

# God, Evil and the Best of All Possible Worlds

GOTTFRIED LEIBNIZ

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) was one of the greatest intellectuals of his time and regarded as a “universal genius.” In addition to being a great philosopher (who had major philosophical contributions in metaphysics, epistemology, logic, philosophy of action, and philosophy of religion), he was very important to the developing field of physics and to mathematics. For example, Leibniz was instrumental (along with Isaac Newton) in the development of calculus. He is perhaps best known for his thought that the existence of evil is compatible with God’s existence because this world is the best of all possible worlds.

SOME intelligent persons have desired that this supplement be made [to Theodicy], and I have the more readily yielded to their wishes as in this way I have an opportunity again to remove certain difficulties and to make some observations which were not sufficiently emphasized in the work itself.

**I. Objection.** Whoever does not choose the best is lacking in power, or in knowledge, or in goodness.

God did not choose the best in creating this world.

Therefore, God has been lacking in power, or in knowledge, or in goodness.

*Answer.* I deny the minor, that is, the second premise of this **sylogism**; and our opponent proves it by this:

*Prosylogism.* Whoever makes things in which there is evil, which could have been made without any evil, or the making of which could have been omitted, does not choose the best.

God has made a world in which there is evil; a world, I say, which could have been made without any evil, or the making of which could have been omitted altogether.

Therefore, God has not chosen the best.

*Answer.* I grant the minor of this prosylogism; for it must be confessed that there is evil in this world which God has made, and that it was possible to make a world without evil, or even not to create a world at all, for its creation has depended on the free will of

God; but I deny the major, that is, the first of the two premises of the prosylogism, and I might content myself with simply demanding its proof; but in order to make the matter clearer, I have wished to justify this denial by showing that the best plan is not always that which seeks to avoid evil, since it may happen that the *evil is accompanied by a greater good*. For example, a general of an army will prefer a great victory with a slight wound to a condition without wound and without victory. We have proved this more fully in the large work by making it clear, by instances taken from mathematics and elsewhere, that an imperfection in the part may be required for a greater perfection in the whole. In this I have followed the opinion of St. Augustine, who has said a hundred times, that God has permitted evil in order to bring about good, that is, a greater good; and that of Thomas Aquinas (in libr. II. sent. dist. 32, qu. I, art. 1), that the permitting of evil tends to the good of the universe. I have shown that the ancients called Adam’s fall *felix culpa*, a happy sin, because it had been retrieved with immense advantage by the incarnation of the Son of God, who has given to the universe something nobler than anything that ever would have been among creatures except for it. For the sake of a clearer understanding, I have added, following many good authors, that it was in accordance with order and the general good that God allowed to certain creatures the opportunity of exercising their liberty, even when he foresaw that they would turn to evil, but which he could so well rectify; because it was not fitting that, in order to hinder sin, God should always act in an extraordinary manner. To overthrow this objection, therefore, it is sufficient

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