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# Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil

SAMUEL NEWLANDS\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

THERE WAS A CONSENSUS IN LATE Scholasticism that evils are privations, the lacks of appropriate perfections. For something to be evil is for it to lack an excellence that, by its nature, it ought to have. This widely accepted ontology of evil was used, in part, to help explain the source of evil in a world created and sustained by a perfect being. During the second half of the seventeenth century, progressive early moderns began to criticize the traditional privative account of evil on a variety of philosophical and theological grounds. Embedded in Scholastic Aristotelianism and applied to problems of evil, privation theory seemed to some like yet another instance of pre-modern pseudo-explanation.<sup>1</sup>

Against this growing rejection of privation theory in the late seventeenth century, Leibniz stands out as an enigmatic exception. In his early writings, Leibniz too sharply rejects the standard use of privation theory. He describes it as “a manifest illusion,” a “joke,” a “leftover from the visionary philosophy of the past; it is a subterfuge with which a reasonable person will never be satisfied” (*CP* 111).<sup>2</sup> But within fifteen years, Leibniz changes his mind, or at least his tune. Around 1685, he admits that although privation theory “seems illusory,” it is actually “more solid than it first seems” (*Ak* 6.4.1605). This more positive evaluation continues throughout the rest of Leibniz’s life. In his late writings on the problem of evil,

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<sup>1</sup>For more on the general reception of privation theory in the seventeenth century, see Newlands, “Evils, Privations, and the Early Moderns.”

<sup>2</sup>All translations from Leibniz are mine, except where I cite an English edition, though I have sometimes consulted existing English translations of other passages when available.

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Leibniz even defends traditional privation theory against those who would reject it as illusory, useless, or overly obscure.<sup>3</sup> What is going on here?

I am not the first to be puzzled by Leibniz's apparent shift on this topic. Michael Murray, for example, presents Leibniz's changing views on privation theory as an unsolved interpretive puzzle:

It is interesting to note that, for reasons still not clear, Leibniz comes to favor, in later life, the scholastic "privation" view he rejected in his youth. . . . The role that this revived position is supposed to play for Leibniz in his later writings awaits further scholarly investigation.<sup>4</sup>

However, before we can determine why Leibniz so starkly changed his mind about privation theory, we should be sure that he really *did* change his mind in the first place. I will argue here that, initial appearances to the contrary, Leibniz did not change his mind about privation theory: the theory later embraced by Leibniz under the name "privation theory" is not the same theory that the young Leibniz mockingly dismissed. Seeing this will also shed new light on Leibniz's own, distinctive metaphysics of evil: his "original limitation" theory.

I begin with a brief look at privation theory in its Scholastic setting in section 2. I show that in Scholastic discussions of evil, privation theory served two explanatory roles, one ontological and one causal. In section 3, I turn to Leibniz's early objections to privation theory, and show how they lay the groundwork for his later return to privation theory, at least in name. In section 4, I examine that return in the mid-1680s, the same period during which Leibniz develops his own theory of the origin and nature of evil. Against this backdrop, I argue that Leibniz's more positive remarks on privation theory represent another attempt by Leibniz to co-opt the mantle of traditional views for his own irenic purposes.

In the fifth and sixth sections, I explore Leibniz's own original limitation theory of evil in more detail and conclude that his re-appropriation fails in at least one crucial respect: his theory would have been rejected by adherents of traditional privation theory. This is a somewhat surprising result. On a topic about which Leibniz seems especially concerned to echo Christian tradition, he in fact departs from it in all but name. Hence, although Leibniz's views on the nature and cause of evil do undergo development, it is not the development toward traditionalism that he himself sometimes suggests.

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<sup>3</sup>T 29 and GP VI.449.

<sup>4</sup>Murray, "Leibniz on the Problem of Evil." To the extent to which the topic is even mentioned, many interpreters appear to take at face value Leibniz's word that he accepts Augustinian/Thomistic privation theory. For example, Michael Latzer writes that Leibniz "means by *privatio boni* neither more nor less than his forbears meant by it, and, to this extent, his is a fully traditional understanding of evil" (Latzer, "The Nature of Evil: Leibniz and His Medieval Background," 59). In general, however, there has not been much discussion of this topic. Robert Sleight raises the topic in several endnotes to *CP* and discusses aspects of it at greater length in an unpublished paper. Maria Rosa Antognazza touches on aspects of Leibniz's understanding of privation theory in her "Metaphysical Evil Revisited." Outside of scholarship in English, three books are especially noteworthy. Gaston Grua's landmark *Jurisprudence universelle et théodécie selon Leibniz* contains a rich discussion of these topics, esp. 346–67. More recently, Paul Rateau has provided the most textually exhaustive treatment of evil in Leibniz that is also sensitive to the developments of Leibniz's thought (Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*). Lastly, Agustín Echavarría generally shares my conclusion about Lubin's relation to Leibniz (section 6.2 below) in his recent *Metafísica leibniziana de la permisión del mal*, esp. 80–148.

One obvious goal of this paper is to shed fresh light on Leibniz's views on a central topic in medieval and early modern theodicies. This discussion will also tie together some of Leibniz's distinctive metaphysical theories from the 1680s that underlie his own metaphysical account of the nature and source of evil. It also provides another window into one of the most discussed issues in Leibniz studies today: how to best understand and treat the developmental character of Leibniz's thought. The upshot of Leibniz on privation theory for this general topic is a cautionary tale: we ought not always accept Leibniz's own genealogical claims about the origins and shifts of his maturing views.

## 2. SCHOLASTIC BACKGROUND

In this section, I will examine the Scholastic version of what I will call "traditional privation theory." I will focus on Aquinas and Suárez, two of the great bookends of medieval Scholasticism. Readers should be forewarned: lest we never get back to Leibniz, I will sacrifice thoroughness for incisiveness. There is undoubtedly much more to be said about Scholastic accounts of evil in general, and privation theory in particular, than I do here.<sup>5</sup> I will mostly focus on those elements that foreshadow my discussion of Leibniz's views in later sections. The privative account of evil played two explanatory roles in Scholastic accounts of evil, one ontological and one causal, which I will discuss in turn.

### 2.1 *Scholastics on the Nature of Evil*

At the heart of privation theory is an answer to an ontological question about evil: what is it? Since at least Augustine, many believed that a proper ontology of evil should precede and inform discussions of the causes of evil.<sup>6</sup> Leibniz shared this pre-modern interest in what we might think of as the *metaphysics of evil*, an explanatory project that precedes more familiar theodician inquiries. (Of course, examining the nature and source of evil was not an entirely independent project; Leibniz and the Scholastics agreed that a suitably characterized ontology and causal theory of evil could help theists defend their beliefs in the holiness and justice of God in light of the world's evils.) An important question for us will be whether Leibniz ultimately agrees with the Scholastic metaphysics of evil, despite what he sometimes claims.

According to traditional privation theory, evils are absences of perfections that a thing ought to have.<sup>7</sup> To use a stock medieval example, the evil of blindness is the lack of sight in a thing that, by its nature, ought to see. In Scholastic Aristotelianism, the nature of a thing was given by its intrinsic *telos*: the end toward which a thing

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<sup>5</sup>It is not even clear that the points that I extract from Scholastic discussions of evil were ones that centrally occupied the Scholastics themselves, though they were at the heart of late seventeenth-century discussions of evil. For a canvassing of recent work on other topics related to evil that are not so metaphysically charged and that were also of interest to the Scholastics, see Bonnie Kent, "Evil in Later Medieval Philosophy."

<sup>6</sup>Notice, for instance, how Augustine opens *On Free Choice of the Will* and the way Aquinas's discussions of evil proceed in *De Malo*, *ST*, and *SCG*.

<sup>7</sup>See Aquinas, *De Malo*, q 1, art 1 and *SCG* IIIa.7; Suárez, *DM* XI.1.3 (which includes a helpful historical survey of the view).

tended determined the perfections or excellences it ought to have. A subject was evil, therefore, insofar as it lacked perfections that, by its telic nature, it ought to have. Among other things, this meant that the lack of sight would be an evil for a goat but not an evil for a rock.<sup>8</sup>

This account of the nature of evil avoided two alternatives that were repeatedly rejected in Western Christianity. The first, traditionally associated with Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism, claimed that evils had a positive reality of their own.<sup>9</sup> This understanding of evil could not be consistently combined with two other central Scholastic doctrines. First, goodness and being are convertible, which meant that to the degree to which a thing or any of its properties are real or have being (*esse*), to that degree the thing or its properties are also good—and vice versa.<sup>10</sup> Second, God is the primary source of all and only goodness, which, by the convertibility of goodness and being, entails that God is also the primary source of all and only reality or being. This doctrine extends to properties or aspects of things too: that which is to some degree good and real has God as its primary source. As Aquinas puts it, “[E]very being, whatever the mode of its being, must be derived from the First Being.”<sup>11</sup> Aquinas also expresses this point in terms of God being the primary source of all the *reality* in things: “Therefore, as every real thing needs to come from the first and universal cause, so every reality in things needs to come from the first and universal good.”<sup>12</sup> (Leibniz will later echo this formulation, as we will see.)

But if, per Manichaeism, evils had positive reality, it would follow by the convertibility thesis that their reality was, in fact, good—which contradicts the initial assumption that they are evil. Furthermore, if evils were real, God would be the source of them; but since God is the source of only goodness and being according to the second doctrine, we again reach a contradiction. The Scholastic tradition therefore rejected any view according to which evils had a positive reality of their own.

The second ontological alternative to privation theory stems from Neoplatonism and is much closer to the ontology of privation theory. This view, which I will call “evil-as-negation,” claims that evils are just a *lack* of being, goodness, perfection, and reality. Evils are therefore equivalent to limitations or metaphysical imperfections. This shares with privation theory the denial of any being or reality to evils in themselves. Nonetheless, the bulk of the Western Christian tradition rejected the evil-as-negation view as inadequate.<sup>13</sup> For one, as Aquinas points out, it is too coarse-grained to distinguish between what are, intuitively, mere lacks and what are genuine evils:

<sup>8</sup>Aquinas, *ST I*, q 48, art. 5, ad 1.

<sup>9</sup>It was usually added that particular evils were caused by a fundamental, active evil being or principle, but any view that attributed a positive reality or active essence to evil itself was rejected as too Manichaean. In a section on “The Madness of the Manichaeans,” Suárez highlights some of the most influential Christian objections to the view (Suárez, *DM X*.iii.4).

<sup>10</sup>Aquinas, *ST I*, q 5, art 3 and q16, art 3; and Suárez, *DM X*.iii.

<sup>11</sup>Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q 79, art 2.

<sup>12</sup>Aquinas, *De Malo*, q 1, art 1.

<sup>13</sup>Aquinas, *ST I*, q 48, art 3; and Suárez, *DM XI*.i.3. For an early modern version of this rejection, see Descartes, *CSM II*.38.

Absence of good, taken negatively, is not evil; otherwise, it would follow that what does not exist is evil, and also that everything would be evil, through not having the good belonging to something else; for instance, a man would be evil who had not the swiftness of the roe, or the strength of a lion. But the absence of good, taken in a privative sense, is an evil.<sup>14</sup>

Aquinas also objects in this passage that on the evil-as-negation view, everything will be to some extent evil, since every creature is, by its nature *qua* creature, limited.<sup>15</sup> We should be careful not to reduce this concern to a terminological dispute about the extension of the word ‘evil.’ What Aquinas sometimes calls non-evil “defects,” “limitations,” or “imperfections,” Leibniz will call “metaphysical evils” in his late writings.<sup>16</sup> But that terminological difference is not as important as Aquinas’s main concern here: the 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. These concerns will become important later when we turn to Leibniz, as I will argue that Leibniz ultimately settles on a sophisticated version of the evil-as-negation view.

## 2.2 Scholastics on the Cause of Evil

Concerning the cause of evils, there is a basic tension at the heart of Scholastic teaching.<sup>17</sup> As we saw in the previous section, Aquinas claimed that God is the primary source of all and only good things, which, by the convertibility of goodness and being, meant that God is the primary source of every being. Furthermore, most Scholastics agreed that God is not just the initial or remote source of every being: God’s providence is such that God is also an *immediate* causal source of everything real.<sup>18</sup> According to Scholastic ontology, actions themselves have reality and are beings; hence, God must be an immediate and primary source of every action as well.<sup>19</sup> However, when it came to *sins*, there was equally strong pressure on Scholastics to deny that God was an immediate source of sinning.<sup>20</sup> So while

<sup>14</sup>Aquinas, *ST I*, q 48, art 3; see also q 48, art 5, ad 1.

<sup>15</sup>Suárez also makes this point against the evil as negation view: “[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” (Suárez, *DM XI.i.3*; translation slightly modified; see also *DM XI.iii.18*).

<sup>16</sup>See *T 21*; Leibniz defends his extension of the term elsewhere (*GP III.574*). Leibniz is joined by others at the start of the eighteenth century in extending the term ‘evils’ to such metaphysical limitations: see also King, *De Origine Mali*, 37; and Clark, *Demonstration*, 78–79.

<sup>17</sup>As will become clear, I am mostly interested here in what we might think of as the *metaphysics* of causing evil. I will focus almost exclusively on the category of moral evils (i.e. sins), what Scholastics, following Augustine, called “evils of fault.”

<sup>18</sup>Aquinas, *SCG IIIa.76*. These Scholastics argued that the primacy and immediacy of God’s causal contribution was consistent with the existence of efficacious natural agents. They developed elaborate accounts of God’s general co-operation, or *concurrence*, with secondary causes to defend this compatibility, though that will not be my primary focus here. For an overview, see Fredosso, “God’s General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is Not Enough,” and “Suárez on God’s Causal Involvement in Sinful Acts.”

<sup>19</sup>Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q 79, art 2; Leibniz makes a similar point in an early passage (*CP 127*).

<sup>20</sup>Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q 79, art 1. Among Protestants, the doctrine that God is not the author of sin was later affirmed in the Augsburg, Belgic, Westminster, and London Baptist confessions, among many others.

in their causal theory Scholastics wanted to make God an immediate source of every action, in their moral theory they wanted to deny that God was an immediate source of moral evil. The privative nature of evil presented a way of reconciling these two demands, which I will describe as its “causal role.”

The basic strategy was to affirm that God is an immediate cause of whatever perfection and reality there is in sin, while tracing back the deficiency in sin entirely to creatures. Aquinas summarizes this tracing strategy: “And, likewise, whatever there is of being and action in a bad action is reduced to God as the cause; whereas whatever defect is in it is not caused by God, but by the deficient secondary cause.”<sup>21</sup> Aquinas marks this distinction by claiming that God is an immediate cause of the *act* of sin, but not of the *defect* of sin (the sinfulness of sin, we might say).<sup>22</sup> Sometimes a similar distinction was made between the *material* aspect of sin, to which God contributes, and the *formal* aspect of sin, for which creatures alone are responsible.

Regardless of the formulation, one might wonder why the defective/formal aspects of sin do not also require an immediate divine cause. Aquinas’s answer harkens back to the privative nature of evil: the defective quality of sin is a privation, a lack of reality. But God does not contribute to *lacks* of reality; God is the source of all *and only* reality or perfection. The privative nature of moral evil thus illuminates how God need not be the cause of the sinfulness of sin, while nonetheless contributing to the act of sin. As Suárez summarizes this move,

[Sin] does not follow from the perfection or activity of the proximate cause, but from an imperfection and lack. Therefore, it does not follow from what the cause receives from God, but rather from what it has from itself . . . a secondary cause does not need God’s cooperation insofar as it does not act, but only insofar as it does something; therefore, this evil has no way of being attributed to God either mediately or immediately.<sup>23</sup>

As Suárez makes clear, by denying that God is a cause of sin, Scholastics did not mean that sins, qua privative defects, have no causes whatsoever. Aquinas and Suárez do deny that sins, as privations, have final or formal causes.<sup>24</sup> But they agree that there is a subject that bears the privations, namely “a substance with being,” so there must be at least a material cause of moral evil.<sup>25</sup> What about the efficient cause of sin? Although they deny that God is the efficient cause of any moral evil, they agree that moral evils have an efficient cause, namely the free wills of creatures.<sup>26</sup> Aquinas’s and Suárez’s explanations of this point are, of course, much longer and more elaborate, but only two further details will be needed here.

<sup>21</sup>Aquinas, *ST I*, q 49, art 2, ad 2.

<sup>22</sup>Aquinas, *ST I–II*, q 79, art 2, and *De Malo I*, art 1–2.

<sup>23</sup>Suárez, *DM XI.iii.22*.

<sup>24</sup>Aquinas, *ST I*, q 49, art 1; Suárez basically agrees, though he admits that there is an extended sense in which evils can have a formal and final cause (Suárez, *DM XI.iii.5*, and *XI.iii.12*).

<sup>25</sup>Aquinas, *SCG IIIa.11*; see also Aquinas, *De Malo I*, art. 1; Suárez *DM XI.iii.6*. This prevented Scholastics from making the absurd claim that there is nothing real to the evils of our world, though privation theory is sometimes misrepresented as saying just that.

<sup>26</sup>Aquinas, *De Malo I*, art 3 and *III*, art 2; *ST I–II*, q 79, art 2; *ST I*, q 49, art 1, ad 3; Suárez, *DM XI.iii.18*. Given their views that all willing is done *sub specie boni*, the Scholastics further agreed that evil as such is never intended. To use Aquinas’s terminology, evil has a merely *accidental* efficient cause (see Aquinas, *De Malo*, q 1, art 3 and *SCG IIIa.4*; Suárez *DM XI.iii.5*).

First, Aquinas and Suárez agree that the efficient cause of actual sins need not be traced further back than to the creature's misused freedom. As Aquinas claims, "[T]here is no need to seek a cause of this nonuse of the aforementioned rule, since the very freedom of the will, by which it can act or not act, is enough to explain the nonuse."<sup>27</sup> Secondly, although causing sin presupposes some creaturely limitations or defects, those limitations taken together are insufficient to produce sin. At most, such deficiencies produce the capacity for sinning. This is another way of stating their critique of the evil-as-negation view: sins involve but also outstrip mere limitations. The conditions prior to freely willed actions fail to explain why an agent sins rather than does not sin. The free choice of the agent makes that difference. I now turn to Leibniz's early criticisms of privation theory.

### 3. LEIBNIZ'S EARLY REJECTION OF PRIVATION THEORY

In a pair of papers from the early 1670s, Leibniz rejects and even mocks traditional privation theory.<sup>28</sup> As I noted in the introduction, Leibniz describes privation theory in these early writings as "a manifest illusion . . . a leftover from a visionary philosophy of the past; it is a subterfuge with which no reasonable person will ever be satisfied" (CP 111). He even suggests that the theory is something of a philosophical embarrassment, however noble its ambitions: "Of course, one says things in order to excuse God that are so lame that a defense attorney with similar arguments before a reasonable judge would be ashamed" (CP 23). Even worse, these "lovely lawyers of divine justice" (CP 23) actually fail to accomplish what they set out to do: they "are removed from Calvin in name only in a manner of speaking; and they make God the author of sin without saying so, although they claim to do just the opposite" (CP 113). With defense lawyers like the Scholastics, Leibniz wonders, who needs prosecutors?

Putting aside the rhetorical flourishes, Leibniz summarizes the Scholastic view as follows: "Concerning the important question of *the author of sin*, it is commonly believed that one may avoid the difficulty by claiming that sin in its essence is nothing but a pure privation without any reality, and that God is not the author of privations" (CP 111). As this passage indicates, Leibniz thinks privation theory was employed to prove that God is not the author of sin. Leibniz's overarching complaint is that privation theory fails to do this.

Let us look briefly at two of Leibniz's arguments for this conclusion. His first argument relies on an entailment premise and a closure principle, and targets a claim like one made by Aquinas: "God is the cause of the act [of sin] in such a way that nowise is He the cause of the defect accompanying [*concomitantis*] the act, so that He is not the cause of the sin."<sup>29</sup> According to Leibniz's entailment premise,

<sup>27</sup>Aquinas, *De Malo* I, art 3; see also Suárez, *DM* XI.iii.18. Suárez endorses a more staunchly libertarian account of human freedom than Aquinas sometimes appears to accept, but on the above point, both are in agreement. Leibniz rejects this condition on human freedom in his early writings (e.g. CP 23–27), but disagreements over the conditions on free action will not play a significant role here.

<sup>28</sup>"Von der Allmacht und Allwissenheit Gottes und der Freiheit des Menschen" (Ak 6.1.537–46) and "L'auteur du peche" (Ak 6.3.150–51). I will cite both texts from their translation in *CP*; citing their relevant page numbers (CP 23 and CP 111–13) should suffice to disambiguate them in this section, though they overlap closely in the relevant content.

<sup>29</sup>Aquinas, *ST* I–II, q 79, art 2, ad 2.

the morally defective aspects of a sin follow from the existence of its non-moral, “positive” aspects. “For, in fact, the privation is nothing but a simple result or infallible consequence of the positive aspect, without requiring a separate author” (CP 113). Applying this premise to God, Leibniz concludes, “God does everything from which the [sinful] deed follows” (CP 23). One might reasonably think Aquinas agrees, at least on a strong reading of Aquinas’s “accompanying” relation.

Leibniz’s closure principle states that an agent is responsible for whatever is known to be a consequence of that agent’s causal contributions. Leibniz is not clear about exactly what sort of consequence relation he has in mind, nor about what sort of responsibility is supposed to closed under it. During this early period, Leibniz himself rejects some closure principles, such as ones applied to willing.<sup>30</sup> In this context, Leibniz seems most concerned to defend the closure of *causal* responsibility under some form of relevant (and known) entailment. To deny such a closure principle, Leibniz suggests, would be “as though someone were a cause of the number three and wanted to deny that he was a cause of its oddness” (CP 23). Likewise, “it would be a joke to say that [someone] is the author of everything that is real [in an effect] without, nevertheless, being the author of the privative aspect” (CP 111). But if both the entailment and closure claims are true, then if God is the author of the positive or real aspects of sins (as Scholastics admit), then God is also responsible for the sinfulness of sins. Hence, the traditional distinctions—material/formal, real/privative, act/sin—fail to absolve God from being the author of sins.

Leibniz’s second objection involves a kind of *reductio*: the reasoning used by advocates of privation theory to show that God is not the author of sins, if sound, would also demonstrate that humans are not the author of their sins either. “I am amazed these people did not go further and try to persuade us that man himself is not the author of sin, since he is only the author of the physical or real aspect, the privation being something for which there is no author” (CP 113). Indeed, “I do not see why one holds the sinner himself to be a cause of sin . . . these are the lovely lawyers of divine justice, who will at the same time make all sinners unpunishable” (CP 23).<sup>31</sup>

In this objection, Leibniz targets the claim that evils are not caused by God because, as *lacks* of being, privations need no cause. Descartes could be read as claiming something like this: “As for the privation involved—for which is all that the essential definition of falsity and wrong consists in—this does not in any way require the concurrence of God, since it is not a thing.”<sup>32</sup> However, Leibniz objects, if the privative nature of moral evil does not have a Divine cause because, as a *lack* of being, it requires no such cause, then human agents are not the causes of evil either. If God does not cause absences, how can we? And if we can, why cannot God?

<sup>30</sup>CP 63, though notice that he is denying the closure of willing under known entailment when willing is defined in terms of “taking delight in” (CP 55). Frustratingly, Leibniz sometimes even omits the word for “consequence” or “following from” in formulating his closure principles.

<sup>31</sup>Leibniz expresses his point here in terms of sinners not being *punishable*, but I think he means that sinners would not be *causally or morally responsible* for their sins.

<sup>32</sup>Descartes, CSM II.42/AT VII.60–61; see also CSM I.201/AT VIII.14 and I.204/AT VIII.17. For more on Descartes’s relation to privation theory, see Newlands, “Evils, Privations, and the Early Moderns.” Leibniz clearly had Descartes partly in mind, since he continues, “And it surprises me that the profound Descartes stumbled here too” (CP 23).

For what it is worth, I do not think the Scholastics (or Descartes) would have found either of Leibniz's objections very troubling. With respect to the second objection, advocates of traditional privation theory did not claim that moral evils, as privations, lack (efficient) causes altogether. As I noted in section 2.2, moral evils have efficient causes according to Scholastics: the free volitions of sinful creatures.<sup>33</sup> Privation theory was used to show how sinful creatures *could* be the efficient causes of evil without requiring the immediate causal contribution of God. It was not used to show that God is *not*, in fact, the author of sin—just that God need not be, despite being an immediate cause of every act. That is, the causal role of privation theory showed the *consistency* of two claims; it did not seek to demonstrate their truths as well.<sup>34</sup> Leibniz's own wording of the entailment claim in his first objection points to similar hole: even if the sinful aspect need not "require a separate author," it does not follow that it *cannot have* a separate author.

I also doubt that Leibniz in turn would find this line of reply satisfying. Here we arrive at what I take to be the more fundamental point of disagreement between Leibniz and the Scholastics. At bottom, what Leibniz most rejects is the idea that the distinctions and applications of traditional privation theory *demonstrate* that God is not the author of sin. "For to say that God is not the author of sin, *because* he is not the author of a privation, although he can be called the author of everything that is real and positive in the sin—that is a manifest illusion" (*CP* 111; my emphasis). Similarly, in a milder rebuke of privation theory in his "Confessio Philosophi" (1672–73?), Leibniz suggests, "I suppose that this is what is meant by those who have said that the substance of the act, but not the evil, is from God, *although they have been unable to explain how it is that the evil does not result from the act*" (*CP* 41; my emphasis). Even if the Scholastics did not take themselves to be offering such a proof with privation theory, Leibniz thinks a demonstration that God is not the author of sin is nonetheless needed. As we will see shortly, Leibniz came to believe he had discovered one.

Given what Leibniz takes to be the deficiencies of privation theory, why does he think it became so widespread? Leibniz offers an interesting answer:

Compared with this battering ram [that "God himself creates and makes the sins of the world"], what some scholastics cited from the words of several holy Church Fathers and—*because there was nothing better available*—was seized by many sensible people with outstretched arms. (*CP* 23; my emphasis)

In other words, Leibniz thinks Scholastic privation theory was attractive because there was no better option available to demonstrate that God is not the author of sin . . . at least prior to Leibniz coming onto the scene. I think Leibniz saw this lack of a viable alternative as an opportunity to develop and advance his own account of the metaphysics of evil.

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<sup>33</sup>As Leibniz makes clear in the final main paragraph of "Von der Allmacht . . .," he rejects the underlying libertarian account of freedom held by many Scholastics, but that is a separate dispute (*Ak* 6.1.546).

<sup>34</sup>Presumably, Scholastics would point to the concept of a perfect being or to revealed truths for evidence that God is not the author of sin (see Suárez, *DM* XI.iii.22).

In light of this, it is important to note those aspects of privation theory that Leibniz does *not* criticize in these early writings.<sup>35</sup> For one, Leibniz does not object to the ontology of privation theory, at least as he understands it. In fact, he claims to accept it:

Perhaps it will be said that [this moral aspect of sin] consists in *anomie*, as holy Scripture calls it, or in the lack of conformity of the action with respect to the law, which is a pure privation. *I agree with that, but I do not see what it contributes to the clarification of the question.* (CP 111; my emphasis)

This is a telling point of agreement. Leibniz represents himself as fundamentally agreeing with privation theory's ontological claims, and I see no reason to doubt his sincerity here.<sup>36</sup> Hence, when Leibniz later begins to advocate privation theory, I think he genuinely takes himself to be advocating an ontological account of evil that he has accepted all along.

Likewise, Leibniz does not reject the distinctions that were used in the causal role of privation theory, such as the Thomistic distinction between the real or positive aspects of sin—the *act* of sin—and the morally deficient aspects of sin—the *sinfulness* of sin. Leibniz even goes out of his way to affirm this distinction while criticizing the use to which it had been put.<sup>37</sup> Since in his later account of evil, Leibniz continues to distinguish the sources of what is positive and perfect in evil from what is lacking and deficient, this is another point of continuity both across Leibniz's thought and between the early Leibniz and the traditional privation theory he once criticized.

#### 4. LEIBNIZ'S "SHIFT"

In the mid-1680s, Leibniz begins to write more positively about traditional privation theory. He even voices support for its causal role in a way that seems directed against his own earlier criticisms: "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" (Ak 6.4.1605). This more positive evaluation extends to both the ontological and causal roles and continues throughout the rest of Leibniz's writings on evil. In the early 1700s, he claims, "This doctrine also, that sin is of a privative nature, is from Augustine and should not be rejected" (DPG 73).<sup>38</sup> In the *Theodicy*, Leibniz cites the Scholastics approvingly by name: "So the Platonists, Saint Augustine, and the Scholastics were correct in saying that God is the cause

<sup>35</sup>For a reading that takes Leibniz's early objections to be far more sweeping, see Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 244–73; I take the passages cited below to be compelling evidence against this reading.

<sup>36</sup>Therefore, when Leibniz writes that "what some scholastics have said . . . is unsound, namely, that sin is a nothing, that it consists in a lack of the appropriate perfection, that God is the cause only of creatures and of actually existing things and not of the originating imperfection" (CP 23), I do not think his critique is focused on the ontology of privation *per se*, but rather on the application of it to show that God does not "create and make the sins of the world" (CP 21), a point the rest of that paragraph bears out.

<sup>37</sup>Leibniz describes this distinction as "good in and of itself," even though it "has been abused somewhat" (CP 111); see also CP 41 and CP 127.

<sup>38</sup>See also T 29.

of the material aspect of evil, which consists in positive [reality], and not in the formal aspect, which consists in privation" (*T* 30).<sup>39</sup>

How should we interpret these positive comments in light of Leibniz's earlier criticisms? One possibility, of course, is that Leibniz simply changed his mind about the merits of traditional privation theory. Another is that he is only advocating those pieces of the theory that he had accepted all along (see section 3). However, I think something subtler is going on here.

In his *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686), Leibniz claims, "[I]t 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" (*D* 30; my emphasis). Similarly, in the lengthy "Examen religionis Christianae," probably drafted around the same time, Leibniz writes, "And the opinion of Saint Augustine *is reduced to this*, that the cause of evil is not from God, but from nothing, that is, not from anything positive, but from privation, *that is, from the very creaturely limitation we have discussed*" (Ak 6.4.2358; my emphasis). In the second draft of the "Rationale fidei Catholicae" (1685?), Leibniz explains, "the cause of evil is in non-being or privation, that is, in the natural limitation or weakness of things, or, *what comes to the same thing*, in the original imperfection which is prior to original sin itself" (Ak 6.4.2322; my emphasis).

The wording of these texts suggest that Leibniz's change of tune about traditional privation theory is actually an instance of a familiar Leibnizian strategy: develop a theory on one's own and then claim that important historical figures really had that theory in mind all along. In this case, Leibniz had been developing his own "original limitation theory" during the early-to-mid 1680s, which was an account of the nature and origin of evil that Leibniz embraced for the rest of his career. It is not a coincidence that in virtually all of the places in which Leibniz appears most sanguine about traditional privation theory, he is quick to explicitly link traditional talk of privations to his own original limitation account.<sup>40</sup>

I will explore Leibniz's original limitation theory in more detail in the next section, where it will become clear that Leibniz believed his theory played the same ontological and causal roles of traditional privation theory, while avoiding the objections he had raised in the 1670s. This presented an attractive temptation to Leibniz: why not simply *identify* traditional privation theory with his own functionally similar and problem-free account? I think Leibniz yielded to this

<sup>39</sup>See also AG 114 (GR 364) and GP VI.449.

<sup>40</sup>In addition to the passages just cited in which Leibniz thrice equates privation theory with his own theory, see also GR 364; *T* 20; *T* 29–30; *T* 32; *T* 33; GP VI.383; and GP VI.449. The one exception I know of is the very early "Confessio Philosophi" (1672–73?), in which Leibniz speaks somewhat positively about the Scholastic account of evil without mentioning his (yet-undeveloped) original limitation theory. However, even in this early passage, he makes the same sort of co-opting move:

I suppose that this is what is meant by those who have said that the substance of the act, but not the evil, is from God, although they have been unable to explain how it is that the evil does not result from the act. They would have said more correctly [what Leibniz has been saying, namely] that God contributes everything to sin except will. (*CP* 41)

So although his own metaphysics of evil had evolved by the 1680s, Leibniz had been using a traditional mantle to advance it since his earliest major piece on the problem of evil.

temptation in the 1680s, in which case Leibniz's shifting remarks on privation theory are borne not from *reconsideration* but from *re-appropriation*. By the end of his life, Leibniz even suggests that his own version helps clarify traditional privation theory, which might otherwise seem "useless" and "obscure" (GP VI.449). So he is not only co-opting the traditional view—he is even cleaning it up a bit for us.

But there is a twist to this story. Leibniz's own original limitation theory would have been soundly rejected by the very tradition he is trying to appropriate. In other words, "Saint Augustine and the Scholastics" would have denied that their opinion could be reduced to Leibniz's view, since they explicitly reject the metaphysics of evil that Leibniz ends up endorsing. Before turning to their potential criticisms, we need to look more closely at Leibniz's own metaphysics of evil from the 1680s.

#### 5. LEIBNIZ'S ALTERNATIVE: ORIGINAL LIMITATION THEORY

During the first half of the 1680s, Leibniz developed his "original limitation theory" (henceforth "OLT"), an account of the nature and source of evils.<sup>41</sup> This account systematically draws together several central Leibnizian metaphysical doctrines from the 1680s and crystallizes a theodician strategy that he had been working on since the early 1670s. Here are two fairly standard statements of OLT, the first from the second draft of "Rationale fidei Catholicae" (1685?) and the second from the *Theodicy* (1710):

[T]he cause of evil is in non-being or privation, that is, in the natural limitation or weakness of things, or, what comes to the same thing, in the original imperfection which is prior to original sin itself. . . . Therefore, this limitation and imperfection depends on the idea of things, that is, their essences, and not on God's will. . . . (Ak 6.4.2322)<sup>42</sup>

[W]here will we find the source of evil? The answer is that it must be sought in the ideal nature of the creature, insofar as this nature is contained in the eternal truths that are in the understanding of God, independently of his will. For one must consider that there is an *original imperfection in the creature* prior to sin, because the creature is essentially limited. . . . (T 20)<sup>43</sup>

Leibniz was characteristically optimistic about the promise of his OLT. He thought it could adequately address longstanding theodician concerns about the origin and nature of evil, as we will see. He also thought it could help resolve explosive seventeenth-century theological disputes about God's general concurrence, election, reprobation, and human freedom.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, as I claimed in the previ-

<sup>41</sup>Rateau cites Leibniz's reading notes to Bellarmine (Ak 6.4.2577, 1680–84?) as his earliest use of the label (Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 248). I do not disagree, though Leibniz does use very similar terminology in German as early as 1670–71 to describe evil (cf. Ak 6.1.544: "entstehenden Unvollkommenheiten").

<sup>42</sup>Interestingly, Leibniz does not explicitly refer to this doctrine in the first draft of "Rationale fidei Catholicae," though he hints at it (Ak 6.4.2307). The Akademie edition editors note that there is not enough information to precisely date the different drafts, which is unfortunate, since otherwise we may have been able to pinpoint the developmental timeline even more precisely.

<sup>43</sup>OLT also appears in other important late Leibnizian texts, such as "Monadology" (AG 218), "Principles of Nature and Grace" (AG 210), and "Causa Dei" (GP VI.449).

<sup>44</sup>For some of these other applications of OLT, see Ak 6.4.1522–24; Ak 6.4.1593–94; and Ak 6.4.1606–8.

ous section, Leibniz thought OLT could preserve the true kernel of traditional privation theory. In the rest of this section, I will unpack OLT, starting with some of the background doctrines at work in it. This background is worth rehearsing, as I think Leibniz found OLT compelling in large part because of how elegantly it connected up with other pieces of his metaphysics from this period.

### 5.1 *The Background of OLT*

Some elements in Leibniz's reflections on the metaphysics of evil during the 1680s are not new—nor are their attendant problems. In the passages just quoted, Leibniz emphasizes that the source of evil is found in the contents of God's understanding and not in God's will. Leibniz had pursued this intellectualist account of the source of evil since at least the early 1670s. He claimed in his earliest full theodicy, "Confessio philosophi," that God's intellect, and not God's will, is the ultimate ground of sin: "I think, therefore, that sins are not due to the divine *will* but rather to the divine *understanding* or, what is the same, to the eternal ideas or the natures of things" (CP 41). Leibniz used this point to deny that God is the *author* of sin, since "God contributes everything to sin except will" (CP 41). In his OLT, Leibniz returns to this intellectualist strategy, emphasizing again that the ultimate origin of evil is not found in God's will, lest God become the author of sin: "[F]or the primary origin of imperfection is not from God's will, but from the essential limitation of creatures prior to all sin" (Ak 6.4.1607).<sup>45</sup>

A persistent worry about this intellectualist strategy is that it also undermines contingency, since the objects of God's understanding are not under God's volitional control. Hence, the objection runs, sins turn out to be necessary, a conclusion Leibniz was loath to accept. Throughout the 1670s and 1680s, Leibniz offers a number of responses to this concern. Some of these responses appeal to God's *contingent choice* to create a world containing sins in order to vouchsafe the contingency of those sins. However, that appeal raises fresh concerns about God's being the author of sin, since God wills the existence of the series of things from which the existence of sins inevitably follow. Leibniz's early work on the problem of evil seesaws back and forth between these two poles, as the "Confessio philosophi" wonderfully illustrates. Emphasize God's intellect to show how God is not the author of sin, only to face the specter of necessitarianism. Emphasize the role of God's will to avoid necessitarianism, only to raise the threat of God being the author of sin.

Since Leibniz continues in the 1680s to emphasize that God's understanding, and not God's will, is the source of evil, we might expect a return to this back-and-forth between intellect/necessitarianism and will/author of sin. If so, we will not be disappointed. By grounding the origin of evil in God's intellect, Leibniz realizes that he must also show how sins are not necessary, though without making God the author of sin. I believe that by the mid-1680s, Leibniz thought he had discovered the additional metaphysical machinery needed to successfully avoid both horns of the dilemma. I will very briefly outline three of these metaphysical

<sup>45</sup>See also Ak 6.4.2322.

commitments, all of which will be familiar to Leibniz's readers: (1) the grounding of possibilities thesis, (2) the complete concept theory, and (3) the doctrine of creaturely composition. We will then see how OLT sits at the intersection of these metaphysical doctrines and provides Leibniz the basis for a distinctive account of the nature and origin of evil.

I have already alluded to the first doctrine, what I call Leibniz's "grounding thesis." According to this thesis, the essences of creatures, prior to creation, are among the "internal objects" or "objective realities" of God's ideas.<sup>46</sup> Following Scotus, Leibniz claims that God's intellectual activities—God's thinking His ideas—give creaturely essences their reality. Here is one of many passages in which Leibniz affirms this doctrine:

It is true that God is not only the source of existences, but also that of essences insofar as they are real, that is, of the source of that which is real in possibility. This is because God's understanding is the realm of eternal truths or that of the ideas on which they depend. (*M* 43/*AG* 218)<sup>47</sup>

Leibniz emphasizes the non-volitional nature of this grounding: "it is the divine understanding that makes the reality of eternal truths, while his will plays no part at all" (*T* 184).<sup>48</sup> So the reality of creaturely essences, like that of necessary truths, is grounded in the intellectual activities of God.

Although the grounding thesis was developed first, it dovetails nicely with Leibniz's famed "complete concept theory" of individual substances. According to the complete concept theory, every individual substance has "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" (*D* 8/*AG* 41). The grounding thesis indicates the ontological foundation of these fully determinate, possible individual substances: they are among the objects of God's ideas. Their complete concepts include "the basis and reason for all the predicates which can be truly said of" a given substance (*D* 8/*AG* 41). Among these predicates are *contingent* properties, such as Caesar's crossing the Rubicon and, more relevantly, Peter's denying Christ: "And thus everything that will happen to Peter or Judas, both necessary and free, is contained in the perfect individual notion of Peter or Judas" (*AG* 32). Here again, worries about necessitarianism emerge. How can a conceptual truth be contingently true? We will look at one of Leibniz's answers from this period shortly, as it will be relevant to OLT.

Before turning there, we need one more piece of the Leibnizian system before us, his doctrine of creaturely composition. Since the content of the complete concepts of individual substances is not determined by God's actual volitions, one might wonder just what *is* the source of all this rich conceptual content.<sup>49</sup> Leibniz's

<sup>46</sup>For the first description, see *M* 46/*AG* 219; for the second, see *Ak* 6.4.1600 and *GP* III.33. I discuss Leibniz's grounding thesis at length elsewhere (Newlands, "Leibniz on the Ground of Possibility").

<sup>47</sup>For other passages from a variety of periods (though this list is by no means exhaustive), see *CP* 43; *DSR* 29; *Ak* 6.4.17–19; *D* 2/*AG* 36; *LA* 61; *Ak* 6.4.1635; *AG* 151–52; *GR* 365; *NE* 155; *T* 42; *T* 184; and *GP* VI.449.

<sup>48</sup>See also *T* 380; for a passage from the 1680s affirming this, see *D* 2/*AG* 36.

<sup>49</sup>As I have presented his grounding thesis, the *reality* of creaturely essences comes from the activities of God's intellect. But that does not entail that the *content* of those essences is also due to God's thinking, though it is consistent with it. For more on this issue, see Newlands, "Leibniz on the Ground of Possibility."

answer, the creaturely composition doctrine, draws on other ideas he had been developing independently in the late 1670s.

In his work on the ontological argument, Leibniz claimed that God's perfections were maximal degrees of purely positive, simple, unanalyzable, gradable properties.<sup>50</sup> This provided a source for the positive perfections of possible creatures needed by his grounding thesis: perhaps basic creaturely perfections are just lesser versions of basic divine perfections. Similarly, perhaps the more complex positive properties of creaturely essences could be reduced to combinations of lesser degrees of divine perfections. To account for the *imperfections* in creatures, Leibniz could then appeal to the limitations built into the essences of creatures themselves. That is, the perfections of possible creatures are grounded in God's own perfections, and the imperfections are grounded in the limitations of those essences, that which restricts the degree to which a creature could instantiate the maximal degree of a divine perfection. As Leibniz summarizes the idea, "Every perfection of a creature is from God, every imperfection is from its own limitation" (Ak 6.4.2351).<sup>51</sup> This allowed Leibniz to decompose the basic concepts of creatures into (a) positive properties that stem primarily from God and (b) limitations on those properties that stem from the essences of creatures.<sup>52</sup>

However, since we are seeking the source of the content of the essences, it is hardly enlightening to claim that the limitations in essences stem from the limitations in essences. Where exactly do the limitations and imperfections come from? Leibniz sometimes claims that creatures are combinations of "God" and "nothing," and that their limitations are just that: negations, nothing. Reducing basic creaturely properties to combinations of perfections and nothing fit nicely with Leibniz's new binary number system, a point he liked to emphasize.<sup>53</sup> However, it is unclear how the simple negations of divine perfections could provide enough determinate content for all positive creaturely properties. The fact that I am not omnipotent cannot alone establish how much power I have.<sup>54</sup>

Leibniz's more apt metaphor for the relation between divine and creaturely perfections is in terms of a *limit* or *boundary*, akin to the way that the area of a square is bound by the length of its side. In his "Dialogue on Human Freedom and the Origin of Evil" (1695? henceforth "Dialogue"), Leibniz explains his appeal to negation or nothingness in these terms: "God's understanding is the source of

<sup>50</sup>E.g. *DSR* 101–3; his main focus was on the possibility premise of ontological argument, but his account of divine attributes turned out to have other uses as well.

<sup>51</sup>For a later version, see *M48/AG* 219. Leibniz also uses the limited essences of creatures to help keep God and possible creatures ontologically distinct (prior to creation), even though the reality of the former is, in a sense, contained in the reality of the latter (Ak 6.4.990).

<sup>52</sup>Ak 6.4.2313–14. An ever-present danger for Leibniz is to neat up this account by dropping the 'primarily' qualifier and claiming that God contributes *only* the positive, real perfections, whereas creatures contribute *only* limitations, thereby collapsing his system into a form of occasionalism. Leibniz sometimes resists this temptation, but for places where he succumbs, see GR 486; *T* 392; GP VI.348–49; and GP VI.383.

<sup>53</sup>This is especially clear in a 1698 letter to Schulenburg (Ak 2.3.790301 [*Vorausedition*, available online only]), though see also *M* 2; *L* 368; GR 371; and AG 113–15.

<sup>54</sup>For discussions of this concern, see Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 122–23; Adams, "The Priority of the Perfect"; Fichant, *Science et métaphysique dans Descartes et Leibniz*, 85–119; and Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 262–70.

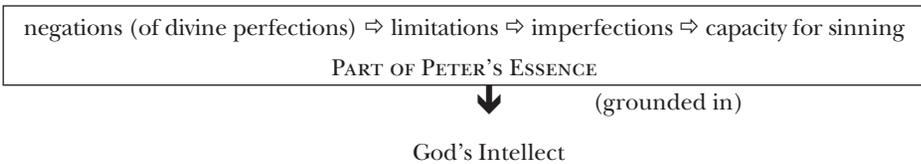
the essences of created things, such as they are in him, that is, *bounded*. If they are imperfect, one can only blame their limitation on their boundaries, that is to say, the extent of their participation in nothingness” (AG 114–15; my emphasis).<sup>55</sup> On this version, creaturely essences are constituted by combinations of limited instances of primitive divine perfections.<sup>56</sup> I will refer to this thesis as Leibniz’s “creaturely composition doctrine.”<sup>57</sup>

With these compressed summaries in place, we are now ready to see how Leibniz uses his grounding thesis, complete concept theory, and creaturely composition doctrine to explain the nature and origin of evil.

### 5.2 OLT and the Source of Evil

According to OLT, the source of evil is found in the essences of creatures. The reality of these essences is grounded in God’s intellect [grounding thesis]. The basic content of these essences is provided by combinations of limited versions of primitive divine perfections [creaturely composition doctrine]. Leibniz had been consistently linking the notions of negation, limitation, and imperfection since the early 1680s,<sup>58</sup> and in OLT, he pulls them together into the following account: the *negations* of divine perfections constitute creaturely limitations. Those *limitations* constitute a creature’s non-moral imperfections, what Leibniz will later characterize as “metaphysical evils.” In the essences of rational creatures, some of those imperfections constitute the capacity for sinning.

To illustrate, consider one of Leibniz’s favorite examples of a moral evil: Peter denies Christ. OLT yields the following picture, where the horizontal arrows represent relations of constitution:



This account does not yet explain the origin of moral evil, however, since it only explains Peter’s *capacity* for sinning. Since part of Peter’s complete concept includes the property *betrays Christ* [complete concept theory], Leibniz needs a bridge to move from Peter’s capacity to sin to his particular sins, prior to Peter’s actual existence. (It is vital to remember in what follows that this is all in God’s mind, prior to any volitional activity.)

<sup>55</sup>See also GP VI.449.

<sup>56</sup>If one then seeks a further source for the distinctive character of these limitations in various creaturely essences, I think Leibniz’s reply is to go primitive: there is nothing further in virtue of which a given essence has the limitations it has. That is just what it is to be that particular essence.

<sup>57</sup>For critical discussion of what I am calling Leibniz’s creaturely composition doctrine, see Adams, “The Priority of the Perfect.”

<sup>58</sup>See, for example, Ak 6.4.401, 556, 560, 567, 576, and 864.

It is very difficult to pin Leibniz down on the move from the capacity for moral evil to its realization in OLT, as his language is frustratingly ambiguous. In “De libertate, contingencia, et serie causarum, Providentia” (1689?), Leibniz writes, “Sins arise [*oriuntur*] from the original limitation of things” (Ak 6.4.1657).<sup>59</sup> A few lines later, he uses a slightly different word: “However, limitations and, proceeding [*nascens*] from them, sins. . . .” In “De libertate, fato, et gratia Dei” (1686–87?), Leibniz employs one of the most elusive connecting terms in Latin, ‘*ratio*’: “[A]t times, the imperfection is so great that it constitutes the basis [*rationem*] of a sin” (Ak 6.4.1605). Nor is this vagueness limited to the 1680s. In his later “Causa Dei,” Leibniz claims that the “true root [*radix*] of the fall is in the original imperfection or weakness of creatures” (GP VI.451). In the *Theodicy*, he uses a more explicitly causal locution (“*viennent*”) to describe the relation between imperfections and errors or evils (T 31).

All of these terms admit of a stronger and weaker reading. On the weaker reading, the imperfections of rational creatures provide the grounds of sin in that they only fulfill (some of) the necessary conditions for sinning. They help make sins possible, but they do no more than that. In “Causa Dei,” Leibniz suggests something like this weaker reading: “Thus the foundation of evil [i.e. the original limitations of creatures] is necessary, but the [actual] arising of evil is contingent; what is necessary is that evils are possible, whereas what is contingent is that evils are actual” (GP VI.449).<sup>60</sup> The stronger reading is that limitations and imperfections, at least when they reach a certain degree, produce or result in sins. Or, as Leibniz might prefer to put it, the relevant imperfections having been posited, sin follows.

If it were not for the hermeneutics of charity, I would say that Leibniz surely intended the stronger reading.<sup>61</sup> For one, the weaker reading is too weak as it stands. Leibniz is clear that the original limitations do not just make sins in rational creatures possible. They also *incline* creatures toward sinning. Leibniz explains, “[T]he cause of sins is not in God’s will, but in the creature’s will, which, by the nature of things and unless sustained by experience or God’s grace, is prone [*prona*] to make judgments on things not sufficiently understood” (Ak 6.4.2312).<sup>62</sup> Again, “it is the very concept of the creature, insofar as it involves limitation, which is the one thing it does not have from God, that draws [*contrahente*] the act towards depravity” (Ak 6.4.1524).<sup>63</sup> According to passages like these, original limitations make rational creatures inclined toward sinning, a disposition that goes beyond merely making sins possible.

Secondly, Leibniz explicitly plunges across the divide between capacity and realization of sin with OLT in at least one passage. In a letter to Molanus in 1698, Leibniz writes, “I said that all creatures are essentially limited, and I called this

<sup>59</sup>See also T 388.

<sup>60</sup>The next phrase in Gerhardt surely contains a mistaken ‘non’: “*non contingens autem per harmoniam rerum a potentia transit ad actum. . . .*” At least, I cannot see how to translate this phrase accurately without making it contradict the preceding sentence and many other passages in Leibniz.

<sup>61</sup>For a lively reading that Leibniz most certainly *did* intend this, even though he could not say it publicly, see Russell, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, 196–202.

<sup>62</sup>I understand “the nature of things” to refer to the original creaturely limitations and “to make judgments on things not sufficiently understood” to refer to an intellectual sin.

<sup>63</sup>See also Ak 6.4.1605; T 33; T 167.

limitation or negation a privative imperfection, and I added that this is the source of evil, *not only the capacity to sin, but also sin itself*" (GR 412; my emphasis). Read in isolation, this sentence suggests that some original limitations *are* sufficient for sins and provide more than the disposition to sin. However, in the very next sentence, Leibniz adds, "For if creatures had every grade of perfection, they would not fall." Murkiness returns. For if that addition is an explication of the previous sentence, then it looks like his previous claim was actually stating a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for sinning after all, contrary to initial appearances.

Leibniz had very good reasons to be cagey here. Like almost everyone else in the period, Leibniz thinks sins most immediately result from the free and contingent volitions of creatures. Leibniz was surely aware that if he said that the original limitations of Peter sufficed for Peter's denial of Christ, he could easily be misinterpreted as neglecting these more immediate free causes. Leibniz shows his awareness of this concern in "De libertate creaturae rationalis" (1686). He first states, "[T]he state of the creature, whether before or after the fall [into sin] was inclined towards sin from its very nature." He adds a sentence later, "However, the state [of actually sinning] is voluntary; and although there is an inclination towards sinning, nevertheless there is not yet actual sin" (Ak 6.4.1593–94).<sup>64</sup>

Leibniz marks a distinction between the proximate and remote causes of moral evil in the *Theodicy* to drive home the ineliminable role of creaturely *freedom*: "[F]ree will is the immediate cause of the evil of fault . . . although it is true that the original imperfection of creatures, which is represented in the eternal ideas, is the first and most remote cause" (T 288).<sup>65</sup> That is, free choices play an ineliminable and more immediate role in bringing about moral evil, but bringing about moral evil is *ultimately* caused by the original limitations themselves. Leibniz again seems content to blur the gap between the capacity and realization of sin, so long as the creature's choice is included as part of the unfolding causal sequence that originates in its original and essential imperfections.

Similarly, Leibniz emphasizes the existence of *contingency* within his OLT:

It is the same with minds less firm in sustaining themselves, whose original imperfection arises from their essence, which is bounded in accordance with their degree. Their sin, which is only something accidental or contingent (*though it is grounded in their essence, without, however, resulting from it as a necessary consequence*) arises from their will. (AG 117; my emphasis)

At the very least, this means that contained in God's complete concept of Peter are *both* Peter's essential limitations and Peter's contingent and free decision to betray Christ. To add this step to our diagram, we need another connector. A filled-in horizontal arrow will represent a consequence of a freely willed choice:

negations (of divine perfections) ⇒ limitations ⇒ imperfections ⇒ inclination toward + free choice → Peter betrays  
sinning Christ

<sup>64</sup>A few lines later he again emphasizes that the inclination toward sin is consistent with freely sinning; see also Ak 6.4.1657.

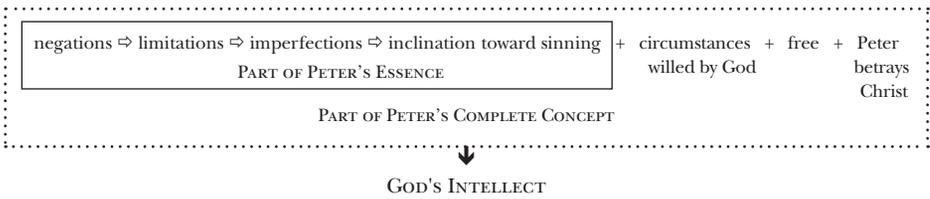
<sup>65</sup>See also T 388, in which Leibniz emphasizes that "vice and crime arise through the free, internal operation of the creature."

Leibniz tries out a variety of strategies during the 1680s to demonstrate how freedom and contingency are consistent with his complete concept theory. One tactic is to carve out a role for God’s will in Peter’s decision to betray Christ.<sup>66</sup> Of course, since this is all logically prior to any actual volition by God, Leibniz cannot appeal to God’s *actual* decree. Instead, Leibniz appeals to God’s volitions “considered as possible” in order to help secure the contingency of the conceptual truth that Peter, if created, betrays Christ.

The key point for OLT is that Peter’s complete concept also includes “circumstances” freely and contingently willed by God (considered as possible), if Peter’s subsequent decision to betray Christ is to be free:

However, these individual [circumstances] are not therefore necessary, and neither do they depend on the divine intellect alone. On the contrary, they also depend on the divine will insofar as those decrees are considered as possible by the divine intellect. . . . And so what I have said remains the case, according to this explanation: contingency does not depend only on essences but also on the free decrees of God. Hence there is no necessity in these things, except in a certain way, namely, as hypothetically necessary (Ak 6.4.1600–1601).

This suggests the following yet fuller picture of OLT, where all these relations are contained in God’s intellect, prior to God’s actual willing anything at all:

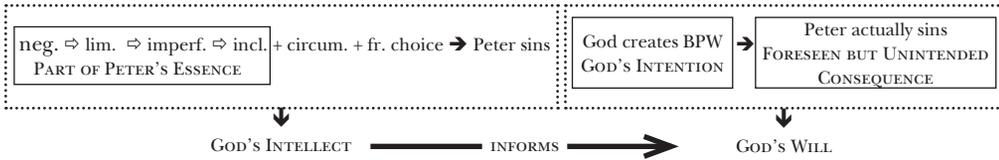


However, as soon as Leibniz adds God’s will back into OLT to preserve contingency, fresh worries about God being the author of sin return. The seesaw tilts back again. With characteristic insight, Leibniz raises this very concern in the next two paragraphs of “De libertate, fato, et gratia Dei.”<sup>67</sup> Leibniz’s main reply throughout his writings on evil is that “God neither causes nor wills evils, but merely permits them” (Ak 6.4.1603).<sup>68</sup> More fully, God wills the existence of the best possible world as a whole, an essential and ineliminable part of which is Peter’s sinning. As he had in his early “Confessio Philosophi,” Leibniz denies that God’s intention is closed under known entailment, and he insists with something like the Doctrine of Double Effect that God favors, intends, and is morally responsible only for willing the best, a foreseen but otherwise unintended consequence of which is the existence of sin. We now have the main steps needed to move from Peter’s original limitations to his actual sinning. Here, then, is the fuller Leibnizian OLT in relation to other pieces of his theodicy from the 1680s:

<sup>66</sup>Leibniz’s fullest discussion of this tactic is Ak 6.4.1599–1601; see also Ak 6.4.1456; Ak 6.4.1522–24; and *LA* 55–57.

<sup>67</sup>See Ak 6.4.1601–2, in which Leibniz begins, “And, having defended human freedom, it seems that divine holiness is surrendered. For God certainly settles all questions: those that are absolutely necessary, by understanding them alone, i.e., by contemplating the ideas of His intellect.” He then notes, given that God’s will is also involved in settling contingent truths, it may seem “at the very least that God wills evils and is the author of sin.”

<sup>68</sup>The “merely permits” strategy has its roots back in the “Confessio philosophi,” *CP* 61–65.



### 5.3 *OLT and the Nature of Evil*

As I argued in section 4, Leibniz tried to map traditional privation theory onto his own OLT. In this section, I will concentrate on his attempt to fit the Scholastic ontology of evils into his own metaphysics of evil.

During the 1680s, Leibniz regularly associates privations with negations, limitations, and/or imperfections.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the associations are so frequent and tight that Leibniz often *identifies* privations with one of these categories, in both theodician and non-theodician contexts. In the early 1680s, Leibniz produced pages upon pages of definitions of basic concepts. He occasionally defined privations, and when he did, it was usually as a negation. For instance, he writes in “Definitions” (1680?), “The good is that which contributes to perfection. But the more perfect is that which involves more essence. The privative is what one calls a negation, the positive is what one calls an affirmation” (Ak 6.4.405).<sup>70</sup> Most often, Leibniz contrasts privations with “the positive,” such as in “Generales inquisitiones de analysi notionum et veritatum” (1686): “The privative is not-A. . . . The positive is A. . . . Every term is understood as positive, unless it is noted that it is privative” (Ak 6.4.740).<sup>71</sup> In these logical works, Leibniz understands a privation to be the negation of positive property or perfection.

This identification of privation with negation and limitation also occurs when Leibniz is discussing OLT and traditional privation theory. Leibniz writes around 1686, “[T]he cause of evil is in *non-being or privation*, that is, in the natural limitation or weakness of things, or, what comes to the same thing, in the original imperfection which is prior to original sin itself” (Ak 6.4.2322; my emphasis).<sup>72</sup> Recall also the passage quoted earlier from the *Discourse*, in which Leibniz “reduces” Augustine’s view to “the opinion that the root of evil is in nothingness, that is to say, in the *privation or limitation* of creatures” (D 30/AG 62; my emphasis). In “De libertate, fato, et gratia Dei,” Leibniz reiterates these connections: “For every privation consists in imperfection, every imperfection in limitation” (Ak 6.4.1605).

Leibniz continues to identify privations with negations or limitations in his later writings on evil.<sup>73</sup> Consider again Leibniz’s remark to Molanus, quoted previously: “I said that all creatures are essentially limited, and I called this limitation or negation a *privative imperfection*” (my emphasis). He adds two weeks later, “Yet,

<sup>69</sup>For a very early version, see Ak 6.1.158.

<sup>70</sup>Leibniz also includes “privation” among a list of lengthy list of primitives (Ak 6.4.409).

<sup>71</sup>See also 6.4.409, 634, 636, 874, 1141, 1168, and 1260.

<sup>72</sup>See also Ak 6.4.2358.

<sup>73</sup>It also occurs in a late discussion of general physics: “But I should still think that the idea of rest is privative, that is, that it consists only in negation” (NE 130).

the origin of evil is from privations, that is, from the limitations of things” (GR 412–13).<sup>74</sup> In the *Theodicy*, Leibniz combines his logical account of privations with OLT: “In general, perfection is positive; it is an absolute reality. Fault is privative; it comes from limitation and tends towards new privations” (T 33). Here faults or imperfections come from privations, a point about constitution that he repeats later in an appendix to the *Theodicy*: “[I]mperfection comes from limitation, that is to say, from the privative” (GP VI.383). In short, for Leibniz, the privative nature of evil consists in it being a mere negation or limitation.

Leibniz’s account of privations coheres very well with his OLT, but it blurs the distinction between mere negation and privation that the Scholastics had insisted upon. In fact, I have only found two passages in which Leibniz respects the Scholastic distinction between negation and privation. One is from his very early “Von der Allmacht . . .” (1670–71?), where he states the Scholastic view “that sin is a nothing, that it consists in the lack of the *appropriate* perfection” (CP 23; my emphasis). The other is from a much later letter to Jacquelot: “The formal aspect of sin consists in a voluntary privation from due perfection” (GP VI.568).<sup>75</sup> Everywhere else, even where Leibniz is articulating the Scholastic view, he collapses the distinction between negation/limitation and privation.<sup>76</sup> This alone would have given Scholastics significant pause concerning Leibniz’s proposed “reduction” of their views to his own OLT.

## 6. CRITICIZING LEIBNIZ

I have argued that Leibniz tried to claim the mantle of traditional privation theory with his OLT and related metaphysical doctrines from the 1680s. What would the Scholastics have thought of Leibniz’s attempted appropriation? In this section, I will argue that the Scholastics would have rejected OLT as giving a false metaphysics of evil.

As I mentioned in the introduction, this is a surprising result, given how hard Leibniz tries to state his own metaphysics of evil in Scholastic-friendly ways. In addition to the examples already cited, consider how Leibniz formulates OLT in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, which closely approximates a passage in Suárez’s disputation on evil:

**Leibniz:** [E]ven before [the first actual sin], there was an original imperfection or limitation connatural to all creatures, which makes them liable to sin or capable of error. . . . 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. (D 30/AG 62)

**Suárez:** [Moral evil] presupposes an imperfection that is intrinsic and connatural to the creature, and this imperfection consists in being mutable and defective. Moreover, speaking formally, the creature does not have this imperfection from another cause, but rather from itself, because it comes from nothing and is of limited and finite perfection in its own kind. . . . Moreover, this natural imperfection, although it may not be evil—for it is not a privation, but a mere negation—can nevertheless be the origin of evil.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup>See also AG 114.

<sup>75</sup>In his reading notes to Lobkowitz, Leibniz also reproduces the distinction, though he is closer to directly citing Lobkowitz (Ak 6.4.1338).

<sup>76</sup>Rateau also picks up on this slip; see Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 253 and 583.

<sup>77</sup>Suárez, *DM* XI.iii.18 (slightly modified translation).

The similarities are striking and surely intended by Leibniz. And yet, just below the surface, Leibniz's account of the metaphysics of evil in OLT departs significantly from Suárez's version. Recall from section 2 that privation theorists sought to avoid two unwanted positions: the Manichean view that evil has a positive reality and the Neoplatonic view that all evil is mere limitation. Leibniz comes close to Manichaeism in some of his formulations of OLT (section 6.1), and outright embraces Neoplatonism in most others (section 6.2). At no point does Leibniz hit the desired middle ground of traditional privation theorists. I conclude (section 6.3) by considering what Leibniz might have made of these criticisms.

### 6.1 *Leibniz the Manichean?*

Thanks largely to the work of Bayle, the charge of Manichaeism had once again become an intellectual weapon in the late seventeenth century. However, it is important to distinguish two senses of Manichaeism, a stronger, more traditional sense and a weaker, more liberal sense idiosyncratic to Bayle. I will claim that Leibniz avoids the more traditional version of Manichaeism, but not the Baylian version.

On the traditional version, an ontology of evil is Manichean if it ascribes to evil an active power. Call this strong Manichaeism (SM). On the more promiscuous sense that Bayle endorses, an ontology of evil is Manichean if it ascribes to evil an active *or passive* power.<sup>78</sup> Call this weak Manichaeism (WM). SM entails WM, but not vice versa.

The closest Leibniz comes to either SM or WM is in his discussion of the relationship between creaturely limitations and moral evils. As we saw in section 5.2, Leibniz denies that creaturely limitations are responsible for only the bare capacity for moral evil. At minimum, creaturely limitations provided a "tendency" and "inclination" toward sinning. I also quoted various passages in which Leibniz claims these original limitations "diminish," "corrupt," "restrain," and "restrict" God's activity, "drag" actions toward evil, and "tend toward" the production of new evils. Paul Rateau describes this tendency in Leibniz as a kind of "anti-conatus," one that goes beyond mere "absence or privation of the good" to become "a conatus opposed to the good movements that come from God."<sup>79</sup> Certainly the language of "dragging" and "corrupting" sounds quite active, and so it can seem that Leibniz ascribes to the origin of evil a kind of active nature that lands him in both SM and WM.

Nonetheless, the power of original limitations is merely a *passive* power for Leibniz. As he puts it in the *Theodicy*, original limitations and imperfections "limit the production of God" (T 388).<sup>80</sup> In fact, Leibniz explicitly denies attributing any active power to evil, explaining that "evil comes only from privation; the positive enters only by accompaniment." A few lines later, he adds, "[I]t is [only] by accident that privation involves action and force . . . evil comes from privation; the positive and action arise by accident, as force arises from the cold" (T 153). Fur-

<sup>78</sup>See esp. Bayle, "Manichaeans," rem D (thanks to Todd Ryan and Michael Hickson for extensive discussions about Bayle on evil).

<sup>79</sup>Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz*, 258 and 261, respectively (my translations).

<sup>80</sup>See also GP VI.383 and 450.

thermore, in section 5.1, I cited the “Dialogue” passage in which Leibniz describes the original limitations of creatures in terms of boundaries to God’s perfections. While original limitations act as *limits* or bounds on perfections, their power is only in this passive, restricting mode.<sup>81</sup> For these reasons, I think Leibniz avoids SM.

Bayle seems to think that placing *any* restriction, passive or active, on the power of God is tantamount to affirming Manichaeism. If so, then Leibniz is clearly guilty of Manichaeism, so understood. Leibniz might emphasize in reply that he does not posit any kind of *external* constraint on God’s power. According to his grounding thesis (section 5.1), original creaturely limitations, like necessary truths, are grounded in God’s intellect. At most, Leibniz must admit that God’s *volitional* power ranges over only the possibilities represented by God’s ideas, but virtually all theists who are not Cartesians about modal truths allow that there are some truths (such as the law of non-contradiction) over which God does not have volitional control. Hence, if positing any limitations on God’s volitional power, even ones internal to God’s own nature, suffices for endorsing WM, then Leibniz is guilty of WM—as would be the great majority of traditional theists who likewise reject modal voluntarism. So much the worse for the sting of WM, we should probably conclude.<sup>82</sup>

## 6.2 Leibniz the Neoplatonist

Whereas Leibniz’s OLT avoids the traditional charge of Manichaeism, it fares much worse when it comes to the sin of Neoplatonism. To be sure, Leibniz rejects the additional Neoplatonic claim that *matter* is inherently evil and the source of every other evil.<sup>83</sup> But as we saw in section two, Scholastics also rejected the more general Neoplatonic evil-as-negation ontology of evil. It is here, I think, that they would also have most strongly objected to Leibniz’s OLT.

Leibniz’s slide toward the evil-as-negation view has cropped up repeatedly already. As we saw in section 5.3, Leibniz regularly ignores the Scholastic distinction between privations and negations and repeatedly defines the privative in terms of negations, limitations, and/or imperfections. Contrast this with how cleanly and sharply Suárez distinguishes negations from privations in passage quoted in section 6.

Furthermore, as I pointed out in section 5.2, Leibniz sometimes endorses the view that moral evils are *constituted* by a heightened degree of limitation or imperfection. As Leibniz puts it, “[A]t times, the imperfection is so great that it constitutes the basis [*rationem*] of a sin” (Ak 6.4.1606). We saw how Leibniz repeatedly emphasizes that the pathway from limitation to sin must still run through the sinner’s will and external circumstances. But given Leibniz’s metaphysics of agency, the step between the ground of sin and sin itself is causally traceable to the preceding original limitations, a point he explicitly affirms in the passage quoted from

<sup>81</sup>Leibniz sometimes follows Augustine and Aquinas in describing the passive powers of limitations as “deficient causes” (T 33). For discussion of this notion in Leibniz, see Schmaltz, “Moral Evil and Divine Concurrence in the *Theodicy*.”

<sup>82</sup>Leibniz also has plenty to say *against* the sort of voluntarism required by the denial of WM. See, for starters, D 2/AG 36.

<sup>83</sup>T 380.

T 288. By contrast, the Scholastics categorically rejected any connection between limitations and moral evil stronger than mere capacity-making.

Lastly, as we saw in section 5.1, Leibniz's OLT and creaturely composition doctrine leads him to conclude that creaturely essences are at least partly constituted by limitations on or negations of divine perfections. Leibniz's inference that the origin of evil is therefore found in "the extent of [an essence's] participation in nothingness" (AG 115) places his metaphysics of evil squarely into the Neoplatonic, evil-as-negation camp.

Leibniz can be shockingly upfront about this. In "Causa Dei," he refers to "what we have affirmed concerning the privative constitution of evil, following Augustine, Thomas, Lubin, and other ancients and moderns . . ." (GP VI.449). One of these names is not like the others. Eilhard Lubin was a Lutheran professor of poetry and divinity at the turn of the seventeenth century. Most notably, Lubin published *Phosphorus: de prima causa et natura mali* (1596), in which he argued that everything sprang from two eternal sources: God and nothingness.<sup>84</sup> Lubin presents and defends an explicitly and thoroughly Neoplatonic conception of evil (replete with a lovely diagram<sup>85</sup>), in which he readily collapses the distinction between privation and lacks (or "nothing") and claims that moral evil flows (*effluxit*) from nothingness and tends toward nothingness.<sup>86</sup> As expected, Lubin was denounced by the orthodox Lutherans of his day, including by the prolific and feisty Albert Grawer in his *Antilubinus* (1606), which includes a helpful "Catalogue of Paradoxes by Lubin."

Leibniz acquired Lubin's book around 1663,<sup>87</sup> and he initially indicated his opposition to Lubin's view of the origin of sin, though at some point later he crossed out that note of disagreement.<sup>88</sup> Almost 50 years later, Leibniz suddenly included Lubin with Augustine and Aquinas as a *defender* of traditional privation theory, despite Lubin's denounced departure from it. 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. No wonder Leibniz lumps "the Platonists, Saint Augustine, and the Scholastics" together as all holding the same ontology of evil (T 30)!

In light of Leibniz's positive evaluation of Lubin the avowed Neoplatonist, consider anew Leibniz's "Dialogue," in which he avoids Manicheanism only to fall immediately into the Neoplatonic evil-as-negation view ('[B]' is Leibniz's spokesman):

[A] . . . To account for sin, there must be another infinite cause capable of counterbalancing the force of divine goodness.

[B] I can name you such a thing.

[A] You would therefore be a Manichaeian, since you admit two principles, one of good and the other of evil.

<sup>84</sup>See, for example, Lubin, *Phosphorus*, 52–55.

<sup>85</sup>Lubin, *Phosphorus*, 60.

<sup>86</sup>Lubin, *Phosphorus*, 212; see esp. 209–26. He also follows Neoplatonists in aligning matter with evil and nothingness (cf. Lubin, *Phosphorus*, 112), though clearly Leibniz rejects that part.

<sup>87</sup>Ak 6.2.19.

<sup>88</sup>Ak 6.1.496.

[B] You yourself will acquit me of this charge of Manichaeism when I name the other principle.

[A] Then please name it now, sir.

[B] It is nothingness.

[A] Nothingness? But is nothingness infinite?

[B] Not doubt it is; it is infinite, eternal, and it has many attributes in common with God. It includes an infinity of things, for all things that do not exist are included in nothingness, and all things that no longer exist have returned to nothingness.

[A] You are joking, no doubt. . . .

[B] No, I am not joking. The Platonists and Saint Augustine himself have already shown us that the cause of good is positive, but that evil is a defect, that is, a privation or negation, and consequently, it arises from nothingness or nonbeing.

A few exchanges later, Leibniz's spokesman adds in full Platonic garb, "If [the essences of things] are imperfect, one can only blame their limitation on their boundaries, that is to say, the extent of their *participation in nothingness*" (AG 113–15; my emphasis).

For all of the above reasons, I conclude that Leibniz's OLT is a sophisticated version of the evil-as-negation view. Unsurprisingly then, the Scholastics would have objected to Leibniz's account on the same grounds they objected to the older evil as negation account: it fails to distinguish sufficiently between moral evil and a "connatural" defect, it places too much responsibility for evil on God (even if not on God's *will*), it is too coarse-grained to distinguish appropriate and inappropriate perfections, and it reduces the origin of all evil into degrees of metaphysical limitations. In short, OLT gets the ontology of evil wrong. If so, then Leibniz has defended an ontology of evil under the name "privation theory" that would have been denounced by its original advocates.

I suspect that in Leibniz's mind, OLT was close enough to the Augustinian/Scholastic ontology of evil that the differences between Christian and Neoplatonists on the ontology of evil were negligible. After all, Leibniz thought he had in OLT a well worked out and systematic metaphysics of evil of his own that preserved God's holiness and our blameworthiness. It is possible that what Leibniz perceived to be the virtues of his own theory blinded him to the fact that the tradition of "the Platonists" and Lubin on the metaphysics of evil was *not* the tradition of "Augustine and the Scholastics." Maybe so, but as we have seen, the roots of Leibniz's misrepresentation of traditional privation theory runs back to some of his earliest writings on the metaphysics of evils. So if he had a blind spot, he had it for a very long time.

### 6.3 Conclusion: So What?

The fact that Leibniz's views are not as consistent with traditional privation theory as Leibniz would have his readers believe is philosophically and historically interesting, though I wonder how much it would have really bothered Leibniz.<sup>89</sup> My

<sup>89</sup>Clearly it would have bothered him if admitting his non-traditionalism would have undercut his irenic projects, but that is a different matter. This is one reason why I find his public endorsement of Lubin so startling.

own speculation is that realizing he was out of step with the dominant Western Christian understanding of the metaphysics of evil would have given Leibniz pause, though he would not have taken it to be a decisive reason to reject his preferred metaphysics of evil. After all, OLT plays the same explanatory roles as traditional privation theory, and it has the backing of a nest of interconnected metaphysical doctrines Leibniz believed worth accepting on independent grounds.

Leibniz might also reply that his OLT fares better against his early criticisms of privation theory than does the traditional version. But does it? Leibniz's persistent intellectualism shifts the origins of evil away from the divine will, and so, by his lights, he has shown how it is that God is not the intentional author of the *origin* of moral evil. And although God's decree to create the world is part of what makes sins actually exist, Leibniz's denial that God's intentions are closed under known entailment leads him to conclude that God is also not the author of *actual* moral evils. Nonetheless, by the same entailment and closure principles that Leibniz used to criticize traditional privation theory (section 3), God bears a kind of *causal* or *ontological* responsibility for sins according to OLT, even if it is not a *moral* responsibility. Hence Leibniz's God under OLT remains the ultimate source of sin, even if not its immediate and intentional cause. Whether or not Leibniz *should* be troubled by that conclusion is a topic for another occasion.

It may be hard for contemporary readers to appreciate what is even at stake in these debates on the metaphysics of evil, if one concedes for the sake of discussion (as I have in this paper) that Leibniz's OLT succeeds in preserving God's blamelessness for moral and metaphysical evils. However, I think that puzzlement would say more about us than about Leibniz and the Scholastics. The historical project of articulating the proper metaphysics of evil was not solely a prolegomenon to defending the justice or holiness of God in a theodicy. Many pre- and early moderns saw evil as raising independent explanatory questions for theists, questions that demanded a rich metaphysics of evil to answer. I have argued throughout this paper that Leibniz's answers in OLT were ultimately at odds with the main Scholastic version, in spite of his claims to the contrary. Nevertheless, Leibniz and the Scholastics agreed on this much: a proper theistic metaphysics requires a systematic, integrated account of the nature and origin of evil.<sup>90</sup>

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