even our enemies . . . All those who are wicked are in fact pitiable, and do not deserve to be hated. They are human beings, they are made in the image of God . . . [and] all *capable* of the highest perfection. (A VI.iv.2274; emphasis mine)

Finally, in a letter to Madame de Brinon from 1691, Leibniz writes that charity should be governed according to “the degrees of perfection which can be found *or introduced into* objects” (A.II.ii.420; emphasis mine).

The point that Leibniz sometimes uses “perfection” in the sense of *potential* perfection naturally provokes the question of whether he holds that there are significant differences between individuals’ capacities for perfection or virtue (to use the term he sometimes prefers). Given that he is no doubt concerned with a fundamental or innate capacity—the kind which may well not be manifest in our present condition, but which is susceptible to the workings of grace in this life or the next—there is good reason for him to accept the claim that no such differences obtain. But if that is right, then the claim that the just person loves the virtuous more



than the (relatively) non-virtuous appears opaque. Considering the relevant passages in their original context will mitigate the opacity and put us in a better position to judge whether they constitute evidence that Leibniz takes divine love to be strictly proportioned. In each case, the sentences which were not included in my original citation, but which provide the relevant context, are italicized:

[O]ne who is wise will love everyone, but the more the traces of divine virtue shine forth in somebody, *and the more she hopes [to find] a stronger and more willing ally in [working for] the common good . . . the more she will love them* (A VI.iv.2863).

*We cannot love individuals (with whom we are not even acquainted) except insofar as we love the whole human race . . . ready and eager when the opportunity should arise to bear witness in our very deeds to our excellent disposition [optimam voluntatem] towards all, as far as the situation permits. But if the interests [utilitates] of very many persons conflict, let us prefer that which is best overall [in summa melius], that is, which is fitting [conveniens] for the majority or for those who are more distinguished. And other things being equal, the more a person excels in perfection of the mind, or in true virtue, the more we will love them* (A VI.iv.2891).

In both passages it is clear that Leibniz is concerned not with divine love, but rather with our love for our fellow human beings.<sup>23</sup> More significantly, he is indicating that the just person's love is governed by a desire to optimise the common good. The individuals who are preferred or loved *more* by the just person are those who are best placed to serve this end, and they are preferred precisely on this basis.<sup>24</sup> But we cannot safely infer from these texts that Leibniz holds that *God* loves some human beings more than others. The just human person loves, or favours, a certain individual more than another because they judge that the former will offer the best return on the investment of their attention—i.e., that that individual will contribute more to the common good. This judgment is necessarily fallible and must largely depend on their apprehension of the actual perfection or virtue of the individuals they are considering. God, on the other hand, has perfect and infallible knowledge both of the actual perfection of any given individual at any point in their life, and also of their capacity for further perfection. Moreover, God's will to optimise the common good must be seen in the context of the divine creative project as a whole: Leibniz emphasises the point that God is fundamentally motivated to actualise a world which is the best as a whole, with "world" being construed as the whole aggregate of created things.<sup>25</sup> God's furthering of the

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<sup>23</sup>Given God's omniscience, the parenthesis in the opening sentence of the second passage makes this point clear enough. However, the comment in the first passage about the just person *hoping* to find an ally for the common good naturally suggests that Leibniz is thinking specifically of our love for our fellow human beings.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. A II.i<sup>2</sup>.280; A VI.i.482.

<sup>25</sup>GP VII.302/ AG 149.

common good, i.e., the good of human beings,<sup>26</sup> is governed by this more fundamental motive. In light of these points of disanalogy between the just human person and God, the two texts cited above cannot properly be used to argue that on Leibniz's account, God loves some human beings more than others. They therefore do not support the claim that Leibniz is committed to the view that divine love is strictly proportioned.

Of course, granting this point does not settle the question of whether Leibniz holds that there are quantitative differences in divine love. Given that, as Adams persuasively argues, divine love cannot be calibrated in such a way that it is impossible to avoid comparing God's love for individual persons in quantitative terms<sup>27</sup>—it is worth pausing to consider this question. I will seek to establish that Leibniz's account of human excellence (or perfection) gives us good reason to think that he is not committed to the view that there are such quantitative differences. At the outset we should note that, given Leibniz's insistence that God does not act arbitrarily, it seems that any quantitative differences in divine love must be explained by the fact that certain human persons are more perfect than others. This in turn suggests that perfection is, to cite Adams, "an intensive magnitude that can be completely and consistently ordered on a scale of value."<sup>28</sup> Adams rejects this view of perfection. He argues that human excellence is not amenable to this kind of quantification because it consists in resemblance to God, and the resemblance is (necessarily) distant, fragmentary, and multidimensional.<sup>29</sup> Leibniz would no doubt endorse the general claim that our excellence or perfection consists in, or at least can be characterised as, resemblance to God. What, though, of Adams's further claim that the resemblance is distant, fragmentary, and multidimensional? I will focus on the question of multidimensionality. Recall that Leibniz defines perfection as degree of reality, or quantity of essence.<sup>30</sup> "Reality" is best understood in the light of its etymological meaning; it can literally be translated "thingishness," or "thinghood."<sup>31</sup> In this scheme, to say that a being attains a greater degree of reality is to say that it becomes more fully the kind of thing it is. On the face of it, this suggests that human perfection can be ranked according to a mathematical structure of value. It is also worth recalling that Leibniz cites knowledge as a paradigm case

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<sup>26</sup>Leibniz takes it for granted that "the common good" relates only to the good of rational creatures. As he never wavers from the view that only rational beings are capable of happiness, he can therefore use "the common good" (or "the public good") [*commune bonum, le bien commun; bonum publicum, le bien public*] interchangeably with "the common happiness" [*communis felicitas, bonheur commun*] Cf. A VI.iv.2810 and A IV.iv.614.

<sup>27</sup>See Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 168–175.

<sup>28</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 117. Adams is speaking of excellence rather than perfection.

<sup>29</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 117.

<sup>30</sup>E.g., GP VII.303; A VI.iv.1358.

<sup>31</sup>See Adams, "The Priority of the Perfect in the Philosophical Theology of the Continental Rationalists," 102–103.

of perfection,<sup>32</sup> and that some of his writings clearly indicate that this particular perfection is uniquely conducive to *Amor Dei super omnia*, which he takes to represent our greatest overall perfection. Often in these contexts, “knowledge” refers specifically to knowledge of those eternal or necessary truths which allow us to understand the workings of nature. As Leibniz implicitly acknowledges, human persons can excel each other with regard to this kind of knowledge.<sup>33</sup> But he is at pains to emphasize that the “simple” are not excluded from *Amor Dei super omnia*, thanks to God’s gift of revelation and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>34</sup> We must also remember that Leibniz never suggests that knowledge is the *only* perfection instantiated by human beings. Furthermore, it seems clear that the other perfections cannot be reduced to knowledge. As we have seen, in Leibniz’s writings relating to love, “perfection” is sometimes used interchangeably with “virtue,” and it is clear that the virtues in question do not all depend on relatively advanced cognitive abilities.<sup>35</sup> Given his assumption that there is a wide range of virtues, or perfections, his implication that these are irreducibly plural, and his assertions that divine love is responsive both to actual and to potential perfection, Leibniz must surely accept that human perfection is multidimensional. It thus seems that on his account, human perfection resists ranking on a scale of value. This in turn suggests that he is not committed to the view that there are quantitative differences in divine love.<sup>36</sup>

One further consideration merits our attention. Leibniz emphasises that rational creatures have the unique privilege of being able to enter into a society with God—i.e., to be members of the City of God<sup>37</sup>—because their very rationality makes them “little Gods” [*petits Dieux*], whose perfections differ from God’s only in degree.<sup>38</sup> Yet the difference between creaturely perfections and divine perfections is nothing less than the difference between the finite and the infinite: human beings can thus be said to fall infinitely short of the divine perfection.<sup>39</sup> In an interesting passage from a text written between 1701 and 1706, Leibniz draws an analogy between

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<sup>32</sup>E.g., Preface to the *Theodicy* (H 51/ GP VI.270, DM 1/ AG 35).

<sup>33</sup>Cf. A IV.vi.363; A IV.i.532.

<sup>34</sup>See A IV.vi.757–758. Cf. RB 497.

<sup>35</sup>This is particularly clear in “De imaginatione futurae vitae” (before 1698), where Leibniz describes a “humble Japanese woman” [*mulierculam japonensem*] whose constancy surpasses that of “the most profound European Doctor of Theology.” A IV.vii.662–3.

<sup>36</sup>In the *Confessio philosophi* Leibniz speaks of some human persons being loved less by God than others (CP 31); I am disregarding this passage as Leibniz is not speaking in his own voice but, rather, is considering a Calvinist view.

<sup>37</sup>Leibniz’s use of the term “City of God” diverges significantly from Augustine’s. See Rudolph, “‘Je suis du sentiment de S. Augustin,’” 65–69.

<sup>38</sup>Letter to Arnauld, 1687, A II.ii<sup>2</sup>.257.

<sup>39</sup>“Conversation du Marquis de Pianese et du Père Emery Eremite (1679–81?)”: “l’esprit de l’homme est un petit modèle de Dieu, quoiqu’infiniment au dessous de sa perfection.” (A VI.iv.2269)

creatures and infinitesimals, acknowledging that in some sense, the value of any creature is negligible:

[I]n a certain way, the creature can be regarded as nothing [*pro nihilo*] when compared to God, as the addition and subtraction of infinitely small quantities to or from ordinal numbers in infinitesimal calculus is disregarded [*negligitur*]. (A IV.ix.627)

This analogy suggests that if God's love for individual human beings were strictly proportioned to their perfection, it would be meagre indeed. As such, it provides further support for the claim that Leibniz cannot hold that divine love is strictly proportioned to our perfection. For this reason, and in light of the other considerations I have discussed, I take it that his account is consistent with the view that divine love is gracious, even if Leibniz himself does not explicitly acknowledge this.

### III. Is God Cruel?

For Leibniz, God's most fundamental motive in creating is to maximize harmony—i.e., to actualize a world which is the most harmonious as a whole. The existence of any human person is explained by their being part of the best possible world, a fully determined series of things which is the only possible world to which that individual can belong. Yet Leibniz is also committed to defending the doctrine of eternal damnation. These various commitments leave him vulnerable to the charge that he presents us with a God who is cruel—and hence unloving. Leibniz is well aware of this vulnerability. Indeed, the charge is given poignant expression in the *Confessio philosophi*, when the Theologian gives voice to the “complaint of the damned”:

[T]hat [complaint] of the damned presents itself to us, which cannot be ignored . . . [They complain] that they were born in such a way, were sent into the world in such a way, came upon [such] times, persons, [and] occasions, that they could not but perish . . .

How cruel it is for the father who brought about their misery—[the father] who caused an unfortunate birth, who provided the worst upbringing—to gaze on [their misery] unmoved, [and] for him even to will their punishment, when it is he himself who should be punished. They shall curse the order of things, apt for their destruction; God who is happy at the misery of others; themselves because they cannot be annihilated; the series of the universe, which also involved them; and finally [they shall curse] that very eternal and immutable possibility of the ideas, the primary source of their misfortunes, which determines the universal harmony and the existence of things in it, and accordingly breaks out, from among so many possible [states], into none other than the state of the universe in which their misery is contained, so that the happiness of others may be more conspicuous (CP 77–79; translation modified<sup>40</sup>).

<sup>40</sup>The most significant modification I have made to Sleigh's translation relates to *querimonia damnatorum*, which Sleigh renders “lament of the damned.” Although “lament” conveys the poignancy of the predicament of the damned, it does not capture the juridical sense of *querimonia*, and I take it that Leibniz uses this term precisely because of its juridical associations. For this reason, “complaint” seems preferable to me.

God “sends” certain individuals into a world which includes circumstances which will determine them to succumb to mortal sin; their unending misery is exacerbated by the knowledge that they cannot be annihilated, because their existence augments the overall harmony of the world by making “the happiness of others . . . more conspicuous.”<sup>41</sup> Little wonder that God’s dealings with them provoke the response: “How cruel!” [*Quam crudele*]. In the person of the interlocutor, Leibniz gives short shrift to the complaint of the damned: “That is rather dramatic, but it is not equally justified” (CP 79; translation modified). In the remainder of the dialogue, he seeks to rebut the complaint by arguing that freedom of the will is compatible with determinism: the damned cannot coherently complain about their fate because they have brought it upon themselves by freely willing to commit mortal sin.<sup>42</sup>

But, of course, it is not sufficient for Leibniz simply to establish that the damned freely will their fate; given his definition of *justus*, he must also show that God loves the damned, and thus wills their good. How, though, can God be said to will the good of the damned in any robust sense? It will be helpful to frame this problem in the context of a more general one, namely the problem of how anyone can be damned, if, as the Scriptures assert, “God wills that all human beings be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4). In the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas proposes a solution which draws on the distinction between antecedent and consequent willing—a distinction which is employed by St John of Damascus (c. 675–749). The relevant passage from the *Summa theologiae* is as follows:

[E]ach thing, insofar as it is good, is to that extent willed by God. At first sight, considered in itself, something can be good or evil but it can nonetheless be the contrary insofar as it is considered alongside its attendant circumstances . . . Hence it may be said of a just judge, that antecedently he wills all men to live; but he consequently wills a murderer to be hanged. Similarly, God antecedently wills all men to be saved, but consequently wills some to be damned, in accordance with the demands of his justice . . . This can be called a velleity rather than an absolute will. In this way it is clear that whatever God wills *simpliciter* comes about, even if that which he wills antecedently does not come about.<sup>43</sup>

Leibniz cites this discussion in one of the appendices to the *Theodicy* (1710). He writes:

We generally have reason to say that the antecedent will of God tends towards the production of good and the prevention of evil, as a part and

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<sup>41</sup>The view that there is an aesthetic rationale for God’s punishment of sin—i.e., that such punishment is permitted because it increases the overall harmony of the world—can be traced back to Augustine. See Adams, “Justice, Happiness, and Perfection in Leibniz’s City of God,” 207n60. Leibniz takes it for granted that the annihilation of the damned is not an absolute impossibility; he simply holds that it is inconsistent with divine wisdom.

<sup>42</sup>Indeed, Leibniz holds that the damned are not deprived of their freedom of will after death; they perpetuate their damnation by perpetuating their sin. See Strickland, “Leibniz on Eternal Punishment,” 310.

<sup>43</sup>*Summa theologiae* Ia, 19, 6, ad 1.

under a certain aspect (*particulariter et secundum quid*: Thom., I, qu. 19, art. 6), according to the measure of the degree of each good or of each evil. But the consequent—or final and total—divine will tends towards the production of as many goods as can be established together, whose combination thereby becomes determined, and also involves the permission of some evils and the exclusion of some goods, as the best possible plan of the universe demands (H 383/ GP VI.382; translation modified).

Leibniz uses “antecedent will” in just the way Aquinas does: he takes it that the antecedent will tends towards any good qua good. His use of “consequent will” is not so clearly aligned with Aquinas’s, though it is not obviously inconsistent with it. The consequent will, Leibniz suggests, tends towards the obtaining of the greatest overall good—i.e., the actualisation of the best possible world.<sup>44</sup>

In the closing sentences of the passage from the *Summa theologiae* cited above, Aquinas makes two important claims. First, he asserts that the antecedent will can be described as a velleity, i.e., (to cite a later section of the *Summa*) that which someone would will [*vellet*] “if something else did not get in the way.”<sup>45</sup> Second, he asserts that whatever is willed consequentially by God comes about. In §24 of the *Causa Dei* Leibniz indicates that he accepts the second of these claims: he clearly (if implicitly) endorses Aquinas’s view that in the case of God, the consequent will “always obtains its effect.” (Tcd 24/MS 119). But in the next section of the *Causa Dei* he rejects the view that the antecedent will is merely a kind of velleity:

§25. The antecedent will is *entirely serious* and pure, [and] must not be confused with a velleity (i.e., when someone would will if they were able, and would wish to be able) which is not found in God. (GP VI.442/ MS 119. Translation modified; emphasis mine)

In the *Theodicy* this point is explicitly related to the question of salvation and damnation:

[I]t may be said that God tends to all good, as good . . . and that by an antecedent will. He has a serious inclination to sanctify and to save all human beings, to exclude sin, and to prevent damnation. It may even be said that this will is efficacious of itself (*per se*), that is, of such a kind that the effect would ensue if there were not some stronger reason to prevent it . . . Complete and infallible success belongs only to the *consequent will*, as it is called . . . This consequent will, final and decisive, results from the conflict of all the antecedent wills . . . it is from the concurrence of all these particular wills that the total will arises. So in mechanics compound movement results from all the tendencies which concur in one and the same moving body, and satisfies each one equally, in so far as it is possible to do all at one time . . . In this sense also it may be said that the antecedent will is efficacious in some way, and even successfully takes effect [*et même effective avec succès*] (T 22/ GP VI.116/ H 136–137)<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Cf. T 23 (GP VI.116/ H 137).

<sup>45</sup>*Summa theologiae* III, 21, 4, resp.

<sup>46</sup>This passage is discussed in Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 542–544.



When thinking about the antecedent will, Leibniz suggests, we must be careful to distinguish “not obtaining its full effect” from “being completely nullified.” Just as the failure of a particular tendency in a moving body to fully determine the final movement of that body does not entail that that tendency has been completely nullified, so too the antecedent will’s failing to obtain its full effect does not entail that it is completely nullified. Far from being a mere velleity, then, the antecedent will is not without efficacy, and thus can be described as “serious.”

To the best of my knowledge, Leibniz never appeals to the claim that God antecedently wills the salvation of all to support his claim that God loves everyone. Yet such a move is surely open to him. As I have already noted, Leibniz’s preferred definition of love should not be taken merely at face value; “Delighting in the happiness of another” need not involve an occurrent delight but, rather, can properly be construed as willing that person’s good or happiness. Leibniz could thus argue that God loves the damned because He antecedently—and hence, seriously—wills their happiness. Though coherent, I struggle to see how this solution is consistent with the view that God loves all in a robust sense of the term.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, it does little to dispel worries that God treats the damned cruelly, willing their overwhelmingly miserable existence because it is a necessary condition of the actualization of the best possible world.

There is good reason to think that Leibniz himself is disturbed by the doctrine of eternal damnation, for broadly the reasons I have just outlined. Indeed, the very inclusion of the “Complaint of the damned” in the *Confessio philosophi*, as well as its rhetorical force,<sup>48</sup> can be taken to suggest this. A much later text—the *Unvorgreiffliches Bedencken über eine Schrift genandt Kurtze Vorstellung* of 1699<sup>49</sup>—is interesting in this connection. Although the *Unvorgreiffliches Bedencken* was co-authored with the Lutheran abbot Gerhard Wolter Molanus, it seems clearly to have been written mainly by Leibniz.<sup>50</sup> In the section of the *Unvorgreiffliches Bedencken* dealing with predestination we find the concession that some people are “horrified” by the thought that God brought human beings into existence even though He foresaw that Adam and Eve would sin; that their sin would be imputed to all their descendants; that the punishment for this sin would include “unspeakable pain in the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41)”; and that notwithstanding the atonement

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<sup>47</sup>I struggle to see this primarily because I find Marilyn Adams’s account of divine love persuasive. See M. Adams, “The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians.”

<sup>48</sup>See Sleight’s comment in CP 160n89.

<sup>49</sup>The “Kurtze Vorstellung,” composed by Daniel Jablonksi, was a summary of points of agreement and disagreement between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. For the background to the *Unvorgreiffliches Bedencken*, see Claire Rösler-Le Van’s discussion in NI 895–898, and Adams’s review of her edition in *The Leibniz Review*. The *Unvorgreiffliches Bedencken* is printed in the original German in A IV.vii, and there is a translation into French in NI.

<sup>50</sup>See Rösler-Le Van’s comments in NI: 902–903.



made by Christ, most people (and, indeed, most Christians) would endure eternal misery.<sup>51</sup> This summary prompts the following comment:

[I]ndeed we cannot understand how, humanly speaking, God—whose heartfelt mercy [*hertzliche Barmherzigkeit*] shines through not only from the light of nature, but is also extolled in Luke 1.78<sup>52</sup>—could override his merciful, paternal heart and bring Himself to create such a poor and miserable creature as a human being became after their deplorable fall. (A. IV.vii.478)

This is immediately followed by the observation that a common response to this problem is to appeal to human free will, and to God's gift of grace. Recognising the "correctness" of such a response, the authors nonetheless deem it insufficient, as it neglects the question of the fundamental "cause of the difficulty"—namely, "Why, in the final analysis, God willed to create such miserable creatures, since He could have been relieved of them" (A IV.vii.478). Francis Bacon's approach to this problem (in the *Confession of Faith*) is then criticised on the basis that he fails to explain why it would not have been better for human beings to remain "uncreated," "in nothingness," or at least returned to nothingness after being created, rather than for so many creatures to be brought into existence to endure an eternity of suffering.<sup>53</sup> The account of damnation reported in this section of the *Unvorgreifliches Bedencken* diverges significantly from Leibniz's own—not least because the former draws on the biblical tradition of representing hell as an "eternal fire," and assumes that most people will be damned.<sup>54</sup> But the fundamental difficulty is one which Leibniz also faces: he too must explain how God's permitting eternal misery is consistent with His "heartfelt mercy" and His "paternal heart," i.e., with His love, as that is characterised in the Scriptures.

One way in which Leibniz seeks to alleviate this difficulty is to endorse the view that the pains of the damned could be mitigated. His most striking discussion of this point comes in the *De arcanis sublimium vel de summa rerum* of 1676. This piece is part of a collection of drafts which were intended to form the basis of a projected work on metaphysics. As G. H. R. Parkinson notes, two themes figure prominently in these writings: the nature of the infinite and the question of the supreme being and His relation to the world.<sup>55</sup> Both themes are evident in the following paragraph of

<sup>51</sup>See A IV.vii.477–479.

<sup>52</sup>The relevant phrase in the Luther Bible is rendered "die hertzliche Barmherzigkeit unsers Gottes." The Vulgate has "per viscera misericordiae Dei nostri."

<sup>53</sup>See A IV.vii.479.

<sup>54</sup>In Leibniz's own depictions of damnation, he does not suggest that the damned are cast into a fiery pit. Instead he emphasises the point that their misery is the natural result of their sin. See Strickland, "Leibniz on Eternal Punishment," 315. Similarly, Leibniz never endorses the view that the majority of human beings will be damned.

<sup>55</sup>See Parkinson, "Leibniz's *De Summa Rerum*."

the *De arcanis sublimium*, where Leibniz makes an intriguing suggestion about damnation:

The maximally harmonious [*harmonicum maxime*] is what is most pleasing to the most perfect mind. If God is a mind and a person, then it follows that there ought to hold, in respect of God and of other minds, whatever can be demonstrated of the best republic, whose king is most wise and most powerful.

[. . .] It does not seem to me that eternal damnation is inconsistent with the harmony of things. It could be that damnation is of infinite duration but not unbounded [*infinite durationis non tamen interminatae*]. (A VI.iii.476)

The suggestion that damnation could be “of infinite duration but not unbounded” is undoubtedly arresting, if also opaque and undeveloped.<sup>56</sup> Any serious attempt to make sense of it would no doubt require a sustained engagement with Leibniz’s metaphysics of space and time—and particularly his discussions of the nature of the infinite. I will not attempt such a study here,<sup>57</sup> but will offer some brief remarks. First, it is worth recalling the immediate context of the suggestion that damnation could be of infinite duration but not unbounded. As we have seen, at the start of the paragraph in which it appears, Leibniz asserts that “the maximally harmonious is what is most pleasing to the most perfect mind.” He then clearly implies that it follows from this that the republic made up of God and other minds must be the best. In subsequently turning to damnation, Leibniz is no doubt tacitly acknowledging that God’s permitting eternal misery gives us reason to doubt that the republic of minds (or City of God) is the best. Given that Leibniz’s commitment to the claim that ours is the best possible world is a cornerstone of his theodicy, and that he takes this claim to entail that the City of God is the most perfect republic, it is not surprising that he seeks to rebut the objection that “damnation is inconsistent with the harmony of things.”

His rebuttal hinges on a distinction between the infinite and the unbounded. The latter term is defined in another piece dating from Leibniz’s Paris period: “I call the unbounded [*interminatum*] that in which no ultimate point can be posited” (A VII.vi.549). As for “the infinite,” shortly before the discussion in the *De arcanis sublimium* cited above, Leibniz notes that in one sense of the term, “the infinite” is more correctly termed “*immensum*.”<sup>58</sup> Ohad Nachtomy’s comments on Leibniz’s use of *immensum* in another piece from this period are illuminating:

[U]nlike the current English connotations of the word ‘immense,’ Leibniz does not use *immensum* here to indicate a large or immense *magnitude*;

<sup>56</sup>These latter features become less puzzling once we recall that these papers were largely intended only for Leibniz’s personal use.

<sup>57</sup>See Futch, *Leibniz’s Metaphysics of Time and Space*; Nachtomy, “Leibniz’s Early Encounters with Descartes, Galileo, and Spinoza on Infinity,” and Arthur’s introduction and commentary in LC.

<sup>58</sup>“Rectius hoc infinitum appellaretur Immensum” (A VI.iii.475).

rather, he uses it in a way much closer to its literal meaning in Latin, that is, to indicate something *beyond any measure*, or more precisely, something that has no measure (and is therefore impossible to measure)—something that *cannot* be measured because it does not belong to the category of quantity.<sup>59</sup>

We can therefore construe Leibniz's suggestion that damnation could be "of infinite duration but not unbounded" as follows: "It could be that damnation is of immeasurable duration, and nonetheless has an ultimate point (or end)." Leibniz soon returns to this theme in the *De arcanis sublimium*:

[A]ll happiness is unbounded [*interminatam*]. No misery is unbounded, but it could be an eternity [*aeternitatem*]. Therefore the blessed will be happy longer than the damned will be unhappy. (A VI.iii.476)

The context of these remarks—i.e., their being in a paragraph which opens with the assertion that the City of God is the "best republic"—suggests that the claim that no misery is unbounded can be inferred precisely from the claim that the City of God is the best republic. The subsequent assertion that "the blessed will be happy longer than the damned will be unhappy" appears to confirm the earlier suggestion that the misery involved in damnation will come to an end.

If this interpretation is correct, Leibniz would clearly be proposing a radically new conception of damnation. Needless to say, it is scarcely surprising that these remarks are confined to a piece which was not intended for publication (at least in its present form). To the best of my knowledge, the account of damnation outlined here does not feature in any of Leibniz's other writings. Nonetheless, a discussion in the *Theodicy* on the mitigation of the pains of the damned is worth citing in this connection. Immediately after noting that "Origen made use of . . . Psalm 77:10:<sup>60</sup> 'God will not forget to have pity, and will not suppress all his mercy in his anger,'" Leibniz writes:

Augustine responds (Enchirid. c.112) that it could be that the punishment of the damned lasts eternally, and that it is nevertheless mitigated. If the text suggested that, the diminution would go on to infinity in relation to its duration, and nonetheless it would have a *non plus ultra* in relation to the magnitude [*grandeur*] of the diminution, just as there are asymptotic figures in geometry, where an infinite length makes only a finite space. (T 272/ GP VI.279/ H 294; translation modified)

Clearly, this suggestion is less bold than the one presented in *De arcanis sublimium*. Still, when we compare this passage to the chapter of the

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<sup>59</sup>Nachtomy, "Leibniz's Early Encounters with Descartes, Galileo, and Spinoza on Infinity," 147–148.

<sup>60</sup>Although the reference is to verse 10 of Psalm 77, the line Leibniz cites is verse 9 in the Luther Bible and in modern translations. Perhaps the discrepancy can be explained by the fact that in the Vulgate, the line in question is verse 10 (though the number of the psalm itself is 76, in keeping with the numbering system used there).

*Enchiridion* which it cites, we can see that it is striking enough. The relevant passages from the *Enchiridion* are these:

It is in vain, therefore, that some . . . deplore the eternal punishment of the damned, and unceasing and everlasting torments, and they do not believe such things will be . . . ‘God will not forget,’ they say, ‘to show mercy, nor in his anger will he shut up his mercy.’ This is indeed the text of a holy psalm. But without the least doubt this is to be understood of those persons who are called ‘vessels of mercy’ . . .

But let [those who are disturbed by the doctrine of eternal damnation] believe, if they care to, that the torments of the damned are to some extent mitigated at certain intervals. Even so, the wrath of God . . . can still be understood to rest upon them. Thus, even in His wrath . . . He would not withhold His mercies; yet, not so as to put an end to their eternal punishment, but rather to apply or to interpose some little respite from their torments.<sup>61</sup>

All Augustine is prepared to grant is that Psalm 77:9 gives us grounds to think that the damned enjoy limited and temporary respite from their torment. In contrast, Leibniz’s appeal in the *Theodicy* to a certain kind of asymptote suggests respite which is permanent (though also limited).

Leibniz’s suggestion that damnation could be of limited duration clearly takes the sting out of the charge that God is cruel to the damned; to a lesser extent, so does his creative appropriation of the view that the pains of the damned are mitigated. In this way, Leibniz has the resources to rebut the objection that in his scheme, God treats some persons cruelly, and thus cannot be said to love all.

#### IV. Concluding Remarks

I have sought to defend Leibniz’s account of divine love against two objections. Regarding the first, I have argued that the proportionment thesis is problematic only if the proportionment in question is strict. If it is not—i.e., if the thesis is simply that there are proper grounds for God’s love for human beings—then it is consistent with the view that divine love is gracious. As far as I can see, Leibniz never explicitly indicates that God’s love for us is *strictly* proportioned to our perfection. Furthermore, given that he sometimes uses “perfection” in the sense of “potential perfection,” and that he accepts that there is an irreducible plurality of perfections, or virtues, he appears to be committed to the view that human perfection is multidimensional, and thus resists rank ordering. This in turn suggests that on Leibniz’s account there are not the kind of quantitative differences in divine love which would give us reason to doubt its graciousness. Finally, despite Leibniz’s striking emphasis on the affinity between God and rational creatures, he explicitly acknowledges that our perfection falls infinitely short of the divine perfection. For these reasons, I take it that Leibniz does not hold that divine love is strictly proportioned, and thus can allow that it is gracious.

<sup>61</sup>*Enchiridion* §112 (ch. 29). Translation slightly modified.

As for the second objection: Leibniz himself is no doubt aware that his allegiance to the doctrine of eternal damnation comes at the cost of exposing him to the charge that God is cruel (and hence unloving). This worry is dismissed rather too briskly in the *Confessio philosophi*, even if that early dialogue also has the merit of presenting the “complaint of the damned” in a form which is both cogent and poignant. But the charge of divine cruelty can be rebutted—or at least blunted—if we turn to Leibniz’s treatment of damnation in some later writings, notably the *De arcanis sublimium* and the *Theodicy*.

In defending Leibniz against these two objections I do not mean to give an unqualified endorsement of his account of divine love. Nor do I wish to claim that Leibniz does enough to pre-empt the objections I have discussed. Indeed, I am sympathetic to the view that it is regrettable that he never makes the graciousness of divine love explicit, or publicly repudiates the doctrine of eternal damnation. But I wish to conclude by suggesting that we should not be too quick to condemn him for these failings, because they should be seen in the light of his commitment to promoting *Amor Dei super omnia*. This commitment is explicitly acknowledged in a letter to Philip Spener from 1687, when he writes:

I should venture to assert that . . . although I am occupied with different things, nonetheless as far as possible I bring all [these] things back to this: that true knowledge of God and reverence for him are advanced [*promoveantur*]. (A II.ii.211)

It may be tempting to dismiss this as a pious platitude, but there is good reason to take Leibniz at his word. His sincerity is most obvious in his uncharacteristically bold stance vis-à-vis the view that pagans are necessarily damned: his rejection of that view is clearly motivated by a concern not to undermine love for God.<sup>62</sup>

A cornerstone of Leibniz’s project of promoting *Amor Dei super omnia* is his vehement opposition to any suggestion that God acts arbitrarily. Instead, he insists, God’s actions are always governed by His perfect wisdom, which in turn is a function of God’s perfect knowledge of necessary truths. No doubt any explicit acknowledgement of the role of grace in divine love risks implying a certain arbitrariness; Leibniz’s sensitivity to this risk offers a plausible explanation for his reluctance to offer such an acknowledgement. To this extent, his reticence is an expression of his commitment to promoting *Amor Dei super omnia*. The same can be said of Leibniz’s failure to repudiate the doctrine of eternal damnation. In a letter to Lorenz Hertel from January 1695, he makes the following remarks about universal salvation:

All that can be said about it is that it would be true if it were possible, and if divine justice could allow it. But as we do not know the depths of [divine justice], it is safer not to advance opinions which are not soundly established

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<sup>62</sup>See A II.ii.340. Re. the boldness of Leibniz’s resistance to the view that pagans are necessarily damned, see Adams, “Leibniz’s Conception of Religion,” 61–63.

and can be harmful since they are capable of keeping sinners in their security.<sup>63</sup> (A I.xi.21)

Here Leibniz clearly implies that promulgation of the doctrine of eternal damnation is justified on the grounds that it discourages sin. Given that sin is an impediment to *Amor Dei super omnia*, to endorse the doctrine of eternal damnation is to support *Amor Dei super omnia*. Leibniz may well be mistaken about the practical benefits of the doctrine of eternal damnation, but I am concerned here only with his motivation, and that is implied clearly enough in the passage cited above. Given this motivation, it seems churlish to argue that he does not do enough to pre-empt the two objections I have considered.<sup>64</sup>

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#### *Abbreviations of editions of Leibniz's works*

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<sup>63</sup>Cited in Adams, "Justice, Happiness, and Perfection in Leibniz's City of God," 216–217.

<sup>64</sup>I am grateful to Daniel Hadas for his assistance with translation, to Maria Rosa Antognazza for many helpful discussions, and to two anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier draft.

T = Leibniz, G. W. 1710. *Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*. Cited from GP VI by section number ("cd" and "dp" precede section numbers from the *Causa Dei* and the "Discours préliminaire," respectively: "a" refers to the "Abregé de la controverse, reduite à des argumens en forme," as divided by objection numbers.

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