

Was Leibniz Committed to Necessitarianism in Some Part of *De Summa Rerum*?

ライプニッツは『至高存在について』のどこかで必然主義に与したのか?

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〈要旨〉

In this paper, I take Leibniz's *De Summa Rerum* (hereafter DSR) as presenting a system of metaphysics, according to which God is the only substance, and yet he chose some (not all) of possible modifications to create in accordance with his will. This reading implies that Leibniz was not a necessitarian insofar as he did not believe that God necessarily wills a certain choice. But DSR has some passages in which Leibniz seems to suggest that events of this world necessarily happen. I examine these passages, and argue that they do not completely show that Leibniz committed a version of necessitarianism. Lastly, I examine Mogens Laerke's interpretation that Leibniz's system of DSR is not free from a worry of necessitarianism since Leibniz did not have a theory of merely possible beings.

〈キーワード〉

ライプニッツ, スピノザ, 必然性, 偶然性, 一元論

1. Introduction

The authors of two recent works, focused upon the discussions in *De Summa Rerum* (hereafter DSR), have argued that Leibniz once introduced a monistic metaphysics, according to which God is the only substance. Robert Adams takes note of *That a Perfect Thing is Possible* from DSR, in which Leibniz asserted “[i]t can easily be demonstrated that all things are distinguished, not as substances (i.e., radically) but as modes” (A VI iii, 573 = DSR 93; Adams 1994, p. 129). In commenting on this passage, Adams has argued that Leibniz had come to a “monistic conclusion” (ibid.). By referring to the same passage, Mogens Laerke also suggests that Leibniz held a quasi-Spinozistic system of metaphysics at that time (Laerke 2008, p. 444; pp. 507-8). Here some readers of their works might be tempted to conclude that when Leibniz wrote DSR he held a stable system of metaphysics, in which we can find many claims to which he was explicitly committed to, and one of the claims is that there is only one substance, namely God. But

Leibniz suggested that God utilizes his will to actualize creatures in DSR. Leibniz's metaphysics seems to be different from Spinoza's monism, according to which God does not exercise his will to create finite things.

In this paper, I take DSR as presenting a system of metaphysics, according to which God is the only substance, and yet he chose some (not all) of possible modifications to create in accordance with his will. This reading implies that Leibniz was not a necessitarian insofar as he did not believe that God necessarily wills a certain choice. But DSR has some passages in which Leibniz seems to suggest that events of this world necessarily happen. It may look as contradicting the view that God exercises his will to create finite things, which further suggests that DSR as a whole does not present a consistent system. I examine these passages, and argue that they do not completely show that Leibniz held a necessitarianism. Lastly, I examine Laerke's interpretation, according to which Leibniz's system of DSR is not free from a worry of necessitarianism since Leibniz did not have a theory of merely possible beings. I argue that

Leibniz actually had it, and we don't have to take his system as holding that finite things necessarily exist.

2. Leibniz's Monism in DSR

The following is a representative passage in which Leibniz seems to hold that God is the only substance, and that all the finite things are modes of God:

It can easily be demonstrated that all things are distinguished, not as substances (i.e., radically) but as modes. This can be demonstrated from the fact that, of those things which are radically distinct, one can be perfectly understood without another; that is, all the requisites of the one can be understood without all the requisites of the other being understood. But in the case of things, this is not so; for since the ultimate reason of things is unique, and contains by itself the aggregate of all requisites of all things, it is evident that the requisites of all things are the same.... Therefore the essence of all things is the same, and things differ only modally, just as a town seen from a high point differs from the town seen from a plain. If only those things are really different which can be separated, or, of which one can be perfectly understood without the other, it follows that no thing really differs from another, but that all things are one, just as Plato argues in the *Parmenides*. (A VI iii, 573 = DSR 93-5)

Here Leibniz argued that all things are distinguished merely as modes. Since they are not distinguished as substances, all things can be considered as "one." There are not two or more substances in the universe, as Spinoza believed. Here one may suppose that Leibniz completely accepted the main framework of Spinoza's metaphysics, according to which God does not have a will, and he necessarily produces all the finite things.

3. Non-Necessitarian Passages in DSR

However, DSR has a passage in which Leibniz seems to argue that actual finite things contingently exist. The following is a note from *On the Secret of Sublime, or*

on the Supreme Being (hereafter *On the Secret*) of 11 Feb 1676:

From the fact that something exists, it follows that there is some necessity for that thing, and so it follows either that all things are necessary per se—which is false—or at any rate that their ultimate causes are necessary per se. From which it follows that an absolutely necessary being is possible, i.e., does not imply a contradiction; from which it follows that it exists. One must now see whether it can be demonstrated of it that it is unique, etc. Further, since some things exist and some do not exist, it follows that there exist the most perfect. (A VI iii, 473 = DSR 23)

Leibniz explicitly declared that either all the things necessarily exist per se, or ultimate causes necessarily exist per se. Let us see the context of the passage. In *On the Secret*, Leibniz at first discussed the principle that "the greatest amount of essence that can exist, does exist" (A VI iii, 472 = DSR 21). The series of actual things contain the greatest amount of essence, and the amount is larger than that of any other series of possible things. Leibniz also wrote that "one perfect being is to be preferred to many imperfect beings" since the imperfect beings "impede the existence of others" (A V iii, 472 = DSR 23). Here he suggested that some beings exist while other beings do not, and not all the possible things exist. Also in the quoted note, Leibniz explicitly wrote "some things exist and so do not exist." Thus he denied that all the things necessarily exist per se.

Now it should be noted that Leibniz used the expression "necessary per se." This expression might be understood as implying that Leibniz distinguished being "necessary per se" from being merely necessary. If so, he may have thought that all things necessarily exist, though they are not necessary per se. Indeed, Leibniz also used the expression "absolutely necessary" in the note, which suggests that this refers to a stronger type of necessity. Here one may suppose that according to Leibniz, God is the only being whose existence is absolutely necessary, and the existence of finite things is not absolutely necessary, though it is necessary in a weak sense.

But there is another passage of *On the Secret*, in which Leibniz seems to suggest that God contingently

create finite things:

God is not as some represent him - something metaphysical, imaginary, incapable of thought, will, or action, so that it would be the same as if you were to say that God is nature, fate, fortune, necessity, the world. Rather, God is a certain substance, a person, a mind. Meditations of such a kind could be entitled *On the Secrets of the Sublime*, or again *On the Supreme Being*. (A VI iii, 474-5 = DSR 27)

Leibniz seems to argue that God has a will. To be sure, Leibniz did not explicitly declare that God has a will. However, he contrasted his view with one that God is incapable of will, suggesting that God actually can will something. Also, Leibniz argued that God is not a necessity. It is not easy to grasp what he meant, but he seems to suggest that actual finite things are contingently (and not necessarily) created by God.

4. Passages Concerning Necessity from DSR

Hereby I argue that Leibniz was not committed to a necessitarian view in DSR. But there is a passage of DSR that seems to suggest that Peter necessarily existed. The following passage is from *On Mind, the Universe and God* (hereafter *On Mind*) of December 1975:

"Impossible" is a two-fold concept: that which does not have essence, and that which does not have existence, i.e., that which neither was, is, nor will be because it is incompatible with God, or, with the existence or reason which brings it about that things exist rather than do not exist. One must see if it can be proved that there are essences which lack existence, so that it cannot be said that nothing can be conceived which will not exist at some time in the whole of eternity.- All things which are, will be, and have been, constitute a whole. Whatever is incompatible with what is necessary is impossible. There is a reason which brings it about that this, rather than something else, exists. The origin of impossibility is two-fold: one from essence, the

other from existence or, positing as actual. In the same way, there is a two-fold reason for impossible problems: one, when they are analyzed into a contradictory equation, and the other, when there is an analysis into an imaginary quantity, for which no place can be understood. This is an excellent image of those things which neither have been, nor are, nor will be. This proposition is necessary: "Whatever will be, will be." Whatever has been done cannot be undone. It is impossible that Peter did not exist, therefore it is necessary that Peter existed, therefore the past existence of Peter is necessary. In the same way it will be demonstrated that it is a necessary proposition that the last judgement will come. But there is something frivolous in all this. (A VI iii, 463-4 = DSR 7)

Leibniz seems to conclude that "the past existence of Peter is necessary." This conclusion seems to follow from the propositions "whatever has been done cannot be undone" and "it is impossible that Peter did not exist." So one may think that Leibniz held necessitarianism here. But I oppose to the necessitarian reading of this passage for the three following reasons.

I: Leibniz distinguished two concepts of impossibility, and he seems to suppose that "Peter did not exist" is not impossible in the strong sense. The first kind of an impossible involves a contradiction, and it is proved to be impossible through this contradiction. The other kind is understood as something analogous to an "imaginary quantity." In another passage of *On Mind*, Leibniz had a discussion of an imaginary number:

A procedure by definitions is to a procedure by ideas as a procedure by drawings is to a procedure by mere imaginations which, being inconstant in themselves, are fixed in this way. When we proceed by imaginations or ideas, without drawings or definitions, we are deceived by the memory, and we often seem to ourselves to have achieved what we have not done. And in this there lies every kind of error; we proceed by analogies, often not troubling ourselves about their application to the present case. Thus, when I say that -1 is a possible quantity, I proceed by

certain analogies. (A VI iii, 462 = DSR 3)

Leibniz suggested that -1 is a possible quantity. But it is not proved to be possible by “a procedure by definitions.” Rather, it is assumed to be possible by the fact that we cannot find a contradiction in its concept. Leibniz seems to think that it is not applied to ordinary numbers when he wrote that an imaginary number is not applied to “the present case.” If we just consider the set of real numbers (or natural numbers or others), then we do not find any place for an imaginary number. In other words, any real number does not satisfy the condition that its power is equal to -1 . Yet, we cannot find a contradiction in the concept of an imaginary number, and it is possible to assume that the number belongs to another realm. Leibniz also seems to suggest that an imaginary number is “impossible” in the weak sense that its possibility is not proved in a positive way. Now we can understand that “Peter did not exist” is impossible in this weak sense.

II: Leibniz made a distinction between that which doesn't have an essence, and that which doesn't have an existence. This seems to suggest that for Leibniz, there is a possible thing that only has an essence, and yet does not have an existence. This seems to suggest that some things contingently exist, and some contingently do not. Leibniz stated that “[o]ne must see if it can be proved that there are essences which lack existence, so that it cannot be said that nothing can be conceived which will not exist at some time in the whole of eternity” (A VI iii, 463-4 = DSR 7). This passage suggests that if something can be conceived as that which will not exist at some time, then it has some essence, but it lacks existence. In my interpretation, Leibniz conceived something as not existing at some time, and it is considered as having an essence without existence. Pegasus may be such a thing since it does not exist though it is possible to exist (and in this sense it has an essence). Naturally, there seems to be a distinction between actual and merely possible things.

III: After concluding that “the past existence of Peter is necessary,” Leibniz stated that “there is something frivolous in all this.” I think he ultimately rejected the conclusion. In my reading, Leibniz suggested that some may assume that Peter necessarily existed, but that Peter necessarily existed is absurd. Since Leibniz introduced an argument of reduction ad absurdum, he did not accept the conclusion at the middle of the argument.

Now one may wonder if DSR has another passage in which Leibniz suggested a necessitarian view. And in fact, there is a passage of *On Mind* discussing necessity:

If the greatest line that can be drawn from a given point through a given point is a quantity, it follows that the greatest line, produced in both directions, has a middle. Indeed, from this it will follow that there is some mid-point, of the whole of space. In this way the universe will have a centre and diameters, though the latter will be without end. From a given point to a given straight line, a greatest straight line cannot be drawn. In the same way in which there is a mid-point in the universe, there will also be a mid-point in eternity. One asks whether this mid-point has already passed, and how long ago. It is necessary that our affairs take place in the mid-point of the universe, and in the middle instant of eternity. It is possible that the mid-point of eternity is distant from us by an infinite time, and that the middle of space is distant from us by an infinite line. When the mid-point of eternity comes, it can be said of God that half of his life has passed. (A VI iii, 465 = DSR 9)

However, I don't think Leibniz assumed that events of the world necessarily happen. For sure, he wrote that “[i]t is necessary that our affairs take place in the mid-point of the universe.” It may seem to suggest that Leibniz held a necessitarian view. But the discussions of the whole passage are based upon a wrong assumption: The length of the greatest line is a quantity. For Leibniz, any line can be extended further, and its length cannot be the greatest. Similarly, any number can be made larger by adding one or some other number, and there is no greatest number. Leibniz wanted to show that if we accept a wrong assumption, an absurd conclusion will follow.

5. Laerke's Interpretation

Laerke does not explicitly argue that Leibniz was committed to a necessitarian view in DSR, but he suggests that there is some worry of necessitarianism in the quasi-spinozistic system of DSR, arguing that Leibniz did not have the theory of pure possibles at that time (Laerke

2008, pp. 546-7; Rivaud 1914, pp. 117-8). Still, I think we can find a discussion of pure possibles in DSR. Let us see an important passage:

But my principle is: whatever can exist and is compatible with others, exists. For the sole reason for limiting existence, for all possibles, must be that not all are compatible. So the sole reason for limitation is that those things should preferably exist which involve the greatest amount of reality. If all possibles were to exist, there would be no need of a reason for existing, and mere possibility would be enough. So there would not be a God, except in so far as he is possible. But a God of the kind in whom the pious believe would not be possible, if the opinion of those who believe that all possibles exist were true. (A VI iii, 582 = DSR 105)

Leibniz took the view that not all possibles exist. Since some of them are not compatible with others, they cannot exist if the others exist. As Laerke points out, Leibniz did not discuss the reality of possibles things. Purely possible things are not considered as having the ideal reality, while according to the later philosophy of Leibniz, they do have it (Laerke 2008, p. 546). Also, Leibniz did not use the term “pure possible,” but it is obvious that he considered non-existing possibles. So, I disagree with Laerke if he implies that Leibniz did not introduce a theory of pure possibles simply because he did not use the term “pure possible.”

Laerke further argues that in DSR “the being conceived in God and the existence in the created world seem not to be separated,” and “the harmony of the world is not exactly created by God, but rather it is God himself” (ibid, p. 548). In this framework, actual finite things are in God conceived as they are, but merely possible things don’t have any ontological status. Laerke’s interpretation here is based upon *My Principle is: Whatever Can Exist and is Compatible with Others, Exists* (hereafter *My Principle*), some notes on letters to Oldenburg, and *On Mind*. I examine the reasons which Laerke presents to defend his reading.

I: The presented passage from *My Principle* rather suggests that Leibniz substantially had a theory of pure possibles. Leibniz stated that “[i]f all possibles were to exist, there would be no need of a reason for existing” (A

VI iii, 582 = DSR 105). Here Leibniz suggested that actually not “all possible exist.” So, some possibles are merely possible since they do not exist. Possibles are recognized as some kind of entities. Against my point, perhaps Laerke would present the following passage which he cited in a footnote (ibid, p. 548n):

And indeed it is generally admitted that, if two things are of such a kind that it is impossible for the one to be understood without the other, then they are “simultaneous.” And certainly, if we were perfectly knowing, i.e., if we were gods, we would easily see that those things which, because of our ignorance, now appear to exist at the same time by accident, coexist by their very nature, i.e., by the necessity of the divine intellect. But these matters must be discussed more accurately. For there are ultimate inexplicable concepts of these things, because they are understood per se and are simple. (A VI iii, 484 = DSR 41)

Leibniz seems to suggest that non-existing things are taken as possibles and yet in fact they are not possible. This implies that so-called possibles are impossible for God. But Leibniz added that “these matters must be discussed more accurately.” In my reading, Leibniz seems to argue that God realizes that each of two simultaneous things, if both of them taken together, are considered as being impossible without the other, but it is considered as possible if it is taken separately from the other. If so, the distinction between possible and actual things is not just for human beings.

II: The passage from a note on letters to Oldenburg does not show that the actual world exists insofar as it is thought by God as the best:

Ces paroles doivent s’expliquer ainsi: à savoir que le monde n’a pu être produit autrement, parce que Dieu ne peut pas ne pas agir avec une souveraine perfection. Étant le plus sage, il choisit le meilleur. Mais il ne faut pas croire que tout découle de la nature de Dieu sans aucune intervention de la volonté. L’exemple tiré de l’opération par laquelle Dieu se comprend lui-même ne me paraît pas heureux, parce que cet acte a lieu en de çà de l’intervention. (A VI iii,

364 = LDS 258)

Thus these need to be explained as the following: The world cannot be produced otherwise, because God cannot act but in the most perfect manner. Since he is the wisest, he chooses the best. But this best choice must involve his will. Laerke reads this passage as suggesting that God's will doesn't play a substantial role to provide the existence of the world, since it exists simply because it is considered as the best. Laerke points out that Leibniz did not state that "God conceives the aggregate of possibles before the creation." But Leibniz also stated that the operation of God's comprehension takes place before the intervention of the will. Obviously, God conceives something before exercising his will to actualize the world.

III: Though Laerke introduces the passage that "[i]mpossible" is a two-fold concept: that which does not have essence, and that which does not have existence" from *On Mind*, as we have seen, this actually suggests that "Peter did not exist" is not necessarily impossible (A VI iii, 463 = DSR 7). Leibniz seems to suggest that some entity has its essence, but it does not exist. He seems to admit that such an entity has some kind of ontological status.

Abbreviation

A. = *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*. Herausgegeben von der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Darmstadt, 1923 ff., Leipzig, 1938 ff., Berlin, 1950 ff. Cited by series, volume, and page.

DSR. = *De Summa Rerum*. 1992. Trans. and ed. G.H.R. Parkinson. Yale University Press.

LDS. = *Leibniz, Descartes et Spinoza*. 1862. L.A. Foucher de Careil. Librairie Philosophique de Lagrange.

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