

WHY GOD THINKS WHAT HE IS THINKING? AN ARGUMENT AGAINST SAMUEL NEWLANDS' BRUTE-FACT- THEORY OF DIVINE IDEAS IN LEIBNIZ'S METAPHYSICS

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Abstract. According to the most prominent principle of early modern rationalists, the *Principle of Sufficient Reason* [PSR], there are no brute facts, hence, there are no facts without any explanation. Contrary to the PSR, some philosophers have argued that divine ideas are brute facts within Leibniz's metaphysics. In this paper, I argue against brute-fact-theories of divine ideas, especially represented by Samuel Newlands in *Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility*, and elaborate an alternative Leibnizian theory of divine ideas.

I. INTRODUCTION

Together with Descartes, Leibniz claims that possibility and necessity are grounded in essences. Leibniz, entirely within the middle platonic tradition of Philo and St Augustin, “locates” essences of finite beings in God's mind. For Leibniz, essences are complete individual notions, i.e. sets of an infinite number of maximally consistent simple or complex divine ideas. But what are the divine ideas grounded in? Why does God's mind entail the ideas which it actually entails? In *Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility*¹ Samuel Newlands gives a distinctive answer to that question: “God has a primitively rich intellect.” In his paper, he argues “against the most plausible alternative, that the content of God's basic ideas is wholly given to God's mind by God's simple, extramental perfections.”² For Newlands, God thinks what he is thinking “without forcing the content of those thoughts to be reflected elsewhere in the divine nature.”³ The content of thinking, the simple divine ideas, are not grounded in something more fundamental: They are primitive facts within God's mind. It seems to me that, for Newlands, two main arguments for his brute-fact-theory exist. The first is as follows:⁴

- (1) If the reason for what God thinks is his own nature, there cannot exist any divine ideas of imperfections.
- (2) But obviously there are divine ideas of imperfections like ideas of bodies or pain.
- (3) So, God's nature cannot be the reason for what God thinks about, because God's nature does not entail any imperfection. [by *modus tollens* on (1) and (2)]

Similar to this argument from the existence of divine ideas of imperfections, Newlands argues that if someone claims that the simple divine ideas are no brute facts but grounded in divine nature, this grounding relation will end in Spinoza's *Deus sive natura*.⁵ By that he means that “[p]ossibilities [i.e. ideas, JLP] are

1 Samuel Newlands, “Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility”, *The Philosophical Review* 122, no. 2 (2013).

2 Newlands, “Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility”, 170, footnote 39.

3 Newlands, “Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility”, 178.

4 I reformulate Newlands' argument by referring to Newlands, “Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility”, 180.

5 Cf. Newlands, “Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility”, 180.

grounded in God by being *actually exemplified* in the divine nature. For example, it is *possible* that something has the nature of thought because God *actually* has the nature of thought.⁶ This consequence does not fit with Leibniz's conception of possibility: Everything which is possible would actually be exemplified in God's nature but Leibniz vehemently defends a fundamental distinction between possibles and actuals and holds that only a subset of that which is possible is actually exemplified. Hence, to avoid Spinoza's modal collapse and a bloated divine nature, Newlands argues for a brute-fact-theory of ideas.

Contrary to Newlands' arguments, I suggest that ideas cannot be primitive facts within the divine mind, because this assumption contradicts the *Principle of Sufficient Reason* [=PSR].⁷ In the beginning I will deal with Newlands' first argument by pointing out that premise (1) is implausible, and therefore, the conclusion (3) is unsound. Afterwards, I will argue for a grounded-in-the-divine-nature doctrine of divine ideas that claims that divine ideas are grounded in God's nature, but which avoids Spinoza's modal collapse and retains the fundamental distinction between possibles and actuals, and which furthermore guarantees the universal significance of the PSR.⁸

II. NEWLANDS' FIRST ARGUMENT

To reject Newlands' first argument, I need to explain what the antecedent of (1) means. Hence, I have to clarify to what Leibniz refers to with the terms 'divine nature' and 'thinking'.

II.1 The Antecedent: Leibniz on Divine Nature

For Leibniz the divine nature is "the 'aggregate' (cf. A VI, iii, 574) or conjunction of all perfections."⁹ And from *De formis seu attributis Dei* from 1676 it follows that God as the perfect being must entail an infinite number of perfections.¹⁰ For Leibniz, the divine nature is not simple but highly complex; it is a "bundle" of an infinite number of perfections. But what is a divine perfection for Leibniz? There are a lot of different definitions of a perfection in Leibniz's oeuvre. For example, perfection as degree of reality or as the ability to represent.¹¹ However, in Leibniz's revision of Descartes' ontological proof of God's existence in *Ens perfectissimum existit* from 1676, he says that a "perfection is a quality which is simple, positive and absolute."¹²

Furthermore, Leibniz emphasizes that a quality is simple, if it is not reducible to more basic qualities, since the quality of *being human* is reducible to the more basic qualities *being rational* and *being a living being*. And a little later Leibniz adds: "But since a quality of this kind is simple, it is therefore, indefinable or unanalysable."¹³ On the other hand, a quality is positive, if it is not a privation or negation.¹⁴ "If all perfections are positive, they involve no negations and thus would be consistent with all other such

6 Newlands, "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility", 162.

7 As Newlands himself points out in Newlands, "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility", 180–81. Shamik Dasgupta defends the thesis, that there exist things which are not apt for further explanation, therefore, the PSR is in some sense restricted, cf. Shamik Dasgupta, "Metaphysical Rationalism", *Noûs* 50, no. 2 (2016). Newlands does not seem to base his brute-fact-theory on Dasgupta's thesis, thus, I will not go into that.

8 I do not focus on premise (2) because it seems to be really plausible. For the entire story of creation Leibniz's God has to possess ideas of imperfections to contemplate complete individual concepts of creatures. In this paper I claim that these ideas of imperfections are not simple, but complex divine ideas, i.e. negated positive, simple, and absolute ideas.

9 Adams Robert Merrihew, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 113.

10 Cf. A VI, 3, 514.

11 Cf. A GP VII, 303; PNG § 13; M § 50.

12 A VI, 3, 577, transl. by the author.

13 A VI, 3, 577, transl. by the author.

14 Leibniz is not committed to the scholastic distinction between privation and negation, cf. A I, 15, 300; A VI, 4, 2322; GP IV, 455, GP V, 117; GP VI, 383. For Leibniz on privation and negation see Maria Rosa Antognazza, "Leibniz's Metaphysical Evil Revisited", in *New Essays on Leibniz's Theodicy*, ed. Larry Jorgensen and Samuel Newlands (Oxford Univ. Press, 2014) and Samuel Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52, no. 2 (2014).

perfections.¹⁵ Hence, God's existence must be possible, a consequence Leibniz wants to show in respect to his ontological argument. Finally, an absolute quality is unrestricted¹⁶, unconditional¹⁷ or unlimited¹⁸. If God's nature is the aggregate of all perfections, and all perfections are simple, positive and absolute qualities, God's nature is the aggregate of all simple, positive and absolute qualities.

II.2 The Antecedent: Leibniz on the Nature of Thinking

For Descartes, the nature of thinking is consciousness, but for Leibniz the essence of thinking is reflection.¹⁹ In *De reminiscencia et de reflexione mentis in se ipsum*, a Paris-note from April 1676, he mentions:

It seems that when I think of myself thinking and already know, between the thoughts themselves, what I think of my thoughts, and a little later marvel at this triplication of reflection, then I turn upon myself wondering and do not know how to admire this admiration.²⁰

For Leibniz, the mind is essentially able to think about itself and this capacity is iterative, i.e. by self-reflection the mind thinks about its thinking, and thinks about thinking about the thinking about itself, and so on *ad infinitum*. Finite beings are not able to perform an infinite iterative process of reflection, but, in principle, God as an atemporal being is able to do so.²¹ For sure, the term 'process' in this context is highly problematic, because if God is atemporal, God cannot perform discursive processes. The divine mind as an atemporal being seems to be able to enact an infinite number of iterative "loops" within one eternal act of contemplation, just as the *ars combinatoria* of divine ideas, complete individual notions, and possible worlds is performed by God's mind in one mental act.

Self-reflection is self-knowledge of a mind and in the *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas*, first published in the *Acta Eruditorum* in November 1684, Leibniz distinguishes two kinds of knowledge [*cognitio*]. *obscure* [*obscura*] and *clear* [*clara*]. The latter can be *inadequate* [*inadaequata*], *adequate* [*adaequata*], *symbolic* [*symbolica*] or *intuitive* [*intuitiva*]. Leibniz points out that only adequate and intuitive knowledge is perfect knowledge.²² Because God is the perfect being for Leibniz, his self-knowledge must be perfect. Therefore, it has to be adequate and intuitive knowledge. In the *Meditations* Leibniz says about adequate knowledge:

But in composite notions, since, again, the individual marks composing them are sometimes understood clearly but confusedly, like heaviness, color, solubility in *aqua fortis*, and others, which are among the marks of gold, such knowledge of gold may be distinct, yet *inadequate*. When everything that enters into a distinct notion is, again, distinctly known, or when analysis has been carried to completion, then knowledge is *adequate* [...].²³

For example, we are able to have clear knowledge of gold without having clear knowledge of the constituents of gold. So, we are able to have a clear notion of gold, without having a clear notion of gold's heaviness, for example. And we have an adequate knowledge of gold, only if we do not have the clear notion

15 Ohad Nachomy, "On the Source of Impossibility in Leibniz's Paris Notes and Some Remarks on Time and Space as Packing Constraints", in *Leibniz on Compossibility and Possible Worlds*, ed. Gregory Brown and Yual Chiek (Springer International Publishing, 2016), 27.

16 Cf. C 51 and 60.

17 Cf. A VI, 2, 397.

18 Cf. A VI, 3, 502.

19 This point is controversial. I follow the so-called *reflective approach* elaborated especially by McRae and Kulstad in Robert McRae, *Leibniz: Perception, Apperception, and Thought* (Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976). And Mark Kulstad, *Leibniz on Apperception, Consciousness, and Reflection* (Philosophia, 1991). For example, Christian Barth criticizes this approach in Christian Barth, "Leibnizian Conscientia and Its Cartesian Roots", *Studia Leibnitiana* 43, no. 2 (2011) and Christian Barth, *Intentionalität und Bewusstsein in der Frühen Neuzeit. Die Philosophie des Geistes von René Descartes und Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*. (Klostermann, 2017), 311–13.

20 L 161; A VI, 3, 516.

21 Cf. C, 76.

22 Cf. A VI, 4/A, 586.

23 AG 24; A VI, 4/A, 587. „[...] quia rursus notae singulae componentes interdum clare quidem, sed tamen confuse cognitae sunt, ut gravitas, color, aqua fortis, aliaque quae auri notas ingrediuntur, hinc talis cognitio auri licet distincta sit, inadaequata est tamen.“

of gold, but if the constituents of the notion of gold are themselves distinctly known. But Leibniz adds: “I don’t know whether humans have any perfectly adequate knowledge, though our knowledge of numbers certainly comes close²⁴. For God’s perfect mind, having adequate knowledge seems to be a necessary condition for Leibniz’s entire “metaphysical story of creation”, because God has to know and evaluate not only possible worlds, but also of their constituents such as complete individual notions and ideas. Therefore, God must have adequate knowledge to evaluate one of the possible worlds as the best possible world and create a corresponding monadic realm.

To be perfect knowledge, God’s knowledge also has to be intuitive. To clarify what intuitive knowledge is, I have to make the opposite term of intuitive knowledge clear first: symbolic knowledge.²⁵ In the *Meditations* Leibniz says that “our thinking about composites is for the most part symbolic.”²⁶ If a concept is complex, we use symbols like words or images which are substitutes for our consideration of all constituents, i.e. ideas, of a complex concept.²⁷ For Leibniz, knowledge is intuitive if it is not symbolic.²⁸ In the *Meditations*, Leibniz elaborates:

And indeed, when a notion is very complex, we cannot consider all of its component notions at the same time. When we can, or indeed insofar as we can, I call knowledge intuitive. There is no knowledge of a distinct primitive notion except intuitive [...].²⁹

If we are not able to embrace the primitive notions which constitute a complex notion in a unique mental act, then it is symbolic knowledge.³⁰ Opposed to that, Leibniz gives two different characterizations of intuitive knowledge: First of all, the concepts or notions that, being simple by their nature, are conceived by themselves are intuitive. Also intuitive are those complex notions that, being composed of intuitive concepts, can be known by conceiving simultaneously all and each of their intuitive conceptual components.³¹

One has symbolic knowledge of a notion if one needs images or words to think of it, because the notion is too complex. And on the contrary, we have intuitive knowledge of a notion if it is simple and is known without words or images.

God’s self-knowledge must be perfect. Therefore, it must be adequate and intuitive. Hence, God must have knowledge of all of his perfections, which cannot be symbolic, because God’s perfections are simple and can only be known without symbols and words, i.e. they can only be known intuitively.

II.3 The Consequent: Leibniz on Imperfections

Now, let us come back to premise (1) which, I suggest, is false. (1) is a conditional. A conditional is false if and only if the antecedent is true, but the consequent is false. But what is the reason for the falsehood of the consequent, that there cannot exist any ideas of imperfections, if ideas are grounded in the divine nature? To answer this question, we need to take a look at Leibniz’s theory of metaphysical evil and imperfection that turns out to be a theory of negation or limitation.

As Samuel Newlands pointed out very clearly in *Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil*, Leibniz tries to identify his own theory of evil with the traditional Scholastic theory of evil-as-privation. But, in fact, Leibniz identifies privation with negation and limitation; something that Scholastic philosophers would not have done. Therefore, Leibniz’s theory turns out to be nothing, but

24 A VI, 4/A, 587. „[C]ujus exemplum perfectum nescio an homines dare possint [...].“

25 Leibniz uses this term for example in the *Meditations* and the *Nouveaux Essais* and he uses the term ‘blind knowledge’ [cognitio caeca] or ‘suppositive knowledge’ [cognitio suppositiva, suppositive connaissance] with the same meaning in many other writings, cf. A VI, 1, 170 and 550; A VI, 2, 481, A VI, 4, 587, 1815, 1868–1869; A VI, 6, 185–186, 259, 275 and 286.

26 AG 25; GP IV, 423: „[U]t compositarum plerumque cogitatio non nisi symbolica est.“

27 Cf. Oscar M. Esquisabel, “Representing and Abstracting. An Analysis of Leibniz’s Concept of Symbolic Knowledge”, in *Symbolic Knowledge from Leibniz to Husserl*, ed. Abel Lassalle Casanave (College Publications, 2012), 6.

28 Cf. A VI, 4/A, 588.

29 AG 25; A VI, 4/A, 588. „Et certe cum notio valde composita est, non possumus omnes ingredientes eam notiones simul cogitare: ubi tamen hoc licet, vel saltem in quantum licet, cognitionem voco intuitivam. Notionis distinctae primitivae non alia datur cognitio, quam intuitiva, ut compositarum plerumque cogitatio non nisi symbolica est.“

30 Cf. A VI, 3, 462–463.

31 Esquisabel, “Representing and Abstracting. An Analysis of Leibniz’s Concept of Symbolic Knowledge”, 5.

some sort of theory of evil-as-negation.³² Every imperfection is only a negation or limitation of a perfection, i.e. a quality without any limitation. If an imperfection is a limitation of a perfection and God is the perfect being, God's nature cannot entail any imperfection. If ideas are a consequence of God's self-knowledge, and God's nature only entails perfections, God's nature cannot be the reason for ideas of imperfections. To solve this problem, I propose that divine ideas of imperfections must be limitations or negations of ideas of perfections like an imperfection is only a limitation or negation of a perfection. God thinks ideas of imperfections only mediately by negating positive and simple ideas which are mental "reflections" of his positive and simple perfections. Therefore, divine ideas of imperfections are complex ideas, because they are, in fact, negated simple ideas. They are, in a way, the products of the first step of the combinatorial approach which ends up in Leibniz's entire "metaphysical story of creation". Negating, and indeed conjoining, seem to be the most basic capacities of the divine mind.³³ Negation and conjoining are fundamental and primitive notions in his logical language, as he clearly points out in an Essay published in 1679.³⁴ They both are related to the *Principle of Contradiction*, a principle which is a "ungrounded grounder"³⁵ for Leibniz, an axiom which is not further demonstrable.³⁶ Or like Michel Fichant has pointed out in *L'origine de la négation*:

Ainsi, la possibilité de la négation n'est pas déduite: si haut qu'on remonte vers l'origine, elle est toujours déjà là;—disons paradoxalement que la possibilité de la négation est impliquée dans la possibilité du possible.³⁷

And in a letter to Christian Schulenburg from 1698 Leibniz locates these logical terms within a wider theological context when he writes: "And this is the origin of things: God and nothing [*Deo et nihilo*], positive and privative [*positivo et privativo*], perfection and imperfection [*perfectione et imperfectione*] [...]."³⁸ All finite beings seem to be more or less perfect limited imitations of the deity's perfections, which perfectly fits with the Christian doctrine that any created being is to a greater or lesser extent an image of God.³⁹ Therefore, every complete individual notion of a finite being and every possible world as a possible creation has to entail at least one negated divine idea to be distinguishable from God.⁴⁰ Or as Leibniz points out in the *Causa Dei*: "a being lacking limitation would be God, not a creature."⁴¹

If divine ideas of imperfection are complex ideas, namely negations of simple and positive ideas, such ideas still exist, even if God's nature does not entail any imperfection. Therefore, Newlands' argument seems to be unsound. Even if God is the perfect being, his mind is able to entail ideas of imperfections, because they are, so to speak, second order ideas, i.e. negated positive divine ideas.⁴²

32 Cf. Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil", 299–301.

33 Suppose there exist a creature *x* who loves but its love is imperfect. If God's basic mental operations only involve negating and conjoining, how God could contemplate *x*'s complete individual concept? God seems only to be able to contemplate the ideas *loving* or *non-loving*, but that does not make any sense, because *x*'s loving is weather perfect loving, i.e., loving without limitation nor non-loving. Therefore, additionally to the mental operations of *conjoining* and *negating* God's mind has to contain some kind of *degree operator*. Unfortunately, I am not able to deal adequately with this topic in this paper. However, some research has already been done about a really similar problem in Neoplatonic syllogistic, cf. John N. Martin, "Proclus and the Neoplatonic Syllogistic", *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 30, no. 3 (Springer Netherlands, 2001) and John N. Martin, "Lukasiewicz's Many-Valued Logic and Neoplatonic Scalar Modality", *History and Philosophy of Logic* 23, no. 2 (Taylor & Francis Group, 2002).

34 Cf. C, 35–36.

35 Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, "The Principles of Contradiction, Sufficient Reason, and Identity of Indiscernibles", in *Oxford Handbook of Leibniz*, ed. Maria Rosa Antognazza (Oxford Univ. Press, forthcoming), 54.

36 Cf. GP VII, 355.

37 Michel Fichant, "L'origine de la Négation", *Les Etudes Philosophiques* (1971), 47.

38 A II, 3, 427, my translation.

39 Cf. Antognazza, "Leibniz's Metaphysical Evil Revisited", 131. See also Edward Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Clarendon Press, 1987).

40 This is also the reason for Leibniz's conception of metaphysical evil as a limitation of creature's essences, cf. Michael Latzer, "Leibniz's Conception of Metaphysical Evil", *The Leibniz Review* 3, no. 1 (The Leibniz Society of North America, 1993). Antognazza, "Leibniz's Metaphysical Evil Revisited" and Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil".

41 GP VI, 449.

42 On the origin of negation in Leibniz see Fichant, "L'origine de la Négation".

III. NEWLANDS' SECOND ARGUMENT

Usually, three kinds of grounding relations of possibilities can be distinguished within rationalist metaphysics: (a) In Descartes, possibilities are grounded in the divine volition. (b) In Spinoza, possibilities are grounded in the actual divine attributes. And (c) in Leibniz, possibilities are grounded in the divine mind, i.e. in the divine ideas.⁴³ Newlands seems to hold that if divine ideas are not brute facts within the divine mind, they must be grounded in actual divine attributes, as in Spinoza's case. Therefore, if the content of divine ideas is no brute fact, Leibniz's theory of modality will end in a Spinozistic modal collapse and a distinction between possibles and actuals is impossible.

But I suppose that an alternative between Spinoza's grounding-in-the-actual-divine-attributes-conception and Newlands brute-fact-theory still exists. Divine "ideas flow from the font of God's essence"⁴⁴. They are products of God's adequate and intuitive knowledge of his very own simple, positive, and absolute qualities, i.e. his perfections.⁴⁵ In *De origine rerum ex formis* from 1676 Leibniz argues: "[...] from the conjunction of simple possible forms there result modifications, that is, ideas, as properties result from an essence."⁴⁶ Like properties result from essences, ideas result from perfections or their conjunction. Within Leibniz's metaphysics "[...] ideas have to be carefully distinguished from *perfections*, so that not even the ideas of perfections are identifiable with perfections [...]."⁴⁷ I guess it makes sense to claim, that the difference between ideas and perfections can be clarified by the distinction between thinking and an object of thought. Perfections are the objects of divine intuitive self-knowledge, the ideas are results of God's self-knowledge, i.e. God's adequate and intuitive knowledge of his own perfections. How Sebastian Bender puts it: By mental reflection on his own perfections, God forms all simple notions.⁴⁸

However, isn't it true that if ideas result from God's intuitive knowledge of his own perfections, and possibles are maximally consistent sequences of ideas, then possibles and divine perfections seem hard to distinguish? How do we then distinguish possibles and actual divine perfections? For me, there seem to be two strategies: Firstly, there is an obvious distinction between ideas and perfections. It is the same as the distinction between an actual thought and an object of thought. While perfections are actual non-mental beings, ideas are actual, but mental beings. Secondly, for Leibniz, possibles are not only ideas of divine perfections and their combination, but combinations of ideas of perfections or their negation.

If it is possible to distinguish divine perfections from divine ideas, Spinoza's modal collapse, namely that "[p]ossibilities [i.e. ideas, **ILP**] are grounded in God by being *actually exemplified* in the divine nature"⁴⁹, can be avoided. As I tried to show, for Leibniz, possibles are not grounded in actual divine perfections, but in mental reflections upon these perfections. If this is true, Newlands' worries about unwanted Spinozistic consequences can be ruled out. In a nutshell: Because ideas are mental, while perfections are non-mental entities, and because possibles are not sets of divine perfection but rather sets of divine ideas and their negations, Spinozistic collapse is ruled out, and Leibniz's important distinction between possibles and actuals still remain. Furthermore, the PSR is guaranteed because there is a sufficient reason for the content of divine ideas: God's own nature. And the divine nature is, so to speak, the stopping point for our asking for sufficient reasons, because it is sufficient⁵⁰ and because it is "*the first reason*

43 Cf. Newlands, "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility", 159–64.

44 GP VII, 139: "[...] idearum ex fonte essentiae ejus fluentium [...]."

45 Cf. Robert Merrihew Adams, "God, Possibility, and Kant", *Faith and Philosophy* 17, no. 4 (2000). Massimo Mugnai, "Leibniz's Nominalism and the Reality of Ideas in the Mind of God", in *Mathesis Rationis. Festschrift für Heinrich Schepers*, ed. Albert Heinekamp (Nodus, 1990). Ohad Nachtom, *Possibility, Agency, and Individuality in Leibniz's Metaphysics* (Springer International Publishing, 2007), 25.

46 P 81; A VI, 3, 521.

47 Mugnai, "Leibniz's Nominalism and the Reality of Ideas in the Mind of God", 164. Please refer to GP VI, 578 too.

48 Cf. Sebastian Bender, *Leibniz' Metaphysik der Modalität* (De Gruyter, 2016), 102.

49 Newlands, "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility", 162.

50 Cf. AG 218; GP VI, 613. "[E]t ce Dieu suffit."

of things”⁵¹ and carries “the reason of its existence with itself”⁵² as Leibniz points out in the *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason* § 8.

I have tried to argue against one of Newlands’ arguments for his brute-fact-theory of divine ideas and I have suggested an alternative for Newlands’ theory and a Spinozistic modal collapse: Divine ideas are grounded in the divine nature mediately, but in God’s self-knowledge immediately. However, this proposal has to struggle at least with the following difficulty:⁵³

- (4) If God is a possible being, then all his perfections are compatible.
- (5) God is a possible being. [which Leibniz proves in *Quod ens perfectissimum sit possibile* (1676) from his Paris Notes⁵⁴]
- (6) God’s perfections are compatible. [by *modus ponens* on (4) and (5)]
- (7) If God’s perfections are compatible, all divine ideas have to be compatible. [if divine idea are the mental “reflections” of all the simple, positive and absolute divine perfections, all perfections are compatible (6), then divine ideas have to be compatible as well]
- (8) All divine ideas are compatible. [by *modus ponens* on (6) and (7)]

If conclusion (8) is true, “how could Leibniz account for the plurality and diversity of possible individuals? In other words, how could Leibniz avoid a collapse of all possibilities into one large individual [...]?”⁵⁵ To put it in other words: all simple divine ideas have to be compatible, because all divine perfections are compatible. Therefore, they could form one single “super-notion”, because all simple and positive ideas are compatible and maximally-consistent. But Leibniz is very clear in claiming an infinite number of complete notions and possible instead of one single “super-notion”. Therefore, to account for diverse possibilities and in avoiding the fusion of all compatible simple ideas into one large individual, “Leibniz has to explain the incompatibility relations among the predicates that make up complete individual concepts.”⁵⁶ Above, I have defined a complete notion as a maximally-consistent sequence of ideas. That means that for any idea *I*, *I* or its negation $\neg I$ is part of a complete notion. If all simple ideas are positive, I have to answer the question, where the “ \neg ” comes from, i.e., why (8) is not true. As pointed out above the incompatibility of different ideas arises from the primitive capacities of the divine mind—to negate and to conjoin—which are the conditions for God’s capacity of creating, because for Leibniz, any creature *qua* being a creature is limited and entails at least one imperfection. Therefore, their complete individual notions entail at least one negated divine idea.

IV. CONCLUSION

I tried to argue against Newlands’ arguments for a brute-fact-theory of divine ideas. I have tried to show that divine ideas of imperfectiona can exist even if ideas are grounded in God’s nature and his nature only entails perfections. In a second step I suggested an alternative between Newlands’ brute-fact-theory and Spinoza’s modal collapse. I propose that ideas are in fact the mental states of the divine mind by which God knows Himself. Possibles are not actualized attributes of the divine nature, but they are compositions of simple and positive divine ideas, combined by God’s primitive capacities of negating and conjoining. Therefore, possibles are grounded in the divine nature immediately, but only mediately. This

51 GP VI, 106.

52 AG 210; GP VI, 602. “[...] portant la raison de son existence avec soy [...]”

53 Leibniz himself has mentioned this problem in GP VII, 194.

54 Cf. A VI, 3, 572.

55 Nachtomy, “On the Source of Impossibility in Leibniz’s Paris Notes and Some Remarks on Time and Space as Packing Constraints”, 25.

56 Ibid., 26.

interpretation makes it possible to avoid Spinoza's modal collapse and retain the distinction between possible and actuals, and finally, to account for the universal significance of the PSR.⁵⁷

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*. Darmstadt and Berlin, Berlin Academy, 1923–. Cited by series, volume, and page.
- AG *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Hackett, Indianapolis 1989. Cited by page.
- AT *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. by Ch. Adam and P. Tannery, Paris 1897–1913. Cited by volume and page.
- C *Opuscules et fragments inédits de Leibniz: Extraits des manuscrits de la bibliothèque royale de Hanovre*, ed. by Couturat, Paris 1903; Hildesheim 1961. Cited by page.
- DM *Discours de métaphysique*, ed. by Henri Lestienne, Paris 1975. Cited by paragraph.
- F *Nouvelles lettres et opuscules inédits de Leibniz*, ed. by A. Foucher de Careil, Paris 1857. Cited by page.
- GP *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. by C. I. Gerhardt, Berlin 1875–1890, reprint, Hildesheim 1965. Cited by volume and page.
- L *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. and trans. by Leroy E. Loemker, 2nd ed., Reidel, Dordrecht and Boston 1969. Cited by page.
- M *Monadology*. Cited by paragraph from *Principes de la nature et de la Grace* and *Principles de philosophie ou Monadologie*, ed. by André Robinet, Paris 1954.
- NE *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. by Jonathan Bennett/Peter Remnant, New York/Cambridge/London 1982. Cited by volume, chapter and paragraph.
- P *De Summa Rerum: Metaphysical Papers 1675–1676*, ed. and trans. By G. H. R. Parkinson, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven/London, 1992. Cited by page.

