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Prefacing the *Theodicy*

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1. Prefacing Radical Rationalism

As its full title suggests, *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* treats features of God, humanity, and the world. It offers a lengthy discussion of the problem of evil and responds to Pierre Bayle's claim that the problem did not permit a rational solution. Many of the chapters in our present collection do the important work of explicating and evaluating Leibniz's attempt to solve the problem and respond to Bayle's skepticism about reason.

In this chapter, I ask that we step back from the main text of the *Theodicy* and attend to its Preface. I show that the latter performs two crucial preparatory tasks that have not been properly appreciated. The first is to offer a public declaration of what I call Leibniz's *radical rationalism*. The Preface assumes that any attentive rational being is capable of divine knowledge. We will have the opportunity to discuss what constitutes such knowledge later. The basic idea is that it is knowledge about a divine perfection that can be understood more or less completely. In the Preface, Leibniz entices his readers to seek such knowledge and explains why doing so has been so difficult before now. What makes this rationalism *radical* is that divine knowledge is severed from any religion or set of religious beliefs. For example, a Chinese scholar who has never heard of Christianity is capable of such knowledge because its *only* requisites are reason and the capacity for divine love. While some Christian doctrines make it easier to approach God, they are neither necessary nor sufficient to do so. The author of the *Theodicy* thereby informs his readers that they have access to divine perfections, regardless of religious affiliation. To acquire such knowledge, they need only work through his book. The second task of the Preface is closely related to the first. It invites readers to seek divine love and virtue. To set themselves on the path to virtue, they need only avoid the pitfalls of religion and use reason in the right way to grasp a divine perfection. Once they enter the main text of the *Theodicy*, they have begun that journey.

The *Theodicy* looks importantly different when so prefaced. While it is surely true that the main text offers a sustained and detailed attempt to solve the problem of evil and rescue reason's power from Bayle's criticisms, neither the solution nor the rescue is its main concern. Rather, the goal of the *Theodicy* is to promote divine love and produce virtuous and pious souls. Leibniz's proposed solutions to the problem of evil and his response to Bayle cannot be properly evaluated outside that context.¹

In this chapter, section 2 calls attention to the provocation implicit in the full title of the *Theodicy* and places the Preface in its wider methodological context. One of the implications of this section is that the commonplace name given to Leibniz's text, namely, *Theodicy* [*Théodicée*], obscures the significance of its full title. Section 3 analyzes the Preface, especially its first few paragraphs, to reveal Leibniz's views about the dangers of religion and the power of reason, independent of religion, to discover divine truths. Leibniz's views about religion and reason frame the discussion of the main text. Section 4 discusses divine knowledge and the means to attain it, and section 5 applies the conclusions of sections 2, 3, and 4 to the main text. By attending to the importance of the Preface, it becomes easier to understand the *Theodicy*'s methodology, evaluate its arguments, and see its point. Finally, section 6 concludes the chapter by showing how the previous discussion helps us understand and evaluate the text better.

2. “Endeavoring” toward God: Naming the Endeavor

The full title Leibniz gave to his longest published work, *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*, is more significant than scholars have noted. It contextualizes the Preface, which itself frames the main text. For early 18th-century readers, the title would have seemed striking in three ways.

It is well known that Leibniz coined the word “théodicée,” creating it out of the Greek “theos” (god) and “dike” (justice). Its rhetorical power however has not been discussed. By including this invented term in his book's title, Leibniz was announcing to his contemporaries a new approach to the topic of God's justice. Many of his readers must have been curious about a new treatment of this ancient problem. In this context, the Preface's first sentence would have seemed striking: “It has ever been seen that men in general have resorted to outward forms for the expression of their religion: *sound piety*, that is to say, light and virtue, has never been the portion of many.” This sentence announces that the book's innovation will involve religion and sound piety. We will

¹ As far as I can tell, previous scholars have not noticed the full significance of the Preface as preparation for the main text of the *Theodicy*. Paul Rateau refers to the Preface in passing as a place in the text where Leibniz defines some terms, but there is no discussion of the importance of these preliminary remarks as an introduction to the text. See Paul Rateau, *Lectures et interprétations des Essais de théodicée de G.W. Leibniz, Studia Leibnitiana, Sonderheft*, Band 40 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011), *passim*.

discuss Leibniz's views about these topics in the next section. The point to emphasize here is that by inserting a newly coined word into his title, Leibniz elicits a question whose answer begins the Preface.

The second feature of the title that would have provoked readers is the word “essais.” When Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) applied the plural of the singular noun “essai”—the 16th-century French word for “attempt,” “test,” or “endeavor”—to a series of personal observations published in 1580, he coined a name for relatively short literary reflections and displayed what was often considered a new form of philosophizing. His *Essais* contain personal comments on a wide range of topics with abundant quotations from an array of authors, especially ancient ones. There is no obvious overarching order to the topics discussed in the *Essais*. Montaigne seems to move randomly from one topic to another. Each individual *essai* is “an endeavor” in that it reflects on its topic, sometimes from a variety of perspectives. The essay, “On Experience,” is a case in point.² It meanders around its topic provoking its author to notice that his “theme” has turned “upon itself,”³ but then forges ahead to endeavor on the theme some more. By asking his reader to accompany him through the turns and twists of free-floating philosophical commentary, Montaigne exemplifies the difficulty of ever finding a stable certainty on any matter at all. His goal however is not clarity but virtue. The virtue here arises from an honest assessment of human capacities and its resultant humility. As interesting as it would be to discuss the details of Montaigne's overall project, the point to emphasize now is that his *Essais* ask readers to reflect on topics from a number of perspectives, often in conjunction with well-chosen historical views. By following Montaigne in his endeavors, readers learn how to be skeptical about authoritative claims, use historical texts to supplement contemporary discussions, and recognize the virtue in humility. In the end, Montaigne uses what I will call a “reflective methodology” to train his readers to be innovative and honest thinkers and thereby to make strides toward virtue.⁴

² Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, published according to the “Exemplaire de Bordeaux” by Fortunat Strowski, Bordeaux 1906 and 1909 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1981). For an English translation of classic essays, see Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. J.M. Cohen, (New York: Penguin, 1958).

³ Strowski 1906/1909: 1069; Cohen 1958: 349.

⁴ There is a rich and varied history of interpretations of Montaigne's *Essais*, beginning soon after their publication. In his classic work on early modern skepticism, Richard Popkin focuses on the Pyrrhonism of Montaigne's late essay, *Apology of Raimond Sebond*, but does not discuss the influence of his methodology. See Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), chapter 3. For a good introduction to the text and a list of classic commentaries, see Marc Foglia, “Montaigne,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2013, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/montaigne/>>. It is also important to acknowledge the connection between Montaigne and Bayle as skeptics. Scholars have disagreed about the form and extent of Bayle's skepticism, but many have placed him in the tradition of modern skepticism going back to Montaigne. For classic studies, see, for example, Craig Brush, *Montaigne and Bayle: Variations on the theme of Skepticism* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1966) and Frédéric Brahami, *Le Travail du scepticisme: Montaigne, Bayle, Hume* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001).

Montaigne's *Essais* were wildly popular, generating a rich array of editions and commentaries.⁵ The term “essais” found its way into titles of philosophical works in which the author reflects on a series of topics and proposes innovative ways of thinking about them. Although an inventory of even the most important 17th-century works in this tradition is beyond the scope of this chapter, a survey of a few prominent examples relevant to Leibniz's *Essais de Théodicée* will be helpful.⁶

One of the first and most significant responses to Montaigne's *Essais* are the *Essayes* of Francis Bacon, published along with his *Religious Meditations, Places of Perswasion and Disswasion, Seene and Allowed* in 1597.⁷ Given the significance attached to Bacon as a natural philosopher and innovator of scientific methodology, it is noteworthy that the *Essayes* constitute the initial part of his first publication.⁸ In the original edition, there are ten short “Essaies,” ranging from “Of Studies” and “Of Regiment of health” to “Of Negotiating.”⁹ In the Epistle Dedicatorie of the first edition, he writes: “in these particulars I have played my selfe the Inquisator;” and offered endeavors “medicinable,” though “small.”¹⁰ Bacon's essays are in fact rather small: they average about 300 words each and contain neither arguments nor neat conclusions. The second essay in the first edition is a good example of his approach. “Of Discourse” begins with a critique of the standard practice in which a discourseser attempts “to holde all arguments” rather than to discern “what is true, as if it were a praise to know what might be said, and not what should bee thought.” Bacon ends this discussion with an epistemological pronouncement consistent with his essays as a whole: “He that questioneth much shall learne much, and content much” and “shall continually gather knowledge.”¹¹

⁵ For example, see John Florio's *The essayes or morall, politike and millitarie discourses of Lord Michaell de Montaigne, Knight of the noble Order of St. Michaell, and one of the gentlemen in ordinary of the French king, Henry the third his chamber. The first booke. First written by him in French. And now done into English...* (London, 1603), which went through several editions; Jonatan de Saint Sernin's *Essais et obseruations sur les essais du Seigneur de Montaigne* (London, 1626), which went through several editions; and Charles Cotton's *Essays of Michael, seigneur de Montaigne in three books, with marginal notes and quotations of the cited authors, and an account of the author's life*, the 3rd edition of which was published in 1700. For Leibniz's references to Montaigne and to the *Essais*, see for example A VI iv 1850, 2253; A VI vi, 289, 557.

⁶ Scholars seem not to have recognized the connection between Leibniz's use of “essais” in his title and the tradition begun by Montaigne. As far as I can tell, only Paul Rateau, in his *Lectures et interprétations des Essais de théodicée*, has anything to say about the word “essais” in Leibniz's title, but he does not connect it either to Montaigne or the tradition of essayists discussed here.

⁷ Francis Bacon, *Essayes: Religious Meditations. Places of Perswasion and Disswasion. Seene and Allowed* (London, 1597).

⁸ For a list of editions of the *Essayes* and references to standard literature on this importance text, see the helpful Wikipedia page on the text at <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essays_\(Francis_Bacon\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essays_(Francis_Bacon))>. Historians of philosophy have often not paid sufficient attention to Bacon's *Essayes*. E.g. *The Stanford Encyclopedia* entry on Bacon includes no information on the *Essayes*.

⁹ A second edition, with thirty-eight essays, appeared in 1612; fifty-eight essays were published in an edition of 1625. See, e.g. *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* (London, 1629).

¹⁰ Bacon, *Essayes*. Epistle Dedicatorie.

¹¹ Bacon, *Essayes*, 2–3.

Bacon's *Essays* have a good deal in common with Montaigne's, on which they are modeled. Like its French predecessor, the *Essays* were widely published throughout the 17th century. Although Bacon is not as thoroughly skeptical as his French predecessor, he shares a desire to offer personal reflections on a series of topics with an eye to encouraging appropriate doubt about commonly held views. Both are explicitly critical of standard approaches to their chosen topics and both encourage their readers to take new and diverse perspectives on them. In short, both encourage readers to develop their own reflective approaches. Bacon goes beyond his predecessor in averring that such an approach will "continually gather knowledge." But he agrees with Montaigne that the humility garnered from such essaying is tantamount to virtue.

Joseph Glanvill (1636–1680) is another English philosopher who takes up the cause of endeavoring toward "modest" proposals, humility, and its correspondent virtue. In his *Scep̄sis scientifica, or, Confest ignorance, the way to science in an essay of The vanity of dogmatizing, and confident opinion . . .* of 1665, he is quite clear about the importance of the word "essay" in his title. His dedicatory letter, addressed to the Royal Society, complains that:

every man is assur'd of his own Scheams of conjecture, though he cannot hold this assurance, but by this proud absurdity, That he alone is in the right, and all the rest of the World mistaken, I say then, there being so much to be produced both from the natural and the moral World to the shame of boasting Ignorance; *the ensuing Treatise, which with a timerous and unassur'd countenance adventures into your presence, can pride it self in no higher title, than that of an ESSAY, or imperfect offer at a Subject.*¹²

Many other 17th-century authors joined Glanvill in including the word "essay" in their book titles as a way of suggesting both a "timerous and unassur'd countenance" and the continuation of the tradition of Montaigne. A significant example is *Essais de morale contenus en divers traitez sur plusieurs devoirs importants* by the well-known French Jansenist, Pierre Nicole (1625–1695). Nicole's first *Essais* appeared in 1671. By 1679, he had published fourteen volumes. Significantly, the first essay of the first volume treats "De la foiblesse de l'homme [On the weakness of man]." Nicole summarizes its point: "The first duty of Man is to know himself; and to know himself is to be fully acquainted with his own corruption and weakness. To teach this is the subject . . . Of the Weakness of Man."¹³ Nicole begins with a scathing critique of pride and enlists the

¹² Joseph Glanvill, *Scep̄sis scientifica, or, Confest ignorance, the way to science in an essay of The vanity of dogmatizing, and confident opinion: with a reply to the exceptions of the learned Thomas Albius* (London: Printed by E. Cotes for H. Eversden, 1665), Address to the Royal Society, C3. My emphasis. I would like to thank Patrick Connolly for bringing this example to my attention.

¹³ Pierre Nicole, *Essais de morale contenus en divers traitez sur plusieurs devoirs importants*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1671). The English translation offered here and in what follows is taken from the English version of volume I, which appeared in 1677 with the title *Moral essays, contain'd in several treatises on many important duties, Written in French, by Messieurs du Port Royal. Faithfully Rendred into English, by A Person of Quality* (London, 1677). The English version is a fairly faithful rendering of Nicole's French. It is noteworthy that by the 5th edition of Nicole's *Essais*, published in 1683, chapter divisions with titles have been introduced into the

reader in recognizing its danger. Like Montaigne, Nicole makes thorough use of historical precedents, citing Seneca and other ancient authors. But unlike his French predecessor, Nicole often refers to Biblical texts, explicitly endorses Christian doctrines, and conceives morality in Christian terms. Nicole ultimately agrees with Montaigne that proper humility is the means to virtue. Only when we “undeceive and free ourselves from those false lights by which we appear in our own Eyes Great” will we establish the “virtue of humility.”¹⁴ In the end, his *Essais* display the proper approach to life, one that can lead to virtue and piety. A first and necessary step to that end is to become aware of one’s weakness. When human weakness is properly acknowledged, then “that Light which they cannot find in themselves” will be sought in God.¹⁵ One will recognize “in what Christian virtue consists.”¹⁶

Nicole’s *Essais* were enormously popular.¹⁷ They went through several editions, and many of his essays were translated into English.¹⁸ Since our concern now is primarily with the significance of the term “essais [essays]” in titles of 17th-century books, it will suit those purposes to examine briefly the popular English translation of his *Essais*, entitled *Moral Essays, Contain’d in several Treatises on Many Important Duties*. Nicole acknowledges the significance of “essais [essays]” in its title and, in the Advertisement, gives “some advice touching the Book it self, and the first shall be of its Title, Moral Essays.” Like Bacon, Nicole embraces Montaigne’s reflective methodology without its skepticism.

It would be a mistake to conclude that nothing was pretended to be herein propos’d, but some uncertain and confus’d Glimpses, or slight Ideas of Christian Perfection. On the contrary, some of these Treatises give a Prospect fair enough, and there is none of them that does not contain Truths most solid, and of the greatest importance.¹⁹

The author recognizes that in using the word “essais” in his title he places himself in the tradition of Montaigne and signals to his reader that the book might contain uncertain “Glimpses.” Although he follows Montaigne in offering various perspectives (“pre-specpects”) on his topics, each essay nonetheless contains some “Truths most solid.” Nicole continues the Advertisement with an explicit statement about the aptness of the title:

The reason then of making choice of this Title has been, That Christian Morality appearing to be of too vast an extent, to be all entirely here treated of, and the enterprise too great to

text. These are not in the 1st or 2nd editions, or in the English translation. *Essais de morale*, Advertisement, a iii; *Moral Essays*, Advertisement, A4.

¹⁴ *Essais de morale*, § VII (7); *Moral Essays*, §VII (5).

¹⁵ *Essais de morale*, §LXVIII (85–6); *Moral Essays*, §LXVIII (61–2). The metaphor of light, which is a common metaphor in the history of Platonism and Christianity, plays a role in Leibniz’s *essays*.

¹⁶ *Essais de morale*, Advertisement, a iii; *Moral Essays*, Advertisement, A4.

¹⁷ Leibniz refers to Nicole admiringly. See, for example, A II I 394, 398.

¹⁸ John Locke translated three of Nicole’s essays into English, including “De la foiblesse de l’homme.” He may have intended to translate more of them and publish them, but did not do so. See Jean S. Yolton, ed., *John Locke as Translator: Three of the Essais of Pierre Nicole* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000).

¹⁹ *Essais de morale*, A3; *Moral Essays*, A3.

reduce into one Body that diversity of Principles it contains . . . *It has been thought better to Essay to Treat it by Parts* [on a mieux aimé essayer de la traiter par parties],²⁰ now applying ones self to the consideration of one duty, now another; whilst it has been thought sufficient, on the peculiar matters here handled, to advance several Truths as they have offer'd themselves, without ordering them according to Method. *And this is what is mark'd out by the word Essays.*²¹

Nicole offers a fairly clear articulation of what we have been calling “reflective methodology.” Some subjects are appropriate to treat in a systematic and ordered fashion; some are not. Large and unwieldy topics like Christian morality are not. For such a topic, it is “better to Essay to Treat it by Parts,” attending to one part and then another. Although such a treatment does not constitute one “Body” of principles, it nonetheless yields truths. As he summarizes his position: “Order and Method are of several kinds” and “a Piece is not altogether to be slighted, though the parts whereof it is composed be not rang'd in so exact an order, or so neatly jointed one with another.”²² Nicole is quite clear that the use of “essais [essays]” in his title places him in the tradition of Montaigne. Like Bacon, he takes the word to imply that the treatment of his subject is not an ordered set of principles, but a set of reflections. And like his English predecessor, one of his goals is to train readers to escape the “darkness” of pride so as to acquire knowledge for themselves. Nicole also joins both Montaigne and Bacon in hoping to encourage readers to pursue virtue, although his ideas about it are distinctively Christian. But he goes beyond his predecessors in offering a cogent account of the philosophical benefits of “essaying.” By treating a subject’s parts, the proper truths about the subject will be discovered in a way that more systematic treatments would not allow. By submitting one’s own ideas to reflective criticism, the pride in and commitment to one’s own views are diminished so that virtue becomes possible. Otherwise, it is not.

Nor is Montaigne’s influence restricted primarily to books whose main goal is virtue. In Dominique Beddevole’s *Essais d’anatomie, où l’on explique clairement la construction des Organes & leurs opération mécaniques selon les nouvelles hypotheses* of 1686, the author explicitly embraces Montaigne’s approach in his account of anatomy.²³ For our purposes, what is most striking is Beddevole’s explicit admission of the importance

²⁰ Like the French “essai,” the early modern English “essay” can be used as a noun or a verb. The *Oxford English Dictionary* makes clear that the English “essay” is used as a verb throughout the 16th and 17th centuries to mean endeavor, test, struggle, and so on. The noun was used in a related sense.

²¹ *Essais de morale*, A3; *Moral Essays*, A3. My emphasis.

²² *Essais de morale*, Advertissement, a iij; *Moral Essays*, Advertisement, A4.

²³ Dominique Beddevole, *Essais d’anatomie, où l’on explique clairement la construction des Organes & leurs opération mécaniques selon les nouvelles hypotheses* (Leiden, 1686). The book was relatively successful in that it was translated into English and Italian. See Bendetto Bacchini, *Saggi d’anatomia, ne quali chiaramente si spiega la struttura de gli organi del corpo animato, e le loro operationi mecaniche secondo l’hipotesi nuove* (Milan, 1690), and J. Scougall, *Essayes of Anatomy, in which the Constitution of the Organs and their Mechanical Operations are clearly Explained according to the Hypothoses* (Edinburgh: George Mosman, 1691). The English version was published again in 1696.

of “essais” in book titles. In the 1691 English translation of his book, entitled *Essayes of anatomy in which the construction of the organs and their mechanical operations explained according to the new hypotheses*, the “To the Reader” reads as follows:

*Those who Judge of a Book by the Title, are Discouraged when a Title is Simple; and on the contrary, believe that a Work is Excellent, when Men have the Art to give a great Idea of it, by an ingeniously invented Title; we might doubt of their acceptance of this little Treatise, if many others which have appeared with the same Modesty, and have nevertheless had a great Success, had not favourably disposed the Reader for the word Essayes. Since those of the Famous Montaigne, how many others have appeared in Physick and in Morality, which have been the Admiration of all the Learned? I hope therefore that they will not be prejudiced against this present Treatise, because it promiseth nothing but Essayes, and that they will be satisfied.*²⁴

Like Nicole, Beddevole takes books to be judged by their titles and the term “essais [essays]” to evoke the work of Montaigne. And like him, his endeavors are those of reflecting in new ways on old topics and offering modest proposals. He also joins Nicole in abandoning Montaigne’s skepticism. Although he humbly claims that he offers “nothing but Essayes,” he also insists that “the Learned” might come to admire its insights. In the Preface, Beddevole avers that some of the observations “found in these Essays . . . seem Important enough to make me believe that they will not be unacceptable.”²⁵ His goal is to train his readers to see the power of the mechanical philosophy in anatomy. He concludes the Preface by acknowledging that he does not seek “great Honour.” Rather, “I Write but to expose my Thoughts to others, to the end, that if they be wrong, they may Correct them, and if they be just, they may forward to better.”²⁶

From this brief discussion of Bacon, Glanvill, Nicole, and Beddevole, it is clear that when Leibniz was devising his great work on divine justice and its “ingeniously invented Title” in the first years of the 18th century, book titles were taken very seriously and the word “essais [essays]” bore important implications.²⁷ Nor is there any doubt that Leibniz was aware of this association with the term “essai [essay].” In his *New Essays on Human Understanding* [*Nouveaux essais sur l’entendement humain*], his

²⁴ *Essais d’anatomie*, 3–4; *Essayes of Anatomy*, 4–5. My emphasis.

²⁵ *Essais d’anatomie*, Preface; *Essayes of Anatomy*, Preface.

²⁶ *Essais d’anatomie*, Preface; *Essayes of Anatomy*, Preface. Beddevole goes on to articulate a mechanistic account of anatomy, organized as “discourses” on a series of topics, beginning with the elements of nature and ending with urine. Along the way, he explains the features and functioning of bodies. He writes, for example, “there must be a certain Magnitude and Figure in these parts to excite a particular Odour.” See *Essais d’anatomie*, 38; *Essayes of Anatomy*, 35.

²⁷ In a longer treatment of the significance of this essayist tradition in the 17th century, I contrast those titles that have a singular noun (“essay” or “essai”) and those that use the plural. It is noteworthy that beginning in the 1630s authors start to use the singular noun in titles of short, straightforward treatments of a single topic. For example, each of Descartes’ three *essais* in his *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences: plus la dioptrique, les météores et la géométrie qui sont des essais de cette méthode* (1637) is such a treatment. There are philosophers who place themselves in the tradition of Montaigne and continue to use the singular “essay” (e.g. Glanvill), but by the end of the century the singular noun almost always implies a relatively short treatment of a single topic. With his *Essay on Human Understanding*, Locke seems to want to treat a single topic while also situating his discussion in the essayist

commentary on John Locke's *An Essay of Human Understanding* of 1690, he describes Locke's work as having a "modest title [titre modeste]."²⁸ It is also noteworthy that in the *Theodicy* Leibniz refers to his work as his "essais" and not his "théodicée."²⁹ Echoing the humble adjectives employed by his predecessors, he calls his book "small"³⁰ and says that the "plainness" of its truth is "fittingly set forth."³¹ As we will see, Leibniz shares a good deal with the essayist predecessors, although he scatters his essays with carefully wrought arguments.

The third point to make about Leibniz's title is its list of topics. A newcomer to *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* might reasonably wonder how God's goodness, human freedom, and the origin of evil are supposed to be related and whether or not Leibniz took them to exhaust the problem of divine justice. As we have seen in this section, Nicole recommends that vast topics be treated "by Parts" in order "to advance several Truths as they have offer'd themselves, without ordering them according to Method." He adds: "this is what is mark'd out by the word Essays."³² As we will see in the next sections, Leibniz follows the lead of these essayists in avoiding an "orderly" presentation of his topics while still hoping his text will promote insights.

The point of this section is to uncover some of the long-lost implications of the full title of Leibniz's *Theodicy*. Our standard way of referring to the work as "the *Theodicy*" obscures one of the title's most important implications. In choosing the title he does, Leibniz places his discussion of divine justice in the essayist tradition. Most 18th-century readers would have had several questions as they began reading the Preface: what motivates the author to repackaging an ancient problem and give it a new name, what are the innovative "endeavorings" on the topics listed in the title and how are they related to one another and to justice, and what is the point of essaying on these topics?

tradition of Montaigne and his followers. In his edition of Leibniz's mathematical writings, Gerhardt gives a short essay that Leibniz wrote on dynamics in the 1690s the title *Essay on dynamics*, but this almost certainly is the editor's title and not Leibniz's since, as Gerhardt writes in the table of contents, the text is "aus d. Manuscript [based on a manuscript]" (iii). For the text, see GM VI 215–31.

²⁸ A VI vi 70. Locke intended as much. In his Epistle to the Reader, he insists against those who "had publish'd their censures of my *Essay*,... that they will not suffer it to be an *Essay*" (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Fraser Campbell (New York: Dover, 1959), 21). Patrick Connolly has noted that Locke included the term "essay" in his title to suggest that it was an endeavor or exploration of his topic as opposed to something dogmatic. I would like to thank Connolly for bringing this example to my attention. See Patrick J. Connolly, "Causation and Scientific Explanation in Locke" (PhD Thesis, University of Chapel Hill, 2013), 4–6.

²⁹ See G VI 29: T Preface 52; G VI 48: T Preface 72. Also see the Excursus on T 392 at G VI 347, 350: 389, 392.

³⁰ G VI 48: T Preface 72.

³¹ G VI 38: T Preface 62.

³² *Essais de morale*, A3; *Moral Essays*, A3.

3. Provoking Piety

The Preface to the *Theodicy* is uniquely important. It contains the preliminary remarks to Leibniz's most prominent published work. Before its composition, Leibniz had only published relatively short treatments, written for a particular audience, discussing either a topic or group of related topics of contemporary relevance.³³ The Preface is so significant because it was written late in his life and introduces the single most important public statement of his philosophy. There can be little doubt that he would be concerned to engage readers and frame the main text's discussion in the most appropriate way. In short, we have every reason to pay special attention to the preliminary remarks to his most important publication. As we will see, the Preface articulates the deep motivations behind the project.³⁴

Section 2 contextualized the full title of the *Theodicy* by placing it in the 17th-century essayist tradition in which it belongs. Because 21st-century scholarship has forgotten this tradition, it has been easy to miss the significance of Leibniz's title. As we will see, once the book is situated in this tradition, its overarching method looks different.

The present section shows that Leibniz's Preface contains a surprisingly radical form of rationalism. The easiest way to see this is to *de*-contextualize the work from his various unpublished writings and attempt to read the Preface as it was meant to be read. Leibniz did not write the *Theodicy* for people familiar with his philosophy. Many of his readers would have read *nothing* by him and those familiar with his work would only have seen his published writings.³⁵ In this section, I argue that once we pay careful attention to what the Preface actually says, we can begin to see it as a provocation to a radically rationalist piety.

Scholars have long complained that Leibniz's treatment of divine justice is less argumentatively focused and more philosophically meandering than one might expect. They have noted that the presentation of his views in the *Theodicy* is organized as a point-by-point refutation of Bayle's account of evil. Given that Bayle's discussion itself is a bit disorderly, perhaps it should not come as a surprise that the overall presentation

³³ His *New Essays* is a counterexample to this in that it is long and would have been published had Locke not died, which discouraged Leibniz from doing so. It is important that Leibniz pluralized the "essay" in Locke's title. Instead of *Essay on Human Understanding*, Leibniz made his French title *Nouveaux Essais sur l'entendement humain*. And as he does in the *Theodicy*, he offers his views in the process of arguing against Locke's proposals.

³⁴ Thanks to Donald Rutherford's important study, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) scholars have been more inclined to take seriously Leibniz's project of theodicy. Not only was Rutherford committed to "recovering the theodicy as an essential part of Leibniz's philosophy," he focused on reason as the key to Leibniz's understanding of God's world (1). He also emphasized the practical and theoretical ends in Leibniz's thought and saw the importance of the perfection of humanity to Leibniz. The present study builds on that work.

³⁵ Leibniz corresponded with a lot of his contemporaries. But it is important for 21st-century scholars to remember that we know much more about Leibniz's thought than did any of his contemporaries.

of Leibniz's thought suffers accordingly.³⁶ But why did Leibniz choose to present his views as counterpoints to Bayle's? There are plenty of arguments in the *Theodicy*. Why didn't he present his positive views as a string of arguments whose conclusions about justice, freedom, reason, faith, and the origin of evil would have refuted Bayle's claims?

Section 2 offered a significant part of an answer to this question. Leibniz chose to organize his discussion of divine justice in the way he did because he wanted to engage his readers in criticizing standard ways of thinking about the topic and reflecting on its related parts in new ways. By calling his work "Essais," he prepares his readers for this methodological mode. Like his essayist predecessors, Leibniz offers readers various perspectives on his topics in order to encourage intelligent reflection and increase the possibility of insight. And Leibniz might have agreed with Nicole that the topic of divine justice was itself too large and unwieldy to be treated in a systematic way and therefore that it "is better to Essay to treat it by Parts." In the case of the *Essays on Theodicy*, Bayle supplied the list of "parts."

In this section and the next, I argue that the Preface offers further explanation of the *Theodicy's* structure and reveals its main goals. As we will see, Leibniz intends to offer glimpses of divine perfections. Although he structures his presentation as a point-by-point refutation of Bayle, his motivation in doing this is to reveal divine perfections to his readers and therefore set them on the path to piety. The frontispiece of the first edition of the *Theodicy* contains a striking image: a man scales a steep mountain as a bird flies overhead holding in its beak a banner on which is written "Ardua virtutis via." Consistent with this image, Leibniz's Preface first explains why the path to virtue is so arduous and then describes the means to scale it.

The Preface can be divided into three parts. The first, which is the most important for our purposes, frames the "endeavors" of the *Theodicy* and sets the goals of the main text. In presenting the "purpose of religion" and the means to piety, its argument is subtle and conclusions provocative.³⁷ The second part begins with a fairly dramatic shift from asserting the book's goals to a description of "the two famous labyrinths,"³⁸ while the third commences with a description of Leibniz's main concerns in responding to Bayle, whom he describes as "one of the most gifted men of our time."³⁹

The rhetorical arc of the Preface's first part is crucial to understanding the text as a whole. It is this part of the Preface that benefits most from de-contextualization. That is, like most of its original readers, we should read the introductory remarks to the *Essays on Theodicy* with special attention and with the fewest possible assumptions

³⁶ For more on this, see Kristen Irwin, "Which 'Reason'? Bayle on the Intractability of Evil," Chapter 2 of this volume.

³⁷ E.M. Huggard's translation of Leibniz's French text is notoriously problematic. There is a new translation underway by Sean Greenberg and Robert Sleigh, Jr. I am much obliged to them for sharing a draft of their translation of the Preface with me.

³⁸ G VI 29: T Preface 53.

³⁹ G VI 38: T Preface 62.

about Leibniz's philosophical views. The Preface begins with a bleak account of a problem and its cause:

[A] It has ever been seen that men in general have resorted to outward forms for the expression of their religion: *sound piety*, that is to say, light and virtue, has never been the portion of many.⁴⁰ One should not wonder at this, nothing is so much in accord with human weakness. We are impressed by what is outward, while the inward requires examination of such a kind as few persons are fitted to give.⁴¹

The problem is that too few people have attained sound piety. The cause is that humans are weak so that the “outward forms” of religions lead them astray. But there is a glimmer of optimism in these introductory remarks. Although most people are tempted by the “outward,” there are some who “are fitted” to examine the inward. The implication is that the preface's author hopes to solve the problem by showing his readers the means to light and virtue. This light metaphor has ancient roots. Famously, in Plato's *Republic*, the sun symbolizes the Good, the highest form of understanding and the source of virtue. In Plato's dialogue, the light emitted by the sun allows the truth-seeker to begin the process of moving toward the good.⁴² It was common for Jews, Christians, and Muslims to describe divine insight in such terms.⁴³ We will see other examples of Leibniz's use of light as a metaphor for divine insight in section 4. For now, it is important that the very first sentence of the *Theodicy* equates sound piety with light and virtue and suggests that piety is not the province of any particular religion. The assumption seems to be that piety is available to all people regardless of faith.

The Preface continues, again employing the metaphor of light, while adding a contrast to shadow and darkness:

[B] As true piety consists in beliefs and in practice, the outward forms of religion imitate these, and are of two kinds: the one kind consists in *ceremonial practices*, and the other in *the formularies of belief*. Ceremonies resemble virtuous actions, and formularies are like shadows of the truth and approach, more or less, the true light.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ G VI 25: T Preface 49.

⁴¹ G VI 25: T Preface 49. I have changed Huggard's English here.

⁴² Plato, *The Republic* (Bk VI) 514a–520a. Also see 507b–509c.

⁴³ It is beyond the purview of this discussion to survey the various meanings of light as a metaphor for the divinity, divine insight, and divine aid in acquiring insight. A couple of examples will have to suffice. Augustine writes in his *Confessions* of 397–8: “But from the disappointment I suffered I perceived that the darkneses of my soul would not allow me to contemplate these sublimities.” Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. and trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), VII.xx.26–27. And in Anne Conway's *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophies*, written in the 1670s, we find: “If anyone asks what are these more excellent attributes [of God], I reply that they are the following: spirit or life and light, by which I mean the capacity for every kind of feeling, perception, or knowledge, even love, all power and virtue, joy and fruition” (Book IX §6 (66)). For the most recent edition of Conway's only writing, see *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, trans. Alison Coudert and Taylor Corse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴⁴ G VI 25: T Preface 49. Leibniz's emphasis.

True beliefs and virtuous actions constitute piety. Outward forms of religion are (more or less) misguided imitations of these. From what follows in the Preface, it is clear that religious ceremonies are imitations of virtuous actions and can be more or less appropriate. From the examples that Leibniz gives of ceremonies and ceremonial practices—rules of religious communities, human laws—he clearly thinks of them as a prescribed set of practices or principles of behavior. Ceremonies fail when they do not promote virtue. Leibniz further explains in the Preface that “formularies of belief,” which he also calls “dogmas,” are religious or philosophical tenets that express more or less clearly divine truths. These fail when they misrepresent or obscure (and in that sense darken) such truths. We will return to his views about ceremonies and tenets.

Passages [A] and [B] offer a compelling account of the dangers of religion. When the external expressions of religion are counterfeits or “shadows,” they lead religious practitioners away from truth and virtue. Leibniz’s warning here echoes those of Montaigne and Nicole: religious practitioners should be ever vigilant and understand that, without sufficient care, most of them will be seduced by falsities masquerading as truths. He goes on to offer a history of religious practice that displays how some religions have gone wrong and others right in promoting piety. He blames religious leaders for the failure of their religion: “But it happens too often that religion is choked in ceremonial, and that the divine light is obscured by the opinions of men.”⁴⁵ Using the ancient “pagans” as an example, he explains how they fell short in tenets and ceremonies. Highlighting the fact that ceremonial practices are “invented” by priests and religious leaders, he describes ancient pagans as those who “had ceremonies in their worship, but

... no articles of faith,” and “never dreamed of drawing up formularies for their dogmatic theology.” Rather, the pagans offered “superstitions” and “boasted of miracles.” Their “priests invented the signs of anger or of the goodness of the gods” so that they could “sway minds through fear and hope,” but they “scarcely envisaged . . . true notions of God and of the soul.”⁴⁶ The ancient pagans failed to produce piety both because they lacked true tenets and because their religious practices failed to promote virtue. At the core of this failure was the absence of an understanding of God and soul. According to Leibniz, the success of the Judeo-Christian tradition is due to its increasing understanding of these notions.

Thus far in the Preface, Leibniz has not distinguished between natural and revealed theology. The former is traditionally thought to concern truths about God’s nature that can be acquired through reason alone; the latter concerns insights gained through revelation, both Biblical and experiential. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it was common to believe that religious ceremonies and moral truths belong to the realm of revealed truths. For example, concerning the latter, God is supposed to have revealed the commandments to Moses; Christ, as the son of God, is supposed to have revealed

⁴⁵ G VI 25; T Preface 50.

⁴⁶ G VI 25; T Preface 50.

moral truths to his followers. The absence of this distinction in the Preface is significant. Leibniz treats matters of virtue—the domain of revealed theology—in the same way that he treats truths of natural theology, namely, as truths that rational human beings can grasp.⁴⁷

Following passage [B] and before his discussion of the pagans, Leibniz continues in his account of the ceremonial practices of Christianity and Judaism.

[C] All these outward forms would be commendable if those who *invented* them had rendered them appropriate to maintain and to express that which they imitate—if religious ceremonies, ecclesiastical discipline, the rules of communities, human laws were always like a hedge round the divine law, to withdraw us from any approach to vice, to inure us to the good and to make us familiar with virtue.⁴⁸

Leibniz's point so far is dramatic. [B] implies that all ceremonial practices—whether the Christian Eucharist or the Islamic call to prayer—are more or less “appropriate” imitations of virtuous actions. [C] suggests that all outward forms of religion—so all ceremonies—are invented by religious leaders. Ceremonies that are “appropriate” encourage piety; those inappropriate discourage it.⁴⁹ It is important to be clear about how radical Leibniz's point so far is. He is suggesting that all religious ceremonies are a human invention and that most of these fail to promote virtue.

Immediately following [C] he writes:

[D] That [to inure us to the good and to make us familiar with virtue] was the aim of Moses and of other good lawgivers, of the wise men who founded religious orders, and above all of Jesus Christ, divine founder of the purest and most enlightened religion.⁵⁰

Leibniz renders the history of religion as one of progress toward proper ceremonial practices and tenets or what he sometimes calls “public dogmas.” Although [D] refers to Christianity as the “most enlightened” religion, Leibniz's history of religion suggests that neither Moses nor Christ is any more than a very insightful prophet. As we will see, when [D] is combined with [E], [F], and [G], the indication is that Christianity has no more claim to truth than does any other religion and that the only thing special about it as a religion is that its prophet, Jesus Christ, arrived at important truths before other “wise men.” Nor does the discernment of truth—whether by Moses, Christ, or Mohamed—seem to be due to revelation. Rather, Leibniz suggests that any “wise”

⁴⁷ In the *Theodicy*, immediately following the Preface, there is the “Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason.” This is a discussion of the relation between reason and “the truth God had revealed in an extraordinary way” (T §1), namely the mysteries of the faith. As I will argue at the beginning of section 5, it is not inconsistent with the claims of the Preface.

⁴⁸ G VI 25; T Preface 49. My emphasis.

⁴⁹ Throughout his life, Leibniz was interested in the metaphysics of Christian doctrines like the Eucharist and the Trinity. He spent a good deal of energy offering metaphysical accounts of such doctrines that would appeal to Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and so on. His conciliatory efforts on these topics are perfectly consistent with the view that all such ceremonies are human inventions that more or less successfully encourage piety.

⁵⁰ G VI 25; T Preface 49.

person is able to grasp such truths. The prophets are different because they are able “to impart . . . true notions of God and the soul” to others.⁵¹

Leibniz now turns his attention from religious ceremonies to tenets and dogmas. Such dogmas are the domain of natural theology and in passage [F] he acknowledges that. He begins his history of the development of the tenets of natural theology in this way:

[E] Of all ancient peoples, it appears that the Hebrews alone had public dogmas for their religion. Abraham and Moses established the belief in one God, source of all good, author of all things. The Hebrews speak of him in a manner worthy of the Supreme Substance; and one wonders at seeing the inhabitants of one small region of the earth more enlightened than the rest of the human race. Peradventure the wise men of other nations have sometimes said the same, but they have not had the good fortune to find a sufficient following and to convert the dogma into law.⁵²

The radical rationalism of Leibniz’s Preface is fully evident in this passage. The religiously neutral designation of God as “the Supreme Substance” suggests that there is a divine reality that anyone appropriately “wise”—regardless of religious affiliation—can glimpse. In the continuation of his religious history in [E], Leibniz again makes evident that it was only a matter of time until true tenets about the Supreme Substance and the proper laws of human behavior were discovered. Moses and the “the Hebrews” made such discoveries, but their tenets and laws were endorsed because the area where they lived was full of enlightened people. That is, other wise people must have recognized the same truths, but had the misfortune of being ignored. In this vein, Leibniz continues his history of religion a few lines later:

[F] Later also Mahomet showed no divergence from the great dogmas of natural theology: his followers spread them abroad even among the most remote races of Asia and of Africa, whither Christianity had not been carried; and they abolished in many countries heathen superstitions which were contrary to the true doctrine of the unity of God and the immortality of souls.⁵³

Like the prophets of Judaism and Christianity, the prophet of Islam deciphered important “great dogmas” and thereby led the way for even more insights. The pagans failed in their religion primarily because they “scarcely envisaged . . . true notions of God and of the soul.”⁵⁴ The importance of Islam was that it laid the ground for the recognition of important truths within those “notions,” namely, “the unity of God and the immortality of souls.”

Leibniz acknowledges that the slow but steady trek toward truth, light, and piety begun by Moses was hastened when Jesus Christ entered the scene. The Christian prophet was groundbreaking in two ways. First, in his capacity as lawgiver and

⁵¹ G VI 26: T Preface 50.

⁵² G VI 26: T Preface 50. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes, the meaning of early modern French “dogme” and English “dogma” is a “tenet or doctrine authoritatively laid down, esp. by a church or sect.”

⁵³ G VI 27: T Preface 51.

⁵⁴ G VI 25: T Preface 50.

promoter of virtue, he made public the immortality of the human soul and made evident its importance to piety. When he “lifted the veil” and “taught with all the force of a lawgiver that immortal souls pass into another life, wherein they shall receive the wages of their deeds,” he motivated people to act virtuously. For Leibniz in the Preface, the most important single truth for people to grasp in the pursuit of piety is the one introduced by Jesus Christ, namely, that of the immortality of the soul. The strong suggestion is that this is a metaphysical truth that the Christian prophet was the first to see clearly. Although Moses proposed “beautiful conceptions of the greatness and the goodness of God,” to which many “civilized people today assent,” it was Jesus Christ who “demonstrated fully the results of these ideas, proclaiming that divine goodness and justice are shown forth to perfection in God’s designs for the souls of men.”⁵⁵ In other words, Moses had insights into the divine nature and promoted laws that would encourage virtue. But Jesus Christ went much farther as a lawgiver in using the truth about the immortality of the soul to motivate virtue and sound piety. The porous border in the Preface between natural and revealed theology is here apparent. Leibniz implies that Christ’s insight about the soul entailed a more profound understanding of virtue than was otherwise possible. It would seem that truths about virtue—like those about God—are truths of reason.

Leibniz describes Jesus Christ’s second groundbreaking insight in a paragraph that immediately follows [F]. It is a striking passage:

[G] It is clear that Jesus Christ, completing what Moses had begun, wished that the Divinity should be the object not only of our fear and veneration but also of our love and devotion. Thus he made men happy by anticipation, and gave them here on earth a foretaste of future felicity. For there is nothing so agreeable as loving that which is worthy of love. Love is that affection which makes us take pleasure in the perfections of the object of our love, and there is nothing more perfect than God, nor any greater delight than in him. To love him it suffices to contemplate his perfections, a thing easy indeed, because we find the ideas of these within ourselves.⁵⁶

Leibniz moves here from reason to affection or passion.⁵⁷ Previously in the Preface, he has emphasized the human capacity to recognize true tenets and develop virtue. He has been a realist in the sense that truths about the immortality of the soul and about God’s perfections exist independently of human minds and are waiting to be discovered. It is human reason—the faculty that understands truths—that does the discovering. The emphasis on reason abruptly shifts in passage [G] to the capacity for love and the passionate pleasure or delight that such love engenders. Leibniz defines love here as an “affection” that makes the lover take pleasure in the perfections of the object of its

⁵⁵ G VI 26: T Preface 50–1.

⁵⁶ I have corrected Huggard’s translation of the 4th sentence in this passage. He translates it as “Love is that state of mind . . .”

⁵⁷ As far as I can tell, despite the significant work done on the passions in the early modern period, scholars have not analyzed the philosophical importance of divine love and its status as a passion of the soul. This seems a topic worth exploring.

love. As the lover recognizes more perfections in its object, its affection will increase, as will the resultant pleasure. Given God's perfections, the divine lover is capable of having the greatest kind of pleasure, namely, delight. Passage [G] also announces that Jesus Christ's primary significance in the history of religion is due to his insight into the role of divine love in motivating piety. And it is this insight that motivates Leibniz to call Christianity as a religion and Christ as a prophet "enlightened."

At the very beginning of the Preface (passage [A]), Leibniz acknowledges that few people have sound piety because they are "weak" and the "outward forms" of religion lead them astray. "We are impressed by what is outward, while the inward requires examination of such a kind as few persons are fitted to give." Passage [G] seems to propose a simple remedy to the problem of "the inward:" the journey to sound piety begins with the recognition of and resultant love for a divine perfection. Given how thoroughly perfect God is, such recognition and love are "easy." But [G] also claims that it is easy to contemplate and then love God's perfections because "we find ideas of these [perfections] within ourselves." So, the inward "examination" must involve those ideas.

Before examining the next passage of the Preface, it is important to acknowledge an evident tension. Passage [A] offers a gloomy account of humanity and its capacity for sound piety while [G] optimistically reveals the ease with which God is contemplated and loved. How can it be so easy to find God, from which divine love arises, and so hard to achieve piety, which is supposed to follow from that love? The implication of the Preface so far is that religion is the primary culprit. Religious leaders divert people from God by distracting them with misleading dogmas and ceremonies.

But we need to understand more about the means to piety. The next passages of the Preface provide assistance. About "the ideas" of perfections that we find within ourselves, Leibniz avers:

[H] The perfections of God are those of our souls, but he possesses them in boundless measure; he is an Ocean, whereof to us only drops have been granted; there is in us some power, some knowledge, some goodness, but in God they are all in their entirety. Order, proportions, harmony delight us; painting and music are samples of these: God is all order; he always keeps truth of proportions, he makes universal harmony; all beauty is an effusion of his rays.⁵⁸

Leibniz has suddenly dropped his readers into a thicket of metaphysical complications. Individual human souls are related to God as drops of water to the ocean. They share many divine features, including power, knowledge, and goodness. God has these perfections "in their entirety"; human souls have them partially. Most of Leibniz's readers would have recognized these comments about the relation between God and creatures as fairly standard Platonism, according to which God continually emanates divine

⁵⁸ G VI 27: T Preface 51.

features to creatures, though the latter have them in a manner inferior to God's.⁵⁹ In the main text, Leibniz will offer some clues to the metaphysical doctrines suggested here. But the important point now is that he intends his readers to understand that they are themselves capable of glimpsing the divine perfections.

Immediately following [H], Leibniz writes:

[I] It follows manifestly that true piety and even true felicity consist in the love of God, but a love so enlightened that its fervour is attended by insight. This kind of love begets that pleasure in good actions which gives relief to virtue, and, relating all to God as to the centre, transports the human to the divine. For in doing one's duty, in obeying reason, one carries out the orders of Supreme Reason.⁶⁰

True piety consists of love of God and is attended by divine insight. As we will see, to have divine insight or knowledge is to have an awareness of some feature or attribute of God and to have such awareness is to love God. As rational creatures, humans will be divine-like when they "obey" reason and act virtuously. In other words, to behave virtuously is to follow the dictates of reason, which is tantamount to loving God. The more one acts rationally in this sense, the more one loves God. And as the love of God increases, so does the felicity.

Leibniz has moved in short order from an exposé of how religions fail to a promotion of piety and true felicity. It is important to notice what is absent from this account. In this entire discussion of virtue, light, beauty, delight, perfection, and felicity, none of the tenets that distinguish Christianity from other religions is mentioned. There is no mention of grace, salvation, the Eucharist, the resurrection of the body, or even the view that Christ is the son of God. Concerning the latter, Leibniz explains that the doctrine of immortality of the soul was understood long before Christ was born. Christ's importance concerning this doctrine is merely that he was the first to "lift the veil" and recognize the significance of the doctrine to virtue. Following passage [E], Leibniz explains that "the doctrine of the immortality of souls" was consistent with Moses' ideas and "was taught by the oral tradition." Christ's contribution to the history of piety was to give the doctrine "public acceptance" and show "with all the force of a lawgiver that immortal souls pass into another life, wherein they shall receive the wages of their deeds." That is, "Jesus Christ demonstrated fully the results of these [previously held]

⁵⁹ Leibniz's (unpublished) *Discourse on Metaphysics* of 1686 offers a succinct presentation of the emanative relation: "it is very evident that created substances depend upon God, who preserves them and who even produces them continually by a kind of emanation, just as we produce our thoughts." A VI iv 1550. The English Platonist and contemporary of Leibniz, Anne Conway uses similar language to talk about the relation between God and creatures. God is "the infinite fountain and ocean of goodness, charity, and bounty," which "flow perpetually" into creation. That divine "ocean" will necessarily overflow "in its perpetual emanation and continual flux for the production of creatures." Any product of God contains the divine attributes though in an inferior manner. See Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, Book III §6 (17).

⁶⁰ G VI 27: T Preface 51–2. "Car en faisant son devoir, en obeissant à la raison, on remplit les ordres de la Supreme Raison."

ideas, proclaiming that divine goodness and justice are shown forth to perfection in God's designs for the souls of men."⁶¹

The implication of the Preface so far is that neither religious prophets nor religions are required for piety. There is no suggestion that a pious person might be someone who abides by the tenets of the faith or is a careful follower of religious tradition. Neither belief in the divinity of Christ nor commitment to standard Christian doctrines seems necessary for piety. Rather, the only requisites for piety seem to be the capacities to grasp divine perfections and to love them.

Nor does piety seem to render the pious person religious. Leibniz makes the surprising claim that piety yields proper citizenship. He continues:

[J] One directs all one's intentions to the common good, which is no other than the glory of God. Thus one finds that there is no greater individual interest than to espouse that of the community, and one gains satisfaction for oneself by taking pleasure in the acquisition of true benefits for men. Whether one succeeds therein or not, one is content with what comes to pass, being once resigned to the will of God and knowing that what he wills is best. . . . Our charity is humble and full of moderation, it presumes not to domineer; attentive alike to our own faults and to the talents of others, we are inclined to criticize our own actions and to excuse and vindicate those of others. We must work out our own perfection and do wrong to no man. There is no piety where there is not charity; and without being kindly and beneficent one cannot show sincere religion.⁶²

To be pious is to "show sincere religion," which is to commit oneself to the common good. Individual perfection involves engaging in the good of others.

A quick review will put the full significance of passage [J] into clearer focus. The Preface begins with a bleak diagnosis of the human condition: there is a paucity of sound piety. It then offers a cause and a cure. Religion causes the problem by leading people, who "are impressed by what is outward," away from proper piety. God offers the cure by being available to be known and loved. But there remains the difficulty of getting people to abandon false religious beliefs in order to find God. In [J], Leibniz announces his intention to contribute "to the common good" and hence "the glory of God" by motivating his readers to be more perfect. That is, Leibniz is here both describing what the pious person does and doing it himself. He intends to contribute "to the common good" and hence "the glory of God" by motivating his readers to be more perfect. In the Preface so far, his main contribution to that perfection has been to describe the dangers of religion and to suggest the way toward piety. As we will see, in the main text he offers his own version of reflective methodology to reveal divine perfections. Whether or not he is successful in leading others to "the acquisition of true benefits," he can "resign" himself to "the will of God." In short, passage [J] reveals the deep motivations behind Leibniz's *Theodicy*: he intends to lure his readers from the darkness of religion into the light of reason and love.

⁶¹ G VI 26: T Preface 50–1.

⁶² G VI 27–8: T Preface 52.

He continues:

[K] when virtue is reasonable, when it is related to God, who is the supreme reason of things, it is founded on knowledge. One cannot love God without knowing his perfections, and this knowledge contains the principles of true piety. The purpose of religion should be to imprint these principles upon our souls, but in some strange way it has happened all too often that men, that teachers of religion have strayed far from this purpose. Contrary to the intention of our divine Master, devotion has been reduced to ceremonies and doctrine has been cumbered with formulae. . . . There are diverse persons who speak much of piety, of devotion, of religion, who are even busied with teaching of such things, and who yet prove to be by no means versed in the divine perfections. They ill understand the goodness and justice of the Sovereign of the universe; they imagine a God who deserves neither to be imitated, nor to be loved.⁶³

This resounding complaint about religious teachers and the dangers they spread is a dramatic conclusion to the negative theme in the first part of the Preface. The warning seems clear: beware of religions and their teachers. The remedy to this “dangerous” state of affairs is also clear: knowledge of divine perfections. Passage [K] is consistent with the radical rationalism of [D], [E], and [F] in that it assumes that human beings have the capacity, without the aid of religious tenets or ceremony, to grasp divine perfections. And consonant with [G], [H], and [I], it implies that divine knowledge is a necessary and sufficient condition for divine love as well as a necessary condition for piety. Finally [K], like passage [J], displays Leibniz’s commitment to motivate people as intended by “our divine Master.” In short, Leibniz explains:

[L] I have been compelled to gather up my thoughts on all these connected questions and to impart them to the public. It is this that I have undertaken in the *Essais*, which I offer here, on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil.⁶⁴

The main task of this section of my chapter is to analyze the first part of the Preface in an attempt to excavate the deep motivations behind the *Theodicy*. There is a negative part: religious tenets and practices commonly block the way to sound piety. There is a positive part: because God’s perfections are available to be understood and loved, sound piety and virtue are available. And there is the concluding part: Leibniz himself has committed himself to attempt to right some of the wrongs of religion by helping people grasp divine perfections.

The Preface changes gears at this point. Having displayed the goals of his project, Leibniz motivates the “questions” described in [L] and shows the danger of popular dogmas about the divinity. He begins this part of the Preface noting: “There are two famous labyrinths where our reason very often goes astray.” One concerns the problem of the continuum and the other, which interests him here, namely, “the great question of the Free and the Necessary, above all in the production and origin of Evil.”⁶⁵ Leibniz

⁶³ G VI 28–9; T Preface 52–3.

⁶⁴ G VI 29; T Preface 53.

⁶⁵ G VI 29; T Preface 53–4.

follows Montaigne in placing these problems in an historical context. One of the main points of the second part of the Preface is to describe how human understanding became “darkened” on these topics. Leibniz holds the ancients, the “Mahometans,” and the Christians responsible, although he blames the “philosophy of Christians” for having recently “increased this difficulty.”⁶⁶ Bayle and the occasionalists are especially dangerous because their views diminish the chances of reclaiming the truth about these issues. In brief, the dogmas put forward by such thinkers have led people astray: “one would say these authors have indeed renounced the dogma which recognizes God’s justice and goodness.”⁶⁷

Leibniz intends to show his readers the way back to right reason and proper understanding: “My hope for success therein is all the greater because it is the cause of God I plead.”⁶⁸ In the third section of the Preface, Leibniz offers his readers reasons to trust him in his attempt to correct the mistaken dogmas of thinkers like Bayle about the reconciliation of “reason with faith in regard to the existence of evil.”⁶⁹ He notes his success “in other profound meditations” so that he has “some right to claim the attention of readers who love truth and are fitted to search after it.”⁷⁰ He displays his long-term interest on the topic of evil and emphasizes the importance of his theory of “Pre-established Harmony” as a means to solve important problems.⁷¹ And he offers a short history of his disagreements with Bayle, which makes it “a fitting moment for the publication of certain of my ideas.”⁷² But the most striking aspect of this final part of the Preface is its author’s security in the truth of his metaphysical system and its power to solve the problem of divine justice. He writes about his philosophical development:

[M] Thus, I had endeavoured to build upon such foundations, established in a conclusive manner, a complete body of the main articles of knowledge that reason pure and simple can impart to us, a body whereof all the parts were properly connected and capable of meeting the most important difficulties of the ancients and the moderns. I had also in consequence formed for myself a certain system concerning the freedom of man and the cooperation of God. This system appeared to me to be such as would in no wise offend reason and faith; and I desired to submit it to the scrutiny of M. Bayle, as well as of those who are in controversy with him.⁷³

Leibniz is surely motivated in the Preface to emphasize the role of reason and de-emphasize that of revelation because of Bayle’s views. As Leibniz summarizes those views in the Preface, “he wishes to infer that our Reason is confounded and cannot meet her own objections, and that one should disregard them and hold fast the revealed dogmas.”⁷⁴ In response to Bayle, Leibniz offers his readers reason “pure and simple.”

⁶⁶ G VI 33: T Preface 57.

⁶⁹ G VI 43: T Preface 67.

⁷² G VI 45: T Preface 68.

⁶⁷ G VI 34: T Preface 58.

⁷⁰ G VI 38: T Preface 62.

⁷³ G VI 44: T Preface 68.

⁶⁸ G VI 38: T Preface 62.

⁷¹ G VI 39–40: T Preface 64–5.

⁷⁴ G VI 34: T Preface 58.

The final part of the Preface displays, with varying degrees of specificity, some of “the main articles” of Leibniz’s metaphysics. They constitute the background to the discussion of the main text and the materials with which he will solve the problem of divine justice. As noted in section 2, the newly coined word “*théodicée*” would have generated questions about what innovations the text contained on its ancient topic. Leibniz offers a clear answer in [M]: his metaphysical “system” has materials to solve “the most important difficulties of the ancients and the moderns.” Although his certainty about the explanatory power of his metaphysics might seem to conflict with the humility required by his reflective methodology, the next section will suggest otherwise.

The main themes of the first part of the Preface run through the second and third parts as well. Too many people have been misled by false dogmas so that the means to truth is unclear. Leibniz intends to disabuse his readers of falsities concerning divine justice and thereby prepare them to grasp divine perfections. Neither religion nor revealed truths of any kind are required to do this.

4. Knowing and Loving Divine Perfections

In Part One of the *Theodicy*, Leibniz summarizes the central assumption of his book: “In truth God, in designing to create the world, purposed solely to manifest and communicate his perfections in the way that was most efficacious, and most worthy of his greatness, his wisdom, and his goodness.”⁷⁵ The book’s Preface prepares readers to seek divine perfections and sound piety. To begin the journey to piety, they need only glimpse divine perfections.

One of the main points of this chapter is to show that the *Theodicy* is constructed to maximize the likelihood that readers will glimpse divine perfections. Passage [H] lists the main features of the divinity as power, order, justice, goodness, and beauty. Leibniz employs a reflective methodology in the main text to encourage his readers to contemplate the divine features, love them, and therefore set themselves on the road to virtue. While the main text is engaged in refuting Bayle and explicating divine justice, its most important goal is to encourage proper piety by displaying these features. That is, the *point* of the refutation and explication is to exhibit the divine perfections and open the way to piety. In order to understand exactly how the reflective methodology of the main text is supposed to encourage piety, more needs to be said about coming to know divine perfections.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ T 78.

⁷⁶ Some of the material of this section appears in my paper, “Leibniz on Knowledge and God,” *Leibniz and Religion*, ed. Donald Rutherford, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (2002): 531–50. See especially section V.

In an unpublished note written at the end of the 17th century, *On the True Mystical Theology* [*Von der wahren Theologia mystica*],⁷⁷ Leibniz discusses his views on emanative causation, divine knowledge, and light:

Every perfection flows immediately from God. Only the *inner light* that God himself kindles in us has the power to give us a right knowledge of God. The divine perfections are concealed in all things, but very few know how to discover them there. Hence there are many who are learned without being illumined, because they believe not God or the light but only their earthly teachers or their external senses and so remain in the contemplation of imperfections.⁷⁸

The tension here between the ubiquity of God's perfections and the difficulty people have in finding them parallels that in the Preface.⁷⁹ And the underlying epistemology is the same: humans have the capacity to know God's perfections, but need to be properly "illumined" to do so. As Leibniz provocatively puts it here, "God is the easiest and the hardest being to know."⁸⁰

But *On the True Mystical Theology* is more explicit than the Preface about how to resolve the tension. Leibniz explains: "Within our self-state [Selbststand] there lies an infinity, a footprint or reflection of the omniscience and omnipresence of God." In order to know a divine perfection, one need only grasp a divine property. And grasping such a property is easy because the properties of God are everywhere: "In each and every creature is everything, but with a certain *degree of clarity* [*Kraft der Klarheit*]."⁸¹ For Leibniz, God contains an infinity of attributes or what he sometimes calls properties; each of these has an essence. For any such essence, E, there is a range of possible cognitions of it, from partial to complete, where a partial cognition of E is to grasp one of its essential properties and a complete cognition is to grasp every such property.⁸² A complete cognition requires an infinite understanding and so no finite human being can have such a cognition of any divine attribute. Thirty years before he wrote the *Theodicy*, Leibniz was keen to make this point by using numerical examples. He explains, for example, that the essence of the number 6 can be understood in an infinity of ways. To understand either $3 + 3$, 2×3 , $2 + 4$, or $(2 \times 13) - (2 \times 10)$ is to have a partial understanding of the essence of 6. To have a complete understanding is to know

⁷⁷ As with virtually all of his unpublished notes, the title given to this one is not Leibniz's. So we should not attach too much importance to the title and any suggestion that Leibniz is here a "mystic." Moreover, the views described here are found elsewhere.

⁷⁸ *Leibniz' Deutsche Schriften*, 2 vols, ed. G.E. Guhrauer (Berlin, 1838–1840), vol. I, 410. For a translation of this text, see L 367–9.

⁷⁹ Note that in the Preface, Leibniz identifies religion as the primary cause of "darkness"; the culprit here extends to teachers of all kinds (not just religious teachers) and to "external senses."

⁸⁰ *Leibniz' Deutsche Schriften*, vol. I, 411.

⁸¹ *Leibniz' Deutsche Schriften*, vol. I, 411.

⁸² A helpful presentation of this idea is at A VI, 3, 139–40 where Leibniz writes: "Even an accurate cognition [*exacta cognitio*] can increase, not by novelty of matter, but by novelty of reflection. If you have nine units accessible to you, then you have comprehended accurately the essence of the number nine. However, even if you were to have the material for all its properties, nevertheless you would not have its form or reflection [*formam seu reflexionem*]. For even if you do not observe that three times three... and a thousand other

all such properties of 6.⁸³ Since, triangularity, 6-ness, and justice are all attributes of God, it follows that to have a partial cognition of any such essence is to have a partial cognition of God. Although there is a huge epistemological divide between a partial and complete understanding of any essence—whether triangularity, 6-ness, or justice—and an even greater gap between a partial understanding of such an essence and a complete understanding of God, it is nonetheless true that to understand any essence partially is to have a partial understanding of God. So, “God is the easiest . . . being to know” in that to know any essence (say, 6-ness) partially is to know God. But the divinity is also “the hardest being to know” in that complete knowledge of a single property of God (say, 6-ness) requires understanding an infinity of properties.

In texts contemporaneous with the *Theodicy* and *On the True Mystical Theology*, Leibniz confirms the close relation between the human mind and God and highlights the ease of divine knowledge. To find God, all we have to do is to pay the right attention: “It would indeed be wrong to think that we can easily read these eternal laws of *reason* in the soul, as the Praetor’s edict can be read on his notice-board, without effort or inquiry; but it is enough that they can be discovered within us by dint of attention.”⁸⁴ Or, in a related text, he explains: “the principle of order proves that the more we analyze things, the more they satisfy our intellect.”⁸⁵

The reflective methodology of the *Theodicy* is designed to give readers glimpses of divine perfections and the world’s “principle of order,” and thereby set them on the path to piety. Although the first step to piety is a partial knowledge of some divine perfection or property, the motivation to take the next step derives from the love and pleasure resulting from such knowledge. As passage [G] insists, “the Divinity” wished to be the object of “our love and devotion” so that “to contemplate his perfections” is to “love him.” As each of the passages [G], [H], [I], [J], and [K] suggests, the journey to greater and greater divine knowledge is motivated by love. As more perfections are contemplated, the love and pleasure increase.

Leibniz structures the main text of the *Theodicy* to maximize this contemplation and pleasure. *On the True Mystical Theology* includes an account of the journey from knowledge to piety and true faith and ultimately to blessedness: “the knowledge of

combinations are nine, you have nonetheless thought of the essence of the number nine. . . . I will give an example of a finite thing representing [*praebentis*] properties that are infinite without any comparison with external things. Here is a circle: if you know that all the lines from the center to the circumference are equal, in my opinion, you consider its essence sufficiently clearly. Still you have not comprehended in virtue of that innumerable theorems.” Also see A VI iii 462–3.

⁸³ See, e.g. A VI iii 512. Leibniz follows many of his Platonist predecessors (e.g. Philo and Plotinus) in assuming that the Ideas that the divine intellect conceives are also attributes of it. Leibniz’s terminology concerning attribute, property, essence, and perfection shifts over time. In the *De summa rerum* papers written in the 1670s, he is clear that God has an infinity of attributes, each of which is an “Idea” that God conceives and that itself has an essence. Each such essence has an infinity of properties. But he also sometimes talks about divine attributes as properties. According to Leibniz, it follows that God has the Idea of triangularity and also the attribute of triangularity, which itself has an infinity of properties. See, e.g. A VI iii 514, 516, 518, 523.

⁸⁴ RB, Preface §51. Also see chapter iii, p. 435.

⁸⁵ G VI 347–50: L 837.

God is the beginning of wisdom, the divine attributes are the primary truths for the right order of knowledge.” From this state, one can progress to “the essential light,” which is “the eternal Word of God, in which is all wisdom, all light, indeed the origin of all beings and the origin of truths. Without the radiation of this light no ones achieves true faith, and without true faith no one attains blessedness.”⁸⁶

5. Theodicy and Endeavoring toward Piety

There is insufficient space here to offer an account of the argumentative arc of Leibniz’s essays. But it is worth offering evidence that the main text of the *Theodicy* is consistent with the claims of section 2 about the work’s title and reflective methodology, section 3 about the book’s radical rationalism and commitment to piety, and section 4 about Leibniz’s concern to evoke divine knowledge and love.

The main part of the *Theodicy* begins with the “Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason.” Its topic is the “question of *the conformity of faith with reason*.” Its treatment of the topic is a reflective methodology, though Leibniz’s version contains more philosophical incisiveness than most of his essayist predecessors.⁸⁷ While he is careful to acknowledge the role of faith in human life and the importance attached to “the mysteries,” there is nothing in the Preliminary Dissertation inconsistent with the radical rationalism of the Preface. Although he does not broadcast this rationalism here, it is evident. For example, Leibniz complains about recent “abuse” of “the Corpuscular philosophy” by “the Peripatetic sects” and claims that what is “good . . . in the Corpuscular philosophy” can easily “be combined with all that is sound in Plato and in Aristotle” so that they are brought “into harmony with true [natural] theology.”⁸⁸ Leibniz’s point here is that great philosophers throughout history have been able to use reason to discern fundamental truths about the world and the divine nature that created it. For Leibniz, the truths discerned by great thinkers—whether Plato, Aristotle, or the corpuscularians—will be consistent with one another.⁸⁹

Like the essayists before him, Leibniz treats the topics of the Preliminary Dissertation in historical terms, summarizing the views of various historical figures on questions like the relation between philosophy and theology. He shows how previous philosophers went wrong in extending philosophy and reason into areas in which they did not belong. He explains, for example, that due to “the leisure of the cloisters” and “the unhappiness of the times,” the “Schoolmen” were more inclined to make this kind of

⁸⁶ *Leibniz’ Deutsche Schriften*, vol. I, 411–12.

⁸⁷ T §1. Leibniz’s emphasis. Beddevole often includes tidy arguments in his text and Nicole sometimes does.

⁸⁸ T §11.

⁸⁹ In my book, *Leibniz Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), I argue that as a young man Leibniz was committed to the reconciliation of selected claims drawn from Platonism, Aristotelianism, and the new mechanical philosophy (see chapters 1–4). It is interesting that forty years after he first made such comments about conciliation, he continues to insist on it. I take this to be evidence that the young Leibniz was a radical rationalist.

mistake.⁹⁰ By such means, Leibniz accustoms his readers to reflect on various positions and join him in criticizing false dogmas. In the discussion of Beddevole's *Essays of Anatomy* in section 2, I claimed that his goal is to train readers to see the power of the mechanical philosophy in anatomy. Similarly, Leibniz's goal in his *Essays on Theodicy* is to train readers to experience the power of reason in solving problems left unsolved by "false dogmas." In the end, their reason—especially when applied to the topic of divine justice—will glimpse divine perfections. Revelation is not required to know God. He writes: "we have no need of revealed faith to know that there is such a sole Principle of all things, entirely good and wise. Reason teaches us this."⁹¹

Most of Leibniz's readers would have recognized the similarity between Leibniz's reflective style and those of his predecessors. In the same way that Montaigne, Bacon, Glanvill, and Nicole organize their reflections around a series of questions or topics, Leibniz arranges his discussion around points made by Bayle. In the same way that the earlier essayists often meander around their topics, Leibniz frequently does so as well. Although his discussion contains more metaphysical assumptions and is punctuated with more philosophical distinctions and arguments, he is like them in hoping to train his reader to reflect on his topics in the right way. As his readers would have appreciated, he shares his predecessors' concern with virtue. And thanks to the Preface, his readers might have realized that the point of the main text's refutation, argumentation, and explanation is to exhibit the divine perfections and display the means to piety.

Leibniz's readers also would have noticed the affinity between the autobiographical meanderings of *some* of Leibniz's discussion and those of the essayists described in section 2. Many parts of the *Essays on Theodicy* fall squarely in the tradition of free-floating philosophical commentary and personal reflections. He exclaims, for example, "I am not yet half way through [Bayle's] nineteen maxims, and already I am weary of refuting, and making the same answer always."⁹² Like Montaigne, he is prepared to let his own personality and sense of humor reveal itself: "But we will not amuse ourselves now by discussing a question more curious than necessary."⁹³ Like other essayists, his comments contain exclamations: "In short, all these comparisons, spoken of in these maxims that M. Bayle has just given... are exceedingly lame... What temerity, or rather what absurdity!"⁹⁴ Like Montaigne, he is keen to use a broad array of historical materials as points of comparison and debate. The *Theodicy* is full of historical references and contextualizations.⁹⁵ And like his predecessors, Leibniz does not intend

⁹⁰ T §6.

⁹¹ T §44.

⁹² T § 124.

⁹³ T § 25.

⁹⁴ T § 134.

⁹⁵ Even more than his predecessors, Leibniz discusses recent philosophers, their work, and conversations. These digressions include thinkers with a very broad range of interests. See, for example, the discussion of a Jesuit theologian, "Father Friedrich Spee" who discusses "the secret of piety" and who, "in spite of the danger incurred at the time," had the courage "in telling the truth of the matter" and speaking against the false doctrines of others. Among other things, this story serves as an example of someone who stood up against false dogmas and mistaken religious teachers. See T § 96–7.

to present an “orderly” presentation of claims. He confesses to “digressions,”⁹⁶ and is often explicit that he intends to offer conflicting sides of an issue: “It would be long and wearisome to enter here into the replies and rejoinders coming from one side and the other, and it will suffice for me to explain how I conceive that there is a truth on both sides.”⁹⁷ Finally, like Bacon and Nicole, Leibniz encourages humility while assuming that there are some underlying truths that can be fathomed. In words that might have been written by Glanvill or Nicole, he writes: “it is true that there are reasons for God’s choice, . . . but it does not seem that his choice can be subjected to a rule such as we are capable of conceiving, and such as may flatter the pride of men.”⁹⁸

Leibniz, however, differs from his predecessors in one important way: he insists that human reason can attain certainty about ultimate truths. As we noted, Nicole himself rejects the skepticism of Montaigne and claims that his essays allow for insights, while Beddevole intends to display the truths of anatomy. But Leibniz goes beyond this to say that he will prove important conclusions in his book about ultimate reality. In the Preface, he lists the main results of his discussions and writes, for example: “I will show that God himself, although he always chooses the best, does not act by an absolute necessity.”⁹⁹ Leibniz’s essays attempt to encourage humility of the sort that will allow readers to put aside the falsities of religious and philosophical dogmatists so as to glimpse the divine essence and come to love it. Sometimes his reflective methodology will lead to secure truths of reason, sometimes not. But, like his fellow essayists, Leibniz intends to help his readers discover insights for themselves.

Equally clear in the main body of the *Theodicy* is Leibniz’s continued commitment to radical rationalism and the power of reason to discern the divine nature and of human psychology to love it. Although the text includes a good deal of discussion about Jesus Christ and grace, Leibniz remains committed to the idea that all people, regardless of religion, can find God. Being a Christian is not necessary for divine knowledge or even to be “saved.” One can arrive at the most important divine truths without Christianity or any other religion. For example, Leibniz is keen to respond to the claim of “many” that “knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ . . . is necessary for those who would tread the wonted paths to salvation.” He denies this, writing that “one may doubt” that such people don’t attain salvation “for how do we know whether they do not receive ordinary or extraordinary succour of kinds unknown to us?”¹⁰⁰ Leibniz encourages Christians in their hope for divine help while also maintaining that non-Christians

⁹⁶ T § 98.

⁹⁷ T § 42.

⁹⁸ T § 104.

⁹⁹ G VI 37: T Preface 61.

¹⁰⁰ T § 95. In this part of the *Theodicy* Leibniz is being particularly opaque on exactly what is required for salvation. There are good reasons to believe that Leibniz had become more thoroughly committed to the radical rationalism that I am attributing to him during the final years of the 17th century due to the reports from the Jesuit missionaries in China about the wisdom and insights of the Chinese. As Leibniz summarized his views in a letter of 1705, based on Jesuit accounts of “the ancient books,” “ancient history,” and “science”

can come to God. In Part One, Leibniz summarizes the point of his project in a manner consistent with the claims of the Preface:

Our end is to banish from men the false ideas that represent God to them as . . . unfitted to be loved and unworthy of being loved. These notions are the more evil in relation to God inasmuch as the essence of piety is not only to fear him but also to love him above all things: and that cannot come about unless there be knowledge of his perfections capable of arousing the love which he deserves, and which makes the felicity of those that love him. Feeling ourselves animated by a zeal such as cannot fail to please him, we have cause to hope that he will enlighten us, and that he will himself aid us in the execution of a project undertaken for his glory and for the good of men. A cause so good gives confidence.¹⁰¹

Leibniz himself has confidence in his views about God and the created world. In order to encourage his readers to have the same, he asks them to join him in reflecting on the sundry problems and issues surrounding divine justice. By helping them banish their false ideas and offering them the means to true ones, he helps them to find such “zeal.” In the end, he wants to encourage them to think that their capacities for reason and love are sufficient for piety.

6. Conclusion

One of the two main points of this chapter is to show that the goal of Leibniz’s *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal* is to motivate virtue and piety.¹⁰² Once we recognize the preparatory work accomplished by the book’s title and Preface, this goal is easier to discern. The other main point is to excavate both the radical rationalism that Leibniz assumes in the book and the reflective methodology that he uses in his discussion of divine justice. While it remains true that the *Theodicy* contains a sustained attempt to solve the problem of evil and to rescue reason’s power from Bayle’s critique, both the solution and the rescue fall within the arc of Leibniz’s pious concerns, radical rationalism, and reflective methodology.

of the Chinese as well as their understanding of the “holy spirit,” it seems clear that like “the ancient Hebrews (witness the book of Job)” they are “far from idolatry” and are “worshippers of the sovereign principle.” See *Der Briefwechsel mit den Jesuiten in China (1689–1714)*, ed. Rita Widmaier and Malte-Ludolf Babin (Hamburg: Felix-Meiner, 2006), 476–8. For some of Leibniz’s writings on China, see Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Writings on China*, eds. and trans. Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Chicago: Open Court, 1994). For a helpful summary of his developing views about China in relation to his correspondence with the Jesuit philosopher, Des Bosses, see Brandon C. Look and Donald Rutherford, *The Yale Leibniz: The Leibniz-Des Bosses Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). See especially the introduction, section 4, entitled “Leibniz and the Jesuits: China and the Universal Church.” Brandon and Rutherford note that in the correspondence with Des Bosses, Leibniz at times suggests that salvation does not require the aid of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰¹ T §6.

¹⁰² See the frontispiece of the first edition of the *Theodicy* which offers strong evidence that Leibniz’s main goal is to show the path to virtue.

Section 2 argues that the title of Leibniz's book would have implied a good deal to early 18th-century readers. Its first word, "essais," places the work squarely in a methodological tradition beginning with Montaigne. Although Leibniz eschews the skepticism of his French predecessor, he follows other essayists in announcing the need to reconsider his topic and in encouraging his readers to seek insight, humility, and virtue. By combining this methodological tradition with a grand and newly coined term, he signals to his readers the intention to offer innovative endeavors on an old topic ingeniously repackaged. And by listing in the title the three main elements of his topic, he advertises the "parts" of divine justice. In light of its title, the text's personal reflections and philosophical meandering would not have surprised its readers. It behooves scholars to evaluate Leibniz's work with these methodological matters in mind. However much he molds the essayist tradition to suit his own philosophical needs, his essays stand firmly in that tradition.

Section 3 explicates how the Preface prepares the reader for the radical rationalism at the heart of Leibniz's project and encourages the love and piety that are supposed to follow from it. The bleak manner in which the work begins is wonderfully suitable: "human weakness" leads people to be impressed by "what is outward" so that "the inner essence of things" remains hidden. By the end of the Preface, readers have been warned about the dangers of religious practices, lured by the promise of divine knowledge, introduced to the thorny problem of evil, cautioned about the mistakes of Bayle and others, and provided with enough of Leibniz's metaphysics to set the stage for the endeavors of the main text. Having prepared his readers for the significance of the task ahead, Leibniz asks them to join him in his reflections on divine justice. But the Preface also entices readers to think seriously about the role of religion in general and Christianity in particular in the pursuit of divine truths and virtue. This is important. Throughout the main text of the *Theodicy*, Leibniz carefully avoids stating anything overtly unorthodox, but he suggests throughout that piety is available to anyone capable of rationality and divine love. Against the background of the Preface, we can more easily see him walking a very thin line between recognizing the significance of Christ as an inspiration to love and diminishing his divinity. There are good reasons to believe that by the early 18th century Leibniz was convinced that neither religious practice nor religious doctrines were necessary for piety. Because the Preface is so clear on this point, we need to rethink the role of religion in the book as a whole.

Section 4 articulates his views on the close relation between humans and God and the ease with which divine knowledge and its accompanying love are to be gained. In order to discern the divinity, the readers must escape the false dogmas of Bayle and others. In a passage from the Preface, which we have not seen, Leibniz offers a warning that applies to the main text: "But it happens only too often . . . that the divine light is obscured by the opinions of men,"¹⁰³ so that "there are still traces

¹⁰³ G VI 25: T Preface 50.

of the reign of darkness.”¹⁰⁴ In order to lead his readers—his community—out of such darkness, the *Theodicy* proceeds by slow but steady steps, aided by personal reflections and historical comments. Leibniz has organized his discussion of divine justice to tap into the reason of “attentive” humans so that they will more readily glimpse divine perfections and love them.

Section 5 offers evidence that the overarching methodological strategy of the main text, despite its point-by-point discussion of Bayle, is one of a reflective methodology that assumes radical rationalism. The point of the *Theodicy* is to encourage its readers to be pious and to help them improve the world. It’s a pity Leibniz’s endeavors didn’t work.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ G VI 29; T Preface 53.

¹⁰⁵ My endeavors have been much helped by the National Humanities Center, where I was a Fellow the fall of 2012, and by Sam Newlands and Larry Jorgensen whose patience and insightful comments made this a much better chapter.