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# THE PUZZLE OF METAPHYSICAL EVIL AND THEODICY IN LEIBNIZ

**Abstract** The aim of this paper is to critically examine various and incompatible interpretations of Leibniz's conception of metaphysical evil, which are the Scholastic account of evil-as-privation, the Russellian account of evil-as-limitation, and the Neoplatonic account of evil-as-participation-in-nothingness, in terms of their ontological costs and benefits, and to locate them within Leibniz's theodician oeuvres.

**Keywords** Leibniz, metaphysics of evil, theodicy, best possible world, privation, limitation

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## 1. Introduction

As to authorities, replied *Demea* [...] there is one of those innumerable writers, from whom the sense of human misery has not, in some passage or other, extorted a complaint and confession of it. At least, the chance is entirely on that side; and no one author has ever, as far as I can recollect, been so extravagant as to deny it.

There you must excuse me, said *Philo*: *Leibniz* has denied it; and is at least, the first who ventured upon so bold and paradoxical an opinion; at least, the first, who made it essential to his philosophical system.<sup>1</sup>

These words, which David Hume puts to *Philo's* mouth (who comes into play as a sceptic in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* from 1779) express a prevailing opinion about Leibniz's theodicy<sup>2</sup> in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> and XIX<sup>th</sup> century, and even today: Leibniz's theodicy seems to be the example *par excellence* of rationalist's naive and apologetic optimism, which attempts to defend theism and religious beliefs by denying that there exist any evil at all.<sup>3</sup> Poems like *An Essay on Man* published on February 20<sup>th</sup> 1733 by Alexander Pope were considered as a radically enthusiastic reception of this optimistic type of theodicy:

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<sup>1</sup> Hume, David. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 69.

<sup>2</sup> As far as I know, Leibniz uses the term 'théodicée' the first time in a letter to the french Protestant theologian Étienne Chauvin 1696 (cf. A I,12, 625).

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed study on optimism in European Enlightenment, see Fonnesu, Luca. "Der Optimismus und seine Kritiker im Zeitalter der Aufklärung." *Studia Leibnitiana* 26(2) (1994), 131-162.

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;  
All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;  
All Discord, Harmony, not understood;  
All partial Evil, universal Good:  
And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,  
One truth is clear, "Whatever IS, is RIGHT."<sup>4</sup>

Only through the early XX<sup>th</sup> century Leibniz-renaissance this cliché was contested by authors like Louis Couturat, Leroy Loemker and Bertrand Russell. Nowadays it is a commonly accepted idea among Leibniz scholars that Leibnizian theodicy does not by any means deny the existence of evil in the actual world; which he considers as the created monadic realm, according to the best possible world as a highly complex divine thought. Indeed, there is no room for such an insinuation in Leibniz's corpus. For example, in his *Essays on Theodicy*<sup>5</sup> Leibniz explicitly mentions the existence of evil in the actual world as follows:

But it will be said that evils are great and many in number in comparison with the good: that is erroneous.<sup>6</sup> [T]here is incomparably more good than evil in the life of men, as there are incomparably more houses than prisons.<sup>7</sup> On those terms I would dare to maintain that even in this life goods exceed evils, that our comforts exceed our discomforts, and that M. Descartes was justified in writing (vol. I, Letter 9) "that natural reason teaches us that we have more goods than evils in this life".<sup>8</sup>

This passage—and dozens of others in Leibniz's theodician oeuvres—demonstrates clearly, that Leibniz does not deny the existence of evil within the actual world. What he rejects, especially against Pierre Bayle, is that there is more evil than good in the actual world and that there could not have existed another world which is on a par with the actual world in terms of the goodness it contains, yet has less evil. In his *Theodicy* and other treatises Leibniz would like to emphasize that the actual world must be the best even if it entails evil and therefore, conciliate the existence of the perfect being and the existence of evil. This conciliation is one of the most important foundations of Leibniz's entire theocentric metaphysical system.<sup>9</sup>

For Leibniz only "God is sufficient"<sup>10</sup>, "*the first reason of things*"<sup>11</sup> and only God carries "the reason of its existence with itself."<sup>12</sup> Even if Leibniz labels God as the sufficient reason for the existence of the world, he does not exempt God's will from being subject to the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, like Descartes's *Modal Voluntarism* claims. More precisely, for Leibniz, God's choice of creating a world at all and God's choice of creating *this* world rather than any other that he could have created requires an explanation as well.

The primary issue in Leibniz's theory seems to be pertinent to the question of why God has chosen to create any world at all and not avoided the act of creation altogether, despite his knowledge that all

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<sup>4</sup> Pope, Alexander. *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, vol. 3, part 1. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964, 50-51.

<sup>5</sup> The original french title is *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*.

<sup>6</sup> Théod. § 13; GP VI, 109. "Mais l'on dira que les maux sont grands et en grand nombre, en comparaison des biens: l'on se trompe." All English quotations from the *Theodicy* are from *Theodicy*, trans. E. M. Huggard. LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1985. Cited by section number.

<sup>7</sup> Théod. § 148; GP VI, 198. "[I]l y a incomparablement plus de bien que de mal dans la vie des hommes, comme il y a incomparablement plus de maisons que de prisons."

<sup>8</sup> Théod. § 251; GP VI, 266-267. "Et sur ce pied-là, j'oserois soutenir que même en cette vie les biens surpassent les maux, que nos commodités surpassent nos incommodités, et que Monsieur Descartes a eu raison d'écrire (Tom. I. Lettre 9) que la raison naturelle nous apprend que nous avons plus de biens que de maux en cette vie."

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rateau, Paul. "The Theoretical Foundations of the Leibnizian Theodicy and its Apologetic Aim." In *New Essays on Leibniz's Theodicy*, ed. Larry M. Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 92-111, 94-97.

<sup>10</sup> Ariew/Garber, 218; GP VI, 613. "[E]t ce Dieu suffit."

<sup>11</sup> Théod. § 7; GP VI, 106. "Dieu est la première raison des choses [...]."

<sup>12</sup> Ariew/Garber, 210; PNG § 8; GP VI, 602. "portant la raison de son existence avec soy [...]."

possible worlds world which he could ever think of would have entailed metaphysical evil necessarily *ex hypothesi*. The answer to this question is to be found in one of Leibniz's letters to Johann Georg von Eckhart, in which he writes that: "It is preferable, however, to be than not to be [...]"<sup>13</sup> Hence, Leibniz appears to endorse the view that for God, the existence of a world is always better than its non-existence. It is this *necessitas moralis Dei ad optimum*—which is a term Leibniz has adopted from the Baroque Scholasticism<sup>14</sup>—which motivates not only God's decision to create the best possible world, but also his decision to create any world at all.<sup>15</sup> This necessity, being a moral necessity, is only a necessity in an improper sense, because it includes the possibility of its contrary. In other words, God, having free will, is always able to act against this moral necessity, however, he never violates it. As Leibniz writes in his Theodicy:

The decrees of God are always free, even though God be always prompted thereto by reasons which lie in the intention towards good: for to be morally compelled by wisdom, to be bound by the consideration of good, is to be free [...].<sup>16</sup>

Leibniz reiterates in almost all parts of his enormous oeuvre that the will is free if its choice is determined by the knowledge of the good. For Leibniz, God freely decided to create a world, because he knew that existence is always better than non-existence, therefore, the existence of an actual world is better than its non-existence.

The secondary question is why God chose to create *this* world. Leibniz argues that the only sufficient reason for the creation of this particular world is its intrinsic degree of perfection. Accordingly, "God has chosen the most perfect world, that is, the one which is at the same time the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena"<sup>17</sup> and which maximizes the happiness of substances. Again, God freely decides to create the most perfect world, because he has recognized that perfection and harmony are better than imperfection and disharmony, therefore, the existence of the most perfect and harmonious world is a good. The most essential point for Leibniz is that one should not evaluate the perfection partially in a world but rather should consider it as the overall perfection of the world without expecting that a world, "taken in isolation, must be as perfect as the whole itself."<sup>18</sup> Au contraire: "For the part of a beautiful thing is not always beautiful, since it can be extracted from the whole, or marked out within the whole, in an irregular manner."<sup>19</sup> To put it in other words: A possible world as a whole can be the most perfect world, without all its parts having to be perfect as well. Thus, the following two propositions seem to be compatible in Leibniz's metaphysics:

- (1) God has actualized, i.e. created the best possible world.
- (2) The created actual world entails evil.

To shed more light on why (1) and (2) are compatible, it is crucial to analyze Leibniz's conception of evil which, at the same time, constitutes the main objective of this paper.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> GP I, 221, my translation. „Praestat autem esse, quam non esse [...]”.

<sup>14</sup> On the evolution of the term in post-Tridentine period and Baroque Scholasticism see Knebel, Sven. "Necessitas moralis ad optimum. Zum historischen Hintergrund der Wahr der besten aller möglichen Welten." *Studia Leibnitiana* 23(1) (1991), 3-24.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Théod. § 168; GP VII, 389.

<sup>16</sup> Théod. § 237; GP VI, 258-259. "Les decrets de Dieu sont toujours libres, quoyque Dieu y soit toujours porté par des raisons qui consistent dans la vue du bien: car être nécessité moralement par la sagesse, être obligé par la consideration du bien, c'est être libre [...]."

<sup>17</sup> Ariew/Garber, 39; DM § 6; GP IV, 431. "[...] Dieu a choisi celui qui est le plus parfait, c'est à dire celui qui est en même temps le plus simple en hypotheses et le plus riche en phenomenes [...]."

<sup>18</sup> Rutherford, Donald. *The Rational Order of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Théod. § 213; GP VI, 245. "[P]uisque la partie d'une belle chose n'est pas toujours belle I pouvant être tirée du tout, ou prise dans le tout, d'une maniere irreguliere."

<sup>20</sup> In this paper I refrain from going into (1) in detail. On Leibniz's criteria for a possible world to be the best possible world, see for example Rutherford, Donald. *The Rational Order of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 48-67 and Rescher, Nicholas. *The Philosophy of Leibniz*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967, 58-70. Rutherford on the one hand claims that it is the

## 2. Leibniz's Taxonomy of Evil

In the *Treatise on God and Man* from 1705(?) Leibniz proposes a three-fold taxonomy of evil for the first time:<sup>21</sup> “[...] *metaphysical, physical and moral*.”<sup>22</sup> As he subsequently explains in his *Theodicy*: “*Metaphysical evil* consists in mere imperfection, *physical evil* in suffering, and *moral evil* in sin.”<sup>23</sup> In this paper, I will focus only on Leibniz's conception of metaphysical evil since for Leibniz metaphysical evil is the “ultimate source of both physical and moral evil.”<sup>24</sup>

## 3. Leibniz on Metaphysical Evil

In the following section I will deal with three different interpretations of Leibniz's conception of metaphysical evil.

### 3.1 Scholastic Account of Metaphysical Evil as Privation

St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and Francisco Suárez, along with a large number of scholastic philosophers and theologians argued that evil is not a mere negation or limitation but a privation.<sup>25</sup> Even before 1680 Leibniz—like other early moderns— rejected the traditional privative metaphysics of evil. In *The Author of Sin* from 1673(?) Leibniz writes:

For to say that God can be called the author of all that is real and positive in the sin, and yet is not the author of sin because he is not the author of a privation, is a *manifest illusion*; it is a *remnant of the visionary philosophy of times past*; it is an *equivocation which no reasonable man would allow himself to accept*.<sup>26</sup>

But later, at least in *De libertate, fato, gracia Dei* from 1686/1687(?), Leibniz appears to subscribe to the traditional metaphysics of evil as privation:

For it seems illusory to say that God concurs in the material aspect of sin, but not really in the formal aspect, which is a privation or anomie. But in fact, it should be understood that this response is more solid than it first seems [...].<sup>27</sup>

And later, in his *Theodicy* he adds:

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maximization of happiness of rationale substances, which makes a world more perfect. Nicholas Rescher, on the other hand claims that a world is the more perfect, the more it is a unity of variety of phenomena and an orderliness, i.e. the richness of a world's laws.

<sup>21</sup> This is noteworthy because in the Augustinian-Thomistic and scholastic philosophy the commonsense taxonomy of evil consists in the two-fold distinction between *malum poenae* and *malum culpae* which is similar to Leibniz's distinction between physical and moral evil. Therefore, Leibniz's three-fold taxonomy is something which breaks new ground.

<sup>22</sup> GP III, 32, my emphasis. “Bonum malumve triplex intelligi solet, Metaphysicum, physicum et morale.” Translated by Lloyd Strickland in Strickland, Lloyd. *Leibniz on God and Religion*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 291.

<sup>23</sup> Théod. § 21; GP VI, 115. “On peut prendre le mal metaphysiquement, physiquement et moralement. Le mal metaphysique consiste dans la simple imperfection, le mal physique dans la souffrance et le mal moral dans le peché.” In *Treatise on God and Man* Leibniz says something really similar, cf. GP III, 32.

<sup>24</sup> Rutherford, Donald. *The Rational Order of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Aquinas, ST I, q. 48, art. 5 and Suárez, MD, Disputatio XI, sectio I, 3. The most prominent ancestor is St. Augustine, which develops his privative account of a metaphysics of evil especially in *On Free Choice of the Will*.

<sup>26</sup> A VI, 3, 150-151, my emphasis. “Car de dire que Dieu n'est pas l'auteur du peché, par ce qu'il n'est pas auteur d'une privation: quoyque il puisse estre appellé auteur de tout ce qu'il y a de reel et de positif dans le peché, c'est une illusion manifeste; c'est un reste de la philosophie visionnaire du temps passé, c'est un faux-fuyant dont un homme raisonnable ne se laissera jamais payer.” Translated by Lloyd Strickland in *Leibniz on God and Religion*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 272.

<sup>27</sup> A VI, 4, 1605. “Illusorium enim videtur dicere, Deum concurrere ad materiale peccati, non vero, ad formale, quod est privatio seu àvoúia. Verum sciendum est responsionem hanc solidiorem esse quam prima specie videatur [...].” Translated by Samuel Newlands in “Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52(2) (2014), 281-308, 290.

Thus the Platonists, St. Augustine and the Schoolmen were right to say that God is the cause of the material element of evil which lies in the positive, and not of the formal element, which lies in privation.<sup>28</sup>

According to the Scholastic tradition, evil is “a privation of a perfection which a certain kind of thing ought to have according to its nature.”<sup>29</sup> There exists a *telos* which determines the nature of a thing, and a subject is called evil “insofar as it lack[s] perfections that, by its telic nature, it ought to have.”<sup>30</sup> The privative account traditionally distinguishes sharply between privation and negation, as Aquinas points out in the *Summa theologiae*:

Because evil is the privation of good, and not a mere negation, as was said above, therefore not every defect of good is an evil, but the defect of the good which is naturally due. For the want of sight is not an evil in a stone, but it is an evil in an animal; since it is against the nature of a stone to see.<sup>31</sup>

For instance, an animal ought to have the capacity of visual perception as required by its nature, whereas such a capacity does not belong to a stone’s very own nature. Therefore, according to the privative account of evil, which considers evil as the deficiency of something that a being ought to have in respect to its nature, blindness of an animal is an evil, while blindness of a stone is not. If we were to consider evil as a mere negation, then the blindness of a stone would unreasonably be an evil as well. As Samuel Newlands points out:

[T]he evil-as-negation view fails to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate perfections, the very distinction that separates mere limitations from privations. In short, evil-as-negation offers too flat an ontology of evil.<sup>32</sup>

According to the evil-as-negation thesis, every creature has to involve evil, because every creature has to lack at least one perfection. Hence, the entire creation would be evil in some respects, a consequence which theologians like St. Augustine, Aquinas, and Suárez wanted to avoid. In order not to oppose to the traditional metaphysics of evil as privation, Leibniz had to draw a similar distinction between privation and negation or limitation, as Scholastics did. However, for Newlands there are only two passages in Leibniz’s works, which can account for this traditional distinction.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the following passages from Leibniz’s middle and late period (from the *Rationale of the Catholic Faith* from 1685(?), the *Discourse*, a letter to Gerhard Wolter Molanus from 1698, the *New Essays*, and the *Theodicy*) show that Leibniz obviously did not take the traditional distinction too seriously:

[T]he cause of evil is to be traced back to *non-being, or privation, that is, to the natural limitation or weakness of things*, or even – which comes back to the same thing – to the original imperfection which is earlier than original sin itself.<sup>34</sup> And it is to this, in my view, that we must reduce the opinion of Saint Augustine and other authors, the opinion that the root of evil is *in nothingness, that is to say, in the privation or limitation of creatures*, which God graciously remedies by the degree of perfection it pleases him to give.<sup>35</sup> [E]very creature is essentially limited; I call this *limitation or negation a privative*

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<sup>28</sup> Théod. § 30; GP VI, 120. “Ainsi les Platoniciens, S. Augustin et les Scolastiques ont eu raison de dire que Dieu est la cause du materiel du mal, qui consiste dans le positif, et non pas du formel, qui consiste dans la privation [...]”

<sup>29</sup> Antognazza, Maria Rosa. “Metaphysical Evil Revisited.” In *New Essays on Leibniz’s Theodicy*, ed. Larry M. Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 112-134, 113.

<sup>30</sup> Newlands, Samuel. “Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52(2) (2014), 281-308, 284.

<sup>31</sup> Aquinas, ST I, q 48, a 5, ad 1. “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, quia malum est privatio boni, et non negatio pura, ut dictum est; non omnis defectus boni est malum, sed defectus boni quod natum est et debet haberi. Defectus enim visionis non est malum in lapide, sed in animali: quia contra rationem lapidis est, quod visum habeat.”

<sup>32</sup> Newlands, Samuel. “Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52(2) (2014), 281-308, 285.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. CP 23 and GP VI, 568.

<sup>34</sup> A VI, 4, 2322, my emphasis. “Haec autem limitatio et imperfectio pendet ex rerum ideis, seu essentiis non ex Dei voluntate [...]” Translated by Lloyd Strickland in *Leibniz on God and Religion*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 78.

<sup>35</sup> Ariew/Garber, 62; DM § 30; GP IV, 455, my emphasis. “Et c’est à quoy se doit reduire à mon avis le sentiment de S. Augustin et d’autres auteurs que la racine du mal est dans le neant, c’est à dire dans la privation ou limitation des creatures, à laquelle Dieu remédie gracieusement par le degré de perfection qu’il luy plaist de donner.”

imperfection.<sup>36</sup> But I should still think that the idea of rest is *privative*, that is, that it consists only in negation [...].<sup>37</sup> [A]ny imperfection comes from *limitation*, that is to say, from *privation*: since to limit is to deny progress or the *plus ultra*.<sup>38</sup>

The equation of limitation, privation, and negation in these passages demonstrates that Leibniz diverges from the traditionally accepted distinction between limitation or negation and privation. However, to identify privation with limitation would render every creature evil *qua* being a creature and this is exactly what the Scholastic tradition sought to prevent for theological reasons. Had evil been defined only in terms of limitation, this would lead to the conclusion that everything except God is necessarily evil because of having limitations in their nature and this seems to be at odds with the Christian doctrine of creation. Moreover, while the Scholastic tradition had space for a clear conceptual distinction between *privatio* and *negatio* or *limitatio* Leibniz did not have any such space.<sup>39</sup> However, Newlands rightly argues that Leibniz tries to make his own theory of evil look like the traditional evil-as-privation conception without making any essential change concerning his privative account of evil. Furthermore, metaphysical evil cannot consist in a mere privation of a perfection, as for example Michael Latzer claims, because no creature ought to possess all perfections, except God. The nature of being created, as the opposite of being the creator, necessarily entails to be deficient in terms of perfections. In other words, to be distinguishable from God, a creature ought not to possess all perfections, and therefore, ought to lack at least one perfection, i.e. to possess at least one imperfection. Consider that there exists a creature *x* which is quite more similar to God than any other creature, lacking only one perfection *F*, i.e. the creature possesses only one imperfection *non F*. In this scenario it would not be appropriate to claim that the lack of *F* is a privation, i.e. something *x* ought to possess in respect to its nature. On the contrary, only God ought to possess all perfections, and *x* ought *not* to possess *F* to be distinguishable from God. If metaphysical evil consists in mere imperfection, as Leibniz points out in the *Theodicy* § 21, and imperfection cannot be identified with privation, then, by transitivity, not all metaphysical evil is a privation.

Along with Newlands, I argue that a lot of different passages, as shown above, insinuate that Leibniz in fact never changed his mind about the evil-as-privation theory even though Leibniz refers to evil as privation in some cases about.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, his entire metaphysics and his view that creatures participate in divine perfections in different degrees, do not comply with the privative account of evil. Therefore, it should be no surprise that there are other interpretations of Leibniz's theory of metaphysical evil.

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<sup>36</sup> A I, 15, 300, my emphasis. "Dixeram omnem creaturam essentialiter esse limitatam, et hanc limitationem seu negationem vocabam imperfectionem privativam [...]." Translated by Maria Rosa Antognazza in "Metaphysical Evil Revisited." In *New Essays on Leibniz's Theodicy*, ed. Larry M. Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 112-134, 126.

<sup>37</sup> NE 130; GP V, 117, my emphasis. "Je croirois encor que l'idée même du repos est privative, c'est à dire, qu'elle ne consiste que dans la negation."

<sup>38</sup> Théod., Abregé de la Controverse reduite à des Argumens en forme; GP VI, 383, my emphasis. "[T]oute imperfection vient de la limitation, c'est à dire du privatif [...]." Translated by Maria Rosa Antognazza in "Metaphysical Evil Revisited." In *New Essays on Leibniz's Theodicy*, ed. Larry M. Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 112-134, 127.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Antognazza, Maria Rosa. "Metaphysical Evil Revisited." In *New Essays on Leibniz's Theodicy*, ed. Larry M. Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 112-134, 126. Interestingly, Samuel Newlands refers to Eilhard Lublin, a German Lutheran theologian, who was denounced by orthodox Lutherans because of his strong Neoplatonic commitment, who was mentioned by Leibniz in the *Causa Dei* in a breath with St. Augustine and Aquinas as representatives of a privation theory (cf. GP VI, 449). But in fact, "Lublin presents and defends an explicitly and thoroughly Neoplatonic conception of evil [...], in which he readily collapses the distinction between privation and lacks (or "nothing") [...]. This is good evidence that, in Leibniz's mind, the Scholastic evil-as-privation view is actually reducible to the Neoplatonic evil-as-negation view" (Newlands, Samuel. "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52(2) (2014), 281-308, 304). Maria Antognazza points out that there is an echo of the traditional distinction even in Leibniz. That is his distinction between *defective* and *non-defective privation*, cf. Antognazza, Maria Rosa. "Metaphysical Evil Revisited." In *New Essays on Leibniz's Theodicy*, ed. Larry M. Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 112-134, 128.

<sup>40</sup> The rejection of a theory of evil-as-privation as a form of Anti-Aristotelianism fits perfect with the rejection of Aristotelism in general in the early modern natural sciences, cf. Newlands, Samuel. "Evils, Privations, and the Early Moderns." In *Evil. A History*, ed. Andrew P. Chignell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, 273-305, 292-295.

### 3.2 Russellian Account of Metaphysical Evil as Limitation

In *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, Bertrand Russell identifies the *original* imperfection, which Leibniz refers to in *Theodicy* § 21, with the *mere* imperfection in § 20. According to this identification, every creature is metaphysically evil *qua* being a creature, because its essence, necessary involves limitations as Leibniz points out in *On God and Man* and in the *Theodicy*:

From this it is clear that the ultimate origin of evil should be sought not in the divine will but in the original imperfection of creatures (which is contained in deal form in the eternal truths that constitute the internal object of the divine intellect), and that therefore evil could not be excluded from the best possible system of things.<sup>41</sup> For we must consider that there is an *original imperfection* in the creature before sin, because the creature is limited in its essence; whence ensues that it cannot know all, and that it can deceive itself and commit other errors.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, Russell comes to the conclusion that “[t]his gives Leibniz’s solution of the problem of evil, and it is plain that metaphysical evil is the source of the whole.”<sup>43</sup> If metaphysical evil is in fact original limitation of creature’s essences, it seems to pervade God’s entire creation. “It seems to imply that creatures, simply in virtue of not being gods, are in some sense intrinsically and inescapably evil.”<sup>44</sup> But what is the original limitation of creature’s essences? This question concerns the most fundamental part of Leibniz’s concept of creation, namely the ideal realm, i.e. the realm of possibles, essences, eternal truths, ideas, etc. In *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* from 1697 Leibniz says: “[T]hey [the ideas, essences, and eternal truths, JLP] exist [...] in God himself, the source of every essence and of the existence of the rest.”<sup>45</sup> Logically prior to creation, i.e. the actualization of compossible possibles, there were only ideal entities within God’s mind. The most fundamental entities are simple divine ideas, which have their basis in God’s perfections and which are combined to more complex structures by God’s mental act of contemplation.<sup>46</sup> In *On the Origin of Things from Forms*, from April (?) 1676, Leibniz explains:

Ideas exist in God in so far as the most perfect being arises out of the conjunction in the same subject of all possible absolute forms or perfections; but from the conjunction of simple possible forms there result modifications, that is, ideas, as properties result from an essence.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> GP III, 33. “Hinc patet, originem mali ultimam non in voluntate divina quaeri debere, sed in originali imperfectione creaturarum, quae ideali ratione continetur in veritatibus aeternis objectum internum constituentibus divini intellectus, neque malum adeo ab optimo rerum systemate possibili excludi potuisse.” Translated by Lloyd Strickland in *Leibniz on God and Religion*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 293.

<sup>42</sup> Théod. § 20; GP VI, 115. “Car il faut considerer qu’il y a une imperfection originale dans la creature avant le peché, parceque la creature est limitée essentiellement; d’où vient qu’elle ne sauroit tout savoir, et qu’elle se peut tromper et faire d’autres fautes.”

<sup>43</sup> Russell, Bertrand. *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*. London: Routledge, 1992, 233.

<sup>44</sup> Antognazza, Maria Rosa. “Metaphysical Evil Revisited.” In *New Essays on Leibniz’s Theodicy*, ed. Larry M. Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 112-134, 112.

<sup>45</sup> Ariew/Garber 151-152; GP VII, 305. “[...] sed existere in quadam ut sic dicam regione idearum, nempe in ipso Deo, essentiae omnis existentiaeque caeterorum fonte.”

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Mugnai, Massimo. “Leibniz’s Nominalism and the Reality of Ideas in the Mind of God.” In *Mathesis rationis*, ed. Albert Heinekamp, Albert, Wolfgang Lenzen and Martin Schneider. Münster: Nodus, 1990, 153-167, 164; Nachtomy, Ohad. *Possibility, Agency, and Individuality in Leibniz’s Metaphysics*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007, 25; Nachtomy, Ohad. “On the Source of Impossibility in Leibniz’s Paris Notes and Some Remarks on Time and Space as Packing Constraints.” In *Leibniz on Compossibility and Possible Worlds*, ed. Gregory Brown and Yual Chiek. Cham: Springer, 2016, 21-35 and Antognazza, Maria Rosa. “Metaphysical Evil Revisited.” In *New Essays on Leibniz’s Theodicy*, ed. Larry M. Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 112-134, 131. Contrary to this, Samuel Newlands holds that ideas are brute facts within the divine mind, cf. Newlands, Samuel. “Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility.” *Journal of Philosophy* 122(2) (2013), 155-187, 178.

<sup>47</sup> Parkinson, 81; A VI, 3, 521. “Ideae sunt in Deo, quatenus ex formarum omnium absolutarum sive perfectionum possibilium conjunctione in eodem subjecto fit Ens perfectissimum; ex conjunctione autem formarum simplicium possibilium resultant modificationes, id est ideae, ut ex essentia proprietates.”

As ideas result from divine perfection, properties have their basis in essences. According to the *Principle of Contradiction* [=PC] God's mental activity combines the ideas to more complex structures called complete individual notions by Leibniz. In Leibnizian metaphysics, an essence of a creature consists in its complete individual notion and in the *Discourse* § 8 Leibniz spreads out:

[...] [T]he nature of an individual substance or of a complete being is to have a notion so complete that it is sufficient to contain and to allow us to deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which this notion is attributed.<sup>48</sup>

A complete individual notion, i.e. an essence, can analogously be understood as a “blueprint” for a creature.<sup>49</sup> Everything which will ever happen to a created individual substance is included in its corresponding complete individual notion *sub ratione possibilitatis*. A complete individual notion is a sequence of an infinite number of simple and complex divine ideas and/or their negations, which all together are maximal, that is, it holds for every (simple or complex) idea *I* that either *I* or *not I* is a part of a distinct complete individual notion.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, a complete individual notion is a consistent whole which means that all of the ideas it contains have to be compatible with each other according to the PC. Leibniz explains the completeness of a notions in *De Libertate, Fato, Gratia Dei* as follows: “It is of the nature of an individual substance that its concept be perfect and complete, and contains all its individual circumstances, even contingent ones, down to the least detail.”<sup>51</sup> God's mind forms complete individual notions by combining an infinite number of maximally-consistent divine ideas. And only a unique set of compossible complete individual notions, the best possible world, was to be actualized by divine creation.<sup>52</sup> God is the perfect being and created substances imitate the deity by exemplifying divine perfections to a greater or lesser extent. Necessarily, there does not exist any monad which exemplifies all divine perfections without any limitation, because, in accordance with the *Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles*, such a monad would be indistinguishable from and identical with God if it exemplified all perfections. Therefore, Leibniz says in the *Causa Dei*: “[A] being lacking limitation would be God, not a creature.”<sup>53</sup> The whole chain of beings is a limited

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<sup>48</sup> Ariew/Garber, 41; DM § 8; GP IV, 433. “Cela estant, nous pouvons dire que la nature d'une substance individuelle ou d'un estre complet, est d'avoir une notion si accomplie qu'elle soit suffisante à comprendre et à en faire deduire tous les predicats du sujet à qui cette notion est attribuée.”

<sup>49</sup> It is important to distinguish essences from natures in Leibniz's metaphysics. An essence, i.e. a complete individual notion expresses God's knowledge of possible substances, while it is the nature of a created being to have a complete individual notion, i.e. an essence, cf. Ariew/Garber, 41; DM § 8; GP IV, 433. Leibniz defines natures by their concepts and not *vice versa*, and only a creature's nature, not his essence, is the source of its action and spontaneity and not its notion, cf. Rutherford, Donald. *The Rational Order of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 139.

<sup>50</sup> On the origin of negation in Leibniz see Fichant, Michel, *L'origine de la négation*, in: Fichant, Michel, *Science et métaphysique dans Descartes et Leibniz*. Paris 1998, 29-55.

<sup>51</sup> A VI, 4/B, 1600. “[...] quia de natura substantiae individualis est, ut notio ejus sit perfecta atque completa, omnesque circumstantias individuales etiam contingentes ad minima usque contineat [...]” Translated by Robert M. Adams in *Leibniz. Determinist, Theist, Idealist*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 31.

<sup>52</sup> There is a controversy between Leibniz scholars on Leibniz's conception of compossibility. Currently there are at least two mainlines: The *Logical* and the *Lawful Interpretation* of compossibility. For representatives of the *Logical Interpretation*, complete individual notions are compossible, if and only if their constituting ideas do not involve any contradiction, cf. Mates, Benson. *The Philosophy of Leibniz. Metaphysics and Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 75-77 and Nachtomý, Ohad. *Possibility, Agency, and Individuality in Leibniz's Metaphysics*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007, 105-121. Representatives of the *Lawful Interpretation* hold that complete individual notions are compossible, if and only if they are suitably linked at least under one law, which God wishes to uphold, cf. Hacking, Ian. “A Leibnizian Theory of Truth.” In *Leibniz. Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. Michael Hooker. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, 185-195 and Cover, Jan and Hawthorne, John. *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 131-134. There are some further interpretations between these mainlines, like McDonough's *Packing Strategy*, Margaret Wilson's *Hybrid Interpretation* or Messina's and Rutherford's *Cosmological Interpretation*, cf. McDonough, Jeffrey. “Leibniz and the Puzzle of Impossibility. The Packing Strategy.” *Philosophical Review* 119(2) (2010), 135-163; Wilson, Margaret. “Compossibility and Law.” In *Causation in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Steven Nadler. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993, 119-133 and Messina, James and Rutherford, Donald. “Leibniz on Compossibility.” *Philosophy Compass* 4(6) (2009), 961-977. For a fine-grained discussion of the entire controversy please see Brown, Gregory/Chiek, Yual (ed.). *Leibniz on Compossibility and Possible Worlds*. Cham: Springer, 2016.

<sup>53</sup> GP VI, 449. “[N]am quod limitatione careret, non creatura, sed Deus foret.” Translated by Maria Rosa Antognazza in “Metaphysical Evil Revisited.” In *New Essays on Leibniz's Theodicy*, ed. Larry M. Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 112-134, 130.

imitation of the deity and participates in different degrees in divine perfections. If this is true for individual substances, the same must be true for their corresponding complete individual notions. Given that it is impossible for any being to fully exemplify divine perfections due to their limited nature and that Leibniz considers limitation as metaphysical evil, the creation must be called, *ex hypothesi*, metaphysically evil. Leibniz points toward the relation between original imperfection and limitation in nature in the *Dialogue on Human Freedom* from 1695 as follows:

B.—Before all sin, there was an original imperfection in all created things, an imperfection which arises from their limitation. [...] A.—But where does this original imperfection come from? B.—One can say that it comes from the essences or Natures of creatures themselves; for the essences of things are eternal [...]. They do not depend on God's will, but on his understanding [...]. It is God's understanding which is the source of the creature's essences as they are in him, that is to say, limited.<sup>54</sup>

Why then did God create a world, which contains metaphysical evil necessarily *ex hypothesi*? Two answers are possible for Leibniz: First, God could not have created a world without metaphysical evil, because the limitation, and therefore metaphysical evil, is an essential part of any created being. Therefore, God could not have created a world without any evil, because all “blueprints” for any possible creation would necessarily entail at least some limitations. Leibniz writes in the *Rationale of the Catholic Faith*: [...] this limitation and imperfection depends on the ideas or essences of things, not on God's will [...].<sup>55</sup> This also suggests that the source of metaphysical evil is not God's volition, but rather the realm of ideas and notions, which depends only on the PC and exists independently of God's will within the divine understanding. In this sense God only permits, but does not cause evil. According to the second answer, God has the moral necessity to create a world in accordance with the *Principle of the Best* which presupposes that for God, existence is always better than non-existence. “The permission of evils comes from a kind of moral necessity [...].”<sup>56</sup> For Leibniz, this moral obligation is compatible with God's freedom and should not be confused with absolute necessity.<sup>57</sup>

However, the Russellian interpretation of metaphysical evil appears problematic provided that the identification of *original* and *mere* imperfection renders every creature metaphysically evil *qua* being a creature only because of their deficiency deriving from their limited nature. Moreover, the identification of metaphysical evil with limitation of creature's essences would be a refusal of the Christian theology of creation. Suárez goes to the heart of the problem when he writes: “[A] thing is not evil for not having a more excellent perfection if it ought not to have it; otherwise, every creature would be evil for not having the perfection of the Creator.”<sup>58</sup> So, considering a creature as evil depending on its inability to be as perfect as God would be an unacceptable conclusion for Christianity.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, the Christian doctrine says that God's creation is essentially good, as pointed out in Genesis: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”<sup>60</sup> However, the conclusion that Leibniz's understanding of evil is not compatible with the Christianity seems to be an unjustified conclusion given that the approaches to the problem of evil vary depending

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<sup>54</sup> Ariew/Garber, 114 ; Grua 365. “B. — Avant tout péché, il y a une imperfection originale dans toutes les creatures, qui vient de leur limitation. [...] A. — Mais d'où vient cette imperfection originale, qui est antérieure au péché originel? B. — On peut dire qu'elle vient des Essences ou Natures mêmes des creatures; car les essences de choses sont éternelles [...]. Elles ne dependent point de la volonté de Dieu, mais de son entendement [...]. C'est l'entendement de Dieu qui est la source des essences des creatures, telles qu'elles sont en luy, c'est à dire bornées.”

<sup>55</sup> A VI, 4, 2322. “Haec autem limitatio et imperfectio pendet ex rerum ideis, seu essentiis non ex Dei voluntate [...].” Translated by Lloyd Strickland in *Leibniz on God and Religion*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 78.

<sup>56</sup> Théod. § 128 ; GP VI, 182. “La permission des maux vient d'une espece de necessité morale [...].”

<sup>57</sup> Cf. GP VII, 302-308; A VI, 4, 1647-1649 and GP IV, 436-439.

<sup>58</sup> Suárez, MD, Disputatio XI, sectio I, 3. “[R]es non est mala eo quod non habeat excellentiorem perfectionem si ei non debeatur; alioqui omnis creatura mala esset eo quod non habeat perfectionem creatoris.” Translated by Samuel Newlands in “Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52(2) (2014), 281-308, 285, footnote 15.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Latzer, Michael. “Leibniz's Conception of Metaphysical Evil.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55(1) (1994), 1-15, 6 and 15.

<sup>60</sup> Gen 1,31.

on different views concerning the doctrines of Christianity. For example, the Lutheran theologian Flacius Illyricus (1520-1575), who is referred to by Leibniz in *Unvorgreiffliches Bedencken*<sup>61</sup>, writes in *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*: “Hence, it seems to be the case that original sin, or a part of it, is the substance of human beings [...].”<sup>62</sup> Flacius holds that after the fall of man, the original sin is the substance of human beings and not only an accidental part of their nature.<sup>63</sup> And in *The Augsburg Confession* one can find the following passage:

Our churches also teach that since Adam’s fall into sin, all men who are fathered in the normal physical way are conceived and born with sin. This means that they are born without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with evil desires. This disease, or original sin, truly is sin.<sup>64</sup>

These passages offer a contrasting approach to the Christian doctrine of creation: Original sin penetrates all human beings and interestingly there are some passages in Leibniz which insinuate that original sin is employed as the theological equivalent of metaphysical evil being restricted to human beings, when he writes in his *Theodicy*:

The first difficulty is how the soul could be infected with original sin, which is the root of actual sins, without injustice on God’s part in exposing the soul thereto.<sup>65</sup>

This passage is quite similar to a paragraph Leibniz writes in *De libertate, fato, gratia Dei* from 1686(?). There he points towards the following fact: “[A]t times, the imperfection is so great that it constitutes [establish, JLP] the basis of a sin [i.e. a moral evil]”<sup>66</sup> and in the *Discourse* he further argues that this “original imperfection or limitation connatural to all creatures makes them liable to sin, or capable of going wrong”<sup>67</sup>. In his *Theodicy* as well as in *De libertate, fato, gratia Dei* and the *Discourse* Leibniz claims that actual sins are grounded in a capacity to sin. It seems that in theological contexts, like within the passage above from his *Theodicy*, Leibniz refers to this capacity with the term ‘original sin’; within philosophical contexts, like in *De libertate, fato, gratia Dei* and the *Discourse*, he uses the term ‘metaphysical evil’. Original sin is—so to speak—Leibniz’s theological interpretation of metaphysical evil as the limitation of a creature’s essences restricted to human beings. Furthermore, for Leibniz, unlike Flacius and *The Augsburg Confession*, there is no fundamental difference between the ontological and moral status of creation before and after the fall of man. Original sin—for Leibniz—is in some sense grounded in the essences of human beings and impeccability of human beings is not included in the best possible world and is part of the creation naturally.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, Leibniz extends the existence of the original sin by eliminating the difference between the creation before and after the fall, whereas it was considered as the penetration of evil to the creation after the fall of man by Flacius and *The Augsburg Confession*. More precisely, for Leibniz, original sin or metaphysical evil is part of any created being by being a creature. If the Christian doctrine of creation is understood in this “Protestant” manner—and Leibniz was a Lutheran up to his end<sup>69</sup>—Leibniz might be taken as

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<sup>61</sup> A IV, 7, 423-555.

<sup>62</sup> Flacius. *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*. Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1719, 768, my translation. “Unde liquido apparet, aliquod originale Peccatum, aut partem ejus, esse ipsam substantiam hominis [...].”

<sup>63</sup> On Flacius’s doctrine of original sin see Nüssel, Friederike. *Allein aus Glaube. Zur Entwicklung der Rechtfertigungslehre in der konkordistischen und frühen nachkonkordistischen Theologie*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000, 92-105. Leibniz rejects Flacius’s strong interpretation and judges about his thesis that it is a “misstep in philosophy [fehl-tritt]” (A IV, 7, 454).

<sup>64</sup> *The Augsburg Confession*, Article 2.

<sup>65</sup> Théod. § 86 ; GP VI, 149. “La premiere difficulté est, comment l’ame a pu être infectée du peché originel, qui est la racine des pechés actuels, sans qu’il y ait eu de l’injustice en Dieu à l’y exposer.”

<sup>66</sup> A VI, 4, 1605. “[...] quae imperfectio aliquando tanta est, ut peccati rationem constituat [...]” Translated by Samuel Newlands in “Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52(2) (2014), 281-308, 297.

<sup>67</sup> Ariew/Garber, 62; DM § 30; GP IV, 455. “[...] qui les rend peccables ou capables de manquer.”

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Pichler, Aloys. *Die Theologie des Leibniz aus sämtlichen gedruckten und vielen noch ungedruckten Quellen (vol. I)*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965, 321.

<sup>69</sup> Even Leibniz had sympathy for the Catholic faith throughout his life.

having been committed to some extent to this doctrine. Therefore, the Christian doctrine of creation might be reconciled with the Russellian account of metaphysical evil.

But there is still another objection against the Russellian account. In his *Theodicy* Leibniz writes:

[F]or one must confess that there is evil in this world which God has made, and that it would have been possible to make a world without evil or even not to create any world, since its creation depended upon the free will of God.<sup>70</sup>

If the Russellian interpretation of Leibniz's concept of metaphysical evil is correct, then even for God it becomes impossible to create a world without any evil, because any created being is evil metaphysically *qua* being a creature. To avoid this conclusion, one can limit Leibniz's reference to evil in this passage to the moral evil, arguing that had God not created rational beings, there would not exist any moral evil. But there is no evidence, that in this passage Leibniz restricts the term 'evil' to moral evil, therefore, the Russellian interpretation, as some Leibniz scholars have concluded, must be false.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.3 Neoplatonic Account of Metaphysical Evil as a Participation in Non-Being

The Neoplatonic interpretation of Leibniz's theory of evil bears a considerable similarity to the Russellian account.<sup>72</sup> For instance, Leibniz refers to evil as participation in nothingness or non-being in some passages. However, he, unlike the Neoplatonists like Plotinus or Porphyry, does not hold that evil comes from matter.<sup>73</sup> But nevertheless, in the *Dialogue on Human Freedom* Leibniz writes:

If they [the essences of created things, JLP] are imperfect, one can only blame their limitation on their boundaries, that is to say, the extent of *their participation in nothingness*.<sup>74</sup>

And in a letter to Christian Schulenburg from 1698 Leibniz adds: "And this is the origin of things: God and nothing [*Deo et nihilo*], positive and privative [*positivo et privativo*], perfection and imperfection [*perfectione et imperfectione*] [...]."<sup>75</sup> These passages insinuate a connection between the extent of the limitation of a creature's essence and its participation in nothingness or non-being. The Neoplatonic picture is as follows: Created beings are ontologically located between the One and nothingness. The more imperfect something is, the more it participates in nothingness. The ontological "distance" to the One—so to speak—increases while the gap to non-being decreases. In some sense the Neoplatonic picture can be combined with the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* to which Leibniz gives "his own no less distinctive spin, which bends it back in a Neoplatonic direction."<sup>76</sup> It is common to all creatures that they were created from nothing or non-being by God's power. But how creatures are able to participate in something which does not exist? Or to put it in words of Leibniz's interlocutor (A.): "A.—I do not see how nothingness, which is nothing, can enter into the composition of things."<sup>77</sup> The answer of Leibniz's spokesman (B.) is as follows:

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<sup>70</sup> Théod. Appendices, objection 1; GP VI, 377. "[...] car il faut avouer qu'il y a du mal dans ce monde que Dieu a fait, et qu'il étoit possible de faire un monde sans mal, ou même de ne point créer de Monde, puisque sa creation a dependu de la volonté libre de Dieu [...]."

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Latzer, Michael. "Leibniz's Conception of Metaphysical Evil." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55(1) (1994), 1-15, 14.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Antognazza, Maria Rosa. "God, Creatures, and Neoplatonism in Leibniz." In *Für unser Glück oder das Glück anderer: X. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress* (vol. 3), ed. Wenchao Li. Hildesheim: Olms, 351-364.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead*, 3, 30-40. Unlike Manichaeans, Neoplatonists denied that matter as a principle of evil has any active power.

<sup>74</sup> Ariew/Garber, 115; Grua 365, my emphasis. "Il ne faut se prendre qu'à leur limitation ou bornes, c'est à dire à ce qu'elles participent du neant, si elles sont imparfaites."

<sup>75</sup> A II, 3, 427, my translation. "Atque haec est origo rerum ex Deo et nihilo, positivo et privativo, perfectione et imperfectione [...]."

<sup>76</sup> Antognazza, Maria Rosa. "Metaphysical Evil Revisited." In *New Essays on Leibniz's Theodicy*, ed. Larry M. Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 112-134, 131.

<sup>77</sup> Ariew/Garber, 114; Grua 364. "A. — Je ne voy pas bien comment le neant, qui est rien, puisse entrer dans la composition des choses."

It is the same for all other things, for they are bounded or imperfect by virtue of the principle of negation or of nothingness they contain, by virtue of the lack of an infinity of perfections in them, and which are only a nothingness with respect to them.<sup>78</sup>

Leibniz's entire metaphysics is absolutely theocentric. God as the perfect being is the source of created beings. And creatures have their being only in respect to their participation in God's perfections. In some respects, being is to participate in God's perfection for Leibniz. Therefore, non-being is not participation in an ontologized nothingness but is rather non-participation in God's perfections.

But there is a strong objection against the Neoplatonic metaphysics of evil, which also concerns Leibniz's theory of evil. St. Thomas has pointed out that according to the Neoplatonic theory of evil "a man would be evil who had not the swiftness of the roe, or the strength of a lion"<sup>79</sup>. The Neoplatonic conception of evil is not able to distinguish properly between appropriate and inappropriate perfections that a creature ought to participate in, something which, for Aquinas, the privative account of evil can accomplish. For a human being, his lack of the lion's strength, just like his lack of rationality, is a participation in non-being, however, only the latter one can be considered as evil. Therefore, the Neoplatonic conception of evil seems to be "too coarse-grained to distinguish between what are, intuitively, mere lacks and what are genuine evils."<sup>80</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

It was not the purpose of this paper to respond to all objections against different interpretations of Leibniz's conception of metaphysical evil. Nor was it my intention to show that one interpretation is preferable over another one. I sought only to explain their metaphysical benefits and costs. Nevertheless, we should still answer the question how the two following propositions—already mentioned in the introduction—are compatible:

- (1) God has actualized, i.e. created the best possible world.
- (2) The created actual world entails evil.

The previous considerations about Leibniz's conception of metaphysical evil can help us understand the compatibility between these two statements. At least the Russellian as well as the Neoplatonic interpretation of metaphysical evil can explain why the actual world, despite its being created in accordance with the best possible world, entails some evil. Since every creature, by being a creature, is limited or participates in nothingness, this necessitates that even the best possible world entails evil. Because every created being, to a greater or lesser extent, is an image of the deity their essences must be limited necessarily *ex hypothesi*, i.e. they must involve metaphysical evil. Therefore, a proper interpretation of Leibniz's conception of metaphysical evil plays a central role in understanding of his entire theodician project in an adequate way.

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<sup>78</sup> Ariew/Garber, 114; Grua 364. "[...] [I]l en est de même de toutes les autres choses, car elles sont bornées ou imparfaites par le principe de la Negation ou du Neant qu'elles renferment, par le défaut d'une infinité de perfections qui ne sont pas en elles et ne sont qu'un Neant à leur égard."

<sup>79</sup> Aquinas, ST I, q 48, a 3. "[...] utpote quod homo esset malus, quia non habet velocitatem caprae, vel fortitudinem leonis."

<sup>80</sup> Newlands, Samuel. "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52(2) (2014), 281-308, 284.

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