JEMS 5 (2016), 2: 29–52

Striving Possibles and Leibniz's Cognitivist Theory of Volition

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Abstract: Leibniz's claim that possibles strive towards existence has led to diverging interpretations. According to the metaphorical interpretation, only the divine will is causally efficacious in bringing possibles into exisence. According to the literal interpretation, God endows possibles with causal powers of their own. The present article suggests a solution to this interpretative impass by suggesting that the doctrine of the striving possibles can be understood as a consequence of Leibniz's early cognitivist theory of volition. According to this theory, thinking the degree of goodness of something is identical with wanting it to this degree. Arguably, this analysis of volition is relevant not only for Leibniz's early analysis of the human mind but also for his early analysis of the divine mind.

Keywords: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Bartolomeo Viotti, Mario Nizolio, essence, existence, possibility, divine will, divine intellect

1. Introduction

According to *On the Radical Origin of Things*, "in possible things or in possibility itself or essence there is an exigency to exist [...] and, I dare to say, essence by itself tends towards existence."[1] This doctrine—the doctrine of the striving possibles—has always puzzled interpreters. Some interpreters, including David Blumenfeld and Nicholas Rescher, have suggested that Leibniz here is simply using a metaphor. According to this suggestion, the doctrine of

[1] *De rerum originatione radicali*, 23 November 1697, in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz*, edited by Carl I. Gerhardt, 7 vols., Berlin: Winter: 1875–1890 (hereafter cited as GP, followed by volume and page numbers), GP VII, 303: "aliquam in rebus possibilibus seu in ipsa possibilitate vel essentia esse exigentiam existentiae […] et, ut verbo complectar, essentiam per se tendere ad existentiam."

striving possibles can be reduced to claims about causally relevant characteristics of the divine will.[2] Thus, according to the metaphorical reading, everything that really is active in the process of creation is the divine will, whereas essences or possible substances as contents of the divine understanding do not have any causal efficacy of their own. In fact, such an interpretation is supported by a passage from *Body Is Not a Substance,* written shortly after the Paris years. Leibniz there claims that "coherence is the sign of truth, but its cause is the will of God, and its formal reason is that God perceives something to be the best or most harmonious, i.e., that something is pleasing to God. So divine will itself, so to speak, is the existence of things."[3]

However, there are other passages in Leibniz's writings, which give no indication that talk about the striving towards existence is meant in a metaphorical sense. For example, in *On First Truths* from around 1680 Leibniz writes: "*Everything that is possible demands existence*, and therefore would exist unless something else which also demands existence gets in the way and is incompatible with the first […]."[4] Moreover, in a marginal note to the text, he adds: "If Existence were something else than the exigency of existence, it would follow that existence itself would have some essence or that something new would be added to things, about which again it can be asked whether this essence exists, or not, and why rather this one than another."[5] Passages such as these have led other interpreters, including Paul Schrecker, Yvon Belaval, and Christipher Shields to a literal interpretation of the doctrine of striving possibles. According to their interpretation, the striving towards existence is inherent in possible substances themselves. Thus, according to such a reading, essences or possible substances themselves posses causally relevant characteristics.[6] In particular, Shields has pointed out that, according to Leibniz, God "makes" (*facit*)

[2] David Blumenfeld, "Leibniz's Theory of Striving Possibles," *Studia Leibnitiana* 5 (1973), pp. 163–177; Nicholas Rescher, "Leibniz on Creation and the Evaluation of Possible Worlds," in Nicholas Rescher, *Leibniz's Metaphysics of Nature. A Group of Essays*, Dordrecht and Boston: Reidel, 1981, pp. 1–19.

[3] *Corpus non est substantia* (1678–1679 [?]), in, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Darmstadt, Leipzig and Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923- ([hereafter cited as A, followed by series, volume, and page numbers],.A VI, 4, 1637: "Signum veritatis […] cohaerentia est, causa autem est voluntas Dei, formalis ratio est quod Deus percipit aliquid optimum esse seu harmonicωtaton, sive quod aliquid Deo placet. Itaque ipsa ut ita dicam voluntas divina est rerum existentia." Translation from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *The Labyrinth of the Continuum. Writings on the Continuum Problem, 1672-1686*, translated by Richard T. W. Arthur, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, p. 261.

[4] *De veritatibus primis* (mid–end 1680 [?]); A VI, 4, 1442: "*Omne possibile exigit existere*, et proinde existeret nisi aliud impediret, quod etiam existere exigit, et priori incompatibile est."

[5] *Ibid.*, A VI, 4, 1443, note 3: "Si Existentia esset aliud quiddam quam essentiae exigentia, sequeretur ipsam habere quandam essentiam seu aliquid novum superaddere rebus, de quo rursus quaeri posset an haec essentia existat, an non existat et cur ista potius quam alia."

[6] Paul Schrecker, "Leibniz and the Timaeus," *Review of Metaphysics* 4 (1951), pp. 495–506; Christopher Shields, "Leibniz's Doctrine of the Striving Possibles," *Journal of the History of*

all possibles strive for existence.[7] Accordingly, Shields interprets existence as a supervenient quality that has no reality of its own but rather follows from the maximal degree of perfection of the world to which a possible substance belongs.[8]

While I think that this line of argument is on the right track, I believe that more needs to be said concerning the sense in which God can be said to "make" possibles strive for existence. What is the characteristic of ideas in the divine understanding that endows them with causal properties? Blumenfeld and Rescher have objected that characterizing ideas in such away would be incompatible with the idea that the existence of the world is the outcome of an act of choice carried out by the divine will.[9] This objection would be persuasive if, in Leibniz's view, there were a distinction between the divine will and the divine understanding. The present article proposes that Leibniz's claims about striving possibles can be understood in a literal sense, without thereby falling into inconsistency with respect to Leibniz's views about the role of the divine will in bringing the world into existence, by arguing that what Leibniz says about striving possibles is rooted in his cognitivist theory of volition. According to the cognitivist theory of volition, each act of volition is identical with a belief about something being good or bad to a certain degree; conversely, every belief about something being good or bad to a certain degree is identical with an act of volition.[10] I suggest that the way Leibniz applies this theory of volition to a theory of divine action provides a solution for why he regarded the striving of possibles both as something ideal (in the sense that it is founded in the weighing of the goodness involved in essences) and as something real (in the sense that the weighing of the goodness of essences itself is causally relevant even where it does not result in the creation of a particular individual). Hence, the doctrine of striving possibles can be understood as an application of insights into the structure of possibility and action to problems of philosophical theology.

2. Some Metaphilosophical Context

Before going into the intricate details of Leibniz's views on possibility and the will, it is useful to examine the metaphilosophical context within which these views emerged. The origin of Leibniz's analysis of the concept

Philosophy 24 (1986), pp. 343–357; Yvon Belaval, "Note sur Leibniz et Platon," in Yvon Belaval, *Leibniz. De l'age classique sux lumières*, ed. Michel Fichant, Paris: Beauchesne, 1995, pp. 31–39.

[7] Shields, "Leibniz's Doctrine of the Striving Possibles", p. 352; see GP VII, 289.

[8] Shields, "Leibniz's Doctrine of the Striving Possibles", p. 353.

[9] Blumenfeld, "Leibniz's Theory of Striving Possibles," p. 166; Nicholas Rescher, "Leibniz on Possible Worlds," *Studia Leibnitiana* 28 (1996), pp. 129–162, at p. 161.

[10] Leibniz developed this theory in *De affectibus*; see below, section 3.

of possibility, his cognitivist theory of volition and the doctrine of striving possibles all have their origin in his early writings on metaphysics, and in this period one also finds a series of remarks concerning the method of metaphysics that turn out to be highly relevant for present purposes.

There can be little doubt that by the time he finished his philosophical studies, Leibniz held the view that propositions of metaphysics are purely hypothetical. As marginal notes he wrote around 1663-1664 in his personal copy of Daniel Stahl's *Metaphysical Compendium* show, Leibniz regarded this as a common view shared by Fabri and Hobbes.[11] However, a more complex view of the nature of metaphysical concepts is expressed already in the *Dissertation on the Art of Combinations* (1666). The whole enterprise of a universal characteristic is portrayed there not only as something that aims at the production of discourse, but also (and primarily) as something that rests on an adequate analysis of the categorial structure of our language:

> Truly, I miss much in Lull's terms. Because his whole method is directed more at the art of extemporaneous discourse than at the pursuit of full knowledge of a given subject [...]. He determines the number of terms arbitrarily, there are nine in each class. Why does he include among the absolute predicates, which have to be the most abstract, will, truth, wisdom, virtue, glory, why does he omit beauty, or figure, or number? To the relational predicates, there have to be added many more, e.g. cause, whole, part, requisite, etc.[12]

Clearly, such a line of criticism makes sense only under the assumption that there is a non-arbitary categorial structure to human thought. Leibniz's own intent to provide a basis for metaphysical concepts that goes beyond the merely rhetorical use is supplemented in the *Preface to Nizolius* (1670) by an analogous view of the nature of logical concepts:

> True logic is not only an instrument, but also contains in some way the principles and the true reason for doing philosophy, because it hands down those general rules, through which the true and the false can be discerned, and by means of which through the mere application of definitions and experiences all conclusions can be proven. But they also are not the principles of philosophy, or of the propositions themselves, and they do not make the truth of things, but rather

[11] *Notae ad Danielem Stahlium*, A VI, 1, 22. See Daniel Stahl, *Compendium metaphysicae in XXIV tabellas redactum*, Jena, 1655.

[12] *Dissertatio de arte combinatoria*, problema II, § 60; A VI, 1, 193: "Verum in Terminis Lullianis multa desidero. Nam tota ejus methodus dirigitur ad artem potius ex tempore disserendi, quam plenam de re data scientiam consequendi […]. Numerum Terminorum determinavit pro arbitrio, hinc in singulis classibus sunt novem. Cur praedicatis absolutis, quae abstractissima esse debent, commiscuit Voluntatem, Veritatem, Sapientiam, Virtutem, Gloriam, cur Pulchritudinem omisit, seu Figuram, cur Numerum? Praedicatis relatis debebat accensere multo plura, v.g., Causam, totum, partem, Requisitum, etc." (Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.)

> show it; nevertheless they make the philosopher, and are the principles of the right way of doing philosophy, which—as Nizolius has observed—is enough.[13]

Interestingly, in this passage Leibniz does not regard the principles of logic as something that is constitutive of philosophy as a particular theoretical discipline. Principles of logic, in his opinion, are not a tool of theory construction. Rather, they are something that in philosophical analysis is only made explicit. In this sense, making principles of logic explicit only "shows" the truth that already is contained in our ordinary way of thinking about things.

This view of the descriptive nature of philosophical knowledge leads Leibniz to the claim that philosophers do not know other things than ordinary people but rather the same things in a different way:

> And it is very true that there is nothing that cannot be explicated in popular terms, only using more of them. Therefore, Nizolius rightly urges at various places that what does not possess a general term (i.e., as I understand him, that conjoined with other general terms can in particular express a thing) in common language should be regarded as nothing, as a fiction, and as useless. For philosophers do not always surpass common men in that they sense different things, but that they sense them in a different way, that is with the mind's eye, with reflection or attention, and comparing things with other things.[14]

Although the example of "comparing things with other things" mentioned at this place concerns Joachim Jungius's attempt at classifying insects through a comparison of their external features,[15] the point Leibniz has in mind here seems

[13] *Marii Nizolii De veris principiis et vera ratione philosophandi libri IV*, Dissertatio praeliminaris; A VI, 2, 408: "Logicam veram non tantum instrumentum esse, sed et quodammodo principia ac veram philosophandi rationem continere, quia generales illas regulas tradit, ex quibus vera falsaque dijudicari, adhibitisque solis definitionibus et experimentis omnes conclusiones demonstrari possunt. Sed sunto etiam non Philosophiae, non ipsarum propositionum principia, veritatemque rerum non faciant, sed ostendant; attamen Philosophum facient, recte philosophandi principia erunt, quod Nizolio tuendo satis est." See Mario Nizolio, *De veris principiis et vera ratione philosophandi contra Pseudophilosophos*, Parma, 1553. On Nizolius's metaphilosophical views, see Cristina Marras and Giovanna Varani, "I dibattiti rinascimentali su retorica e dialettica nella 'Prefazione al Nizolio' di Leibniz," *Studi Filosofici* 27 (2004), pp. 184–216.

[14] A VI, 2, 413: "Et quidem verissimum est, nullam rem esse, quae non explicari terminis popularibus, saltem pluribus, possit. Unde recte Nizolius noster passim urget, id pro nullo, pro commentitio, et inutili, habendum esse, cui non in lingua communi aliqua vox saltem generalis (id est, ut ego interpretor, quae cum aliis itidem generalibus juncta speciatim tandem rem exprimere possit) sit imposita. Nam Philosophi plebeiis non semper in eo praestant, quod alias res sentiant, sed quod sentiant alio modo, id est oculo mentis, et cum reflexione seu attentione, et rerum cum aliis comparatione […]."

[15] *Ibid*. For Leibniz's relation to Jungius, see Hans Burkhardt, "Jungius, Leibniz und die Logica Nova," in Hans Klein (ed.), *Praktische Logik. Traditionen und Tendenzen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1990, pp. 57–88.

to be more general. The function of comparing things with each other in this context is not that of arriving at empirical generalisations based on an inductive procedure. Rather, using a comparative method leads to an insight into a conceptual structure that, owing to its commonly shared nature, can be regarded as a kind of implicit knowledge that only has to be made explicit: "[M]ost of the dialectical and metaphysical matters themselves occur frequently even in popular speeches, writings, and thoughts, and are used everywhere in normal life. This is why people, guided by this frequent occurrence, have designated them by specific, common, most natural and comprehensive words […]."[16]

If one compares these remarks with the view of metaphysical concepts expressed in the notes he made while reading Stahl's *Metaphysical Compendium,* it becomes clear that, by around 1670-1671, Leibniz's views as to the nature of metaphysics were becoming far more complex. In particular, the framework of a hypothetico-deductive approach to metaphysics has been supplemented by an interpretation of metaphysical concepts in the framework of a theory of implicit knowledge. This implicit knowledge is understood as something that is common to all rational beings. "Common" notions not only comprise notions of arithmetic and geometry but also structure all areas of ordinary discourse. They are common not (only) because they are abstract, Platonic, entities. Rather, mathematical notions are common in the same way as other, nonmathematical, notions are common implications of everyday language. Metaphysics is not only a matter of the construction of adequate explanatory hypotheses, but also a matter of the description of common conceptual structures.

This is why, for the early Leibniz, one of the indispensable starting points of philosophical analysis is the description of our everyday use of words. In his view, one method of bringing the everyday usage of words to light would be to apply a comparative approach that uncovers the similarities in various speakers' use of language. According to him, these similarities are indicative of concepts that inform ordinary rational discourse and therefore are common to rational beings. This conception of the starting point of philosophical analysis can well be examined in his response to Hermann Conring's preface to the centenary edition of Bartolomeo Viotti's *On Demonstration* (1560).[17] Viotti gives the following account of how knowledge of definitions that serve as the starting point of definitions can be acquired:

[16] A VI, 2, 415: "res ipsa Dialecticae et Metaphysicae pleraeque, creberrime in sermonibus, scriptis, cogitationibus etiam plebeiis occurrunt, et in omni vita passim teruntur. Hinc factus est, ut ipsa crebritate admonita gens, pecularibus, usitatis, maxime naturalibus et compendiosis vocabulis talia designaverit […]."

[17] Hermann Conring, "Herman[nus] Conringus Andreae Frölingio Logices in Academia Julia Professori Collegae sui," in Bartolomeo Viotti, *De demonstratione libri quinque ante hos centum annos Parisiis primum editi*, Helmstedt, 1661, pp. [xvii]–[xxxi].

> There is a paved and easy way open for us, on which we get to the essential definition: this is by means of the term associated with the given concept. When, e.g., you want to investigate the essence of pulse or fever, it is necessary to begin with the term in order to grasp the concept all human beings have of pulse [...]. The interpretation of the term brings all accidents to light, from the knowledge of which we proceed to the knowledge of the substance & nature of the thing [...]. Insofar as you by examining and interpreting the common concept which all human beings have about the term "moon", you could say that everyone understands by moon some heavenly body which appears at the heavens at some determinate time in the night and illuminates the earth in various forms [...]. But this I want to be eternal: for investigating essential definitions the mentioned interpretation of terms is a big help.[18]

Likewise, Leibniz contrasts his approach to methodological issues with approaches that work with a theory of proofs that is independent of actual practices and examples:

> I have only said what I have found out in this matter through the experience of many years and through the examples of my own reasoning and that of others, and moreover something that is in accordance with what human beings daily do, even if they are not always aware of it, something that is efficient for inventing and judging, and not, as the methods and precepts of some others, sterile and remote from use and example.[19]

Did Leibniz put these programmatic remarks into practice? Arguably, some aspects of his early analysis of the concept of possibility and the structure of human volition can yield interesting and, perhaps, unexpected answers.

[18] Bartolomeo Viotti, *De demonstratione libri quinque*, Paris, 1560, lib. II, cap. 11, pp. 141–144: "Erit itaque nobis aliquid paratum expetitumque iter, quo ad essentialem definitionem accedamus: hoc autem est per nominis propositi notionem. Quandoquidem ut pulsus vel febris, exempli causa, essentiam intelligas, a nomine incipere oportet, conceptum quem omnes homines habent de pulsu adferendo […]. Nominis etenim interpretatio accidentia omnibus manifesta profert, e quorum cognitione ad substantiam & rei naturam penetramus … Siquidem examinando & interpretando communem conceptum, quem omnes homines habent de hoc nomine luna, dices per lunam omnes intelligere, sydus quoddam in coelo noctu apparens statis temporibus, & sub diversis formis terram illustrans […]. Sed hoc volo perpetuum esse. Ad essentialem definitionem investigandam, nominis iam dicta interpretatio plurimum adfert adiumenti […]."

[19] Leibniz to Conring, 19 March 1678; A II, 1, 602: "Ego vero non nisi ea dixi quae multorum annorum experientia mearumque et alienarum ratiocinationum exemplis tandem in hac re collegi: prorsus congruentia illis quae quotidie faciunt homines, etsi ipsi non semper se facere animadvertant: efficacia etiam ad inveniendum atque judicandum, neque ut aliorum quorundam methodi et praecepta solent, sterilia et ab usu et exemplis remota."

3. Possibility as a Descriptive Concept

At first glance, the doctrine of striving possibles gives the impression of a purely hypothetical theory detached from everything we ordinarily think about possibility. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of description of everyday ways of speaking involved in what Leibniz thinks about the concept of possibility in general, as well as about more specific topics such as the concept of degree of possibility and its connection with a theory of rational action. Already in his 1663 notes on Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld's *Seminar on First Philosophy,* some aspects of his general view of possibility are present. In a passage of his book, Bisterfeld writes:

> Unity is rightly said to be the first attribute of a being. Commonly unity is defined by the idea that it is a mode, that the being is undivided in itself and divided from everything else. In this way, its essence is located in the negation of division [...]. In fact, firstly the defining terms are more obscure than the defined: since we do not understand what is divided, undivided, and something else, unless we know previously what is one. Moreover, this use of the term seems to be excessive; whereas it is by far the most extensive use, when it is observed that it is the congruence of a thing with itself. Since in this way we can apprehend by means of its application [...] absurd and *impossible entities*.[20]

Leibniz comments: "[S]omething impossible is not a unity, i.e. not something congruent with itself; even if it could exist, by supposition, it does not exist, because this supposition is false, or it by all means does not exist, because there cannot exist what does not exist."[21]

Some years later, in *On the Almightiness and Omniscience of God and the Freedom of Man,* Leibniz claims that such a view of the criterion of non-contradiction is grounded in our everyday conception of what is possible:

[20] Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld, *Primae Philosophiae Seminarium*, Leiden, 1675, cap. V, Regula IV, pp. 61–62: "Unitas recte statuitur primum entis attributum. Vulgo definitur Unitas, quod sit modus, quo ens est indivisum in se et ab alio quocunque divisum. Sic ejus essentia collocatur in negatione divisionis, et tanquam consectarium deducitur divisio ad alio. Verum primo termini definientes sunt obscuriores definito: neque enim intelligimus, quid sit divisum, indivisum, aliud, nisi prius sciamus, quid sit unum. Deinde ita exiguus apparet hujus attributi usus; at longe maximus est, si observetur esse entis congruentiam cum seipso. Ita enim ejus applicatione […] *entia impossibilia* et absurda deprehendimus."

[21] *Notae ad Joh. Henr. Bisterfeldium*; A VI, 1, 154, note 14: "impossibile non est unum, id est non congruum secum, s. etiam si sit, per suppositionem, non est, quare illa suppositio falsa est, seu omnino non est, quia non potest esse, quod non est." For Leibniz's relation to Bisterfeld, see Maria Rosa Antognazza, "*Immeatio* and *emperichoresis*: The Theological Roots of Harmony in Bisterfeld and Leibniz," in Stuart Brown (ed.), *The Young Leibniz and his Philosophy (1646–1676)*, Dordrecht and Boston: Kluwer, 1999, pp. 41–64.

> [W]hat tools do humans use when they want to prove that something is possible or impossible? If one pays attention to their hands or rather to their mouths and heads, it will be found that they sometimes bring up a past or present example, and then the issue is decided. Since what has happened, can happen. But sometimes because uniform examples are missing they use another tool, they mention examples, which seem to be as little or even less possible but nevertheless have been true and thus possible, too [...]. Similarly, they sometimes are content to say: This remains possible until someone comes who proves its impossibility. So, how does one prove the impossibility? Pay attention to the thoughts and talks of folks, then you will find it out. They try to explain the thing, the possibility of which is doubted; if it can be explained completely clearly, and imagined in all its details, one takes it for possible; if one finds something that is muddled and self-contradictory, one takes it for impossible [...]. [22]

Analogous entries can be found in Leibniz's tables of definitions following John Wilkins's tables of concepts, with additions stemming from the revision of the MS around 1678 in square brackets:

> *Something* is whatever can be thought. [If A is B or C or D, and so on, it is called *Something.*]
>
> *Nothing* is what can be named but not thought, a name without a thing, without the resonance of the mind. [Or if N is not A and N is not B and N is not C, and so on, N is called *Nothing;* this is what commonly is expressed as "A Non-Being does not have attributes."]
>
> *(Existence)* is the distinct sensibility of something. [or *Existing* is, what can be distinctly sensed or perceived, distinctly i.e. by means of the application of distinct concepts insofar as *Being* is what can be distinctly conceived.]
>
> (Essence) is what can thought distinctly.[23]

[22] *Von der Allmacht und Allwissenheit Gottes und der Freiheit des Menschen* (1670–1671 [?]); A VI, 1, 540: "Was brauchen doch die Mensch fuer mittel, wenn sie beweisen wollen, dass etwas mueglich oder nicht mueglich, sey. Wenn man ihnen auff die Haende oder vielmehr auff Maul und Kopf achtung geben wird, wird sich befinden dass sie unterweilen ein vergangenes oder gegenwertiges Exempel anfuehren, und denn ist die sach ausgemacht. Denn was geschehen ist, dass kan geschehen. Bisweilen aber aus mangel gleichfoermiger exempel brauchen sie einen anderen griff, sie bringen exempel fuer, so eben so wenig oder noch weniger mueglich scheinen, und doch wahr und also auch mueglich gewesen […]. Wie sie sich denn bisweilen damit zufrieden stellen, dass sie sagen; Es bleibt diess solange mueglich, bis einer komt, der die unmueglichkeit beweiset. Wie beweiset man denn nun die unmueglichkeit? Gieb achtung auff der Leute gedancken und reden, so wirstu es finden. Nehmlich sie bemuehen sich die sach, an deren mueglichkeit gezweifelt wird, zu erclaeren, laest sie sich nun ganz deutlich erclaeren, und fein umbstaendiglich einbilden, so haelt man sie fuer mueglich; komt man an etwas, so sich mit sich selbst verwirret, und wiederspricht, so helt mans vor unmueglich […]."

[23] *Vorarbeiten zur Characteristica Universalis*; A VI, 2, 487 and VI, 2, 487, note 3: "*Aliquid* est quicquid cogitari potest. [Si A sit B vel C vel D, et ita porro dicitur *Aliquid*.] *Nihil* est quicquid

Accordingly, he gives the following definition: "*Possible* is whatever can be thought clearly and distinctly."[24] To this definition, a later marginal note adds: "Possible is what does not imply a contradiction."[25]

Yet Leibniz understands possibility not only as something that excludes contradictions but also as something that allows for having degrees. Claiming that there are degrees of possibility might strike some readers as counterintuitive. It might therefore be useful to examine in some detail what Leibniz had in mind. Interestingly, much of the early metaphysics of possibility is developed in the context of his juridical writings. In the *Samples of Law,* he explains that for a proposition to be impossible is to be "of the *false* kind in a strict sense [...], because it designates some circumstance which is not in the nature of things."[26] As he further clarifies it there:

> Impossible is either absolute, or relative to something: relative to something either with respect to a particular time; from this arises the *present impossibility,* which is not possible at a certain time and under a certain state of affairs; or with respect to a certain rule of action; from this we call politically impossible, what someone, who does it, makes it in a foolish way. *Legally impossible* is what cannot exist if the Law is observed as a rule of action [...]. [27]

Similarly, the first version of two definitions from the *Elements of Natural Law* reads: "*Possible* is whatever can happen or what is true in some case."[28] And: "*Impossible* is whatever cannot happen or what is true in no, or not in some, case."[29]

nominari potest, cogitari non potest, nomen sine re, sine mente sonus. [seu si N non sit A et N non sit B et N non sit C et ita porro N dicitur *Nihil*, hoc est quod vulgo dicunt Non Entis nulla esse attributa.] (*Existentia*) est alicuius sensibilitas distincta. [seu *Existens* est, quod distincte sentiri sive percipi potest, distincte id est adhibitis distinctis conceptibus quemadmodum Ens est quod distincte concipi potest.] (Essentia) est alicuius cogitabilitas distincta."

[24] *Ibid*., A VI, 2, 495: "Possibile est quicquid clare distincteque cogitabile est."

[25] *Ibid*., A VI, 2, 495, note 46: "Possibile est quod non implicat contradictionem.".

[26] *Specimina juris* (1667-1669); A VI, 1, 398: "*impossibilis* (ejus species est falsa stricte dicta […], cuius nempe circumstantia aliqua non est in rerum natura)." On the early development of Leibniz's concept of possibility, see Mogens Laerke, "*Quod non omnia possibilia ad existentiam perveniant*. Leibniz's Ontology of Possibility, 1668-1678," *Leibniz Review* 17 (2007), pp. 1–30.

[27] *Ibid*.: "Impossibile est vel absolute, vel secundum quid, secundum quid ratione habita vel certi temporis, hinc oritur impossibilis impraesentiarum, quae certo tempore et statu possibilis non est, quo mutato possibilis est …, vel ratione habita certae regulae agendi, hinc politice impossibile dicimus, quod qui faceret, stulte faceret. Jure impossibile est quod servato Jure tanquam agenda regula, existere non potest […]."

[28] *Elementa juris naturalis*, Fifth MS, A VI, 1, 466: "Possibile est quidquid potest fieri seu quod verum est quodam casu."

[29] *Ibid*.: "Impossibile est quicquid non potest fieri seu quod verum est nullo, seu non quodam casu."

The passages considered so far provide us with a distinction between two cases of possibility, one absolute, one relative to certain circumstances. Moreover, Leibniz connects the idea that some circumstances make an event easier than other circumstances with the idea that possibility has degrees. In the list of definitions following Wilkins's *Essay,* Leibniz explains easiness in terms of the number of requisites: "*Easy* is what is quite possible, or what has few requisites. What is *easy* in things, is *probable* in the mind."[30] He repeatedly comes back to this idea. In *On Affects,* he writes: "*Easier* is what has fewer requisites."[31] In *On the Analysis of Thoughts,* he puts it thus: "*To be easy* is to have few requisites."[32] He uses the concept of easiness when in the *Sample of Definitions of Law* he comes back to the concept of degrees of possibility: "*More probable* is what can happen or should happen more easily. Or *Probability* is the degree of possibility."[33] Thus, analyzing probability in terms of degrees of possibility has its origins in a juridical context.

Something analogous holds for the concept of presumption. In the preceding entry of the *Sample of Definitions of Law,* Leibniz writes: "A *presumption* is what is held true until the contrary is proven."[34] The concepts of possibility and presumption are already connected in the Fifth MS of the *Elements of Natural Law*:

> [I]t comes about more easily that something is possible than that something is impossible. Since in order to be possible nothing else is required than that it is supposed; whereas in order to suppose something impossible also its opposite has to be supposed at the same time. Hence, more is required to be impossible than to be possible [...]. In fact, the requisites or suppositions of the possible are contained in the suppositions of the impossible, not the other way round. *Presumed,* however, is the event whose suppositions are also the suppositions of the opposite event, not the other way round.[35]

These passages suggest that the descriptive concept of possibility involves not only the idea of non-contradiction. It also involves the idea that there

[30] *Vorarbeiten zur Characteristica Universalis*; A VI, 2, 492: "*Facile* est valde possibile, seu cuius pauca sunt requisita. Quod *facile* est in re, id *probabile* est in mente."

[31] *De affectibus*, MS [F], 12 April 1679; A VI, 4, 1427: "Facilius est cujus pauciora sunt requisita."

[32] *De cogitationum analysi* (summer 1678–winter 1680/81 [?]); A VI, 4, 2771: "Facilis est habens pauca requisita."

[33] *Definitionum juris specimen* (spring–summer 1676 [?]); A VI, 3, 631: "*Probabilius* est quod facilius fieri potest potuitve. Sive *Probabilitas* est gradus possibilitatis."

[34] *Ibid.*: "*Praesumtio* est, quod pro vero habetur donec contrarium probetur."

[35] *Elementa juris naturalis*, Fifth MS; A VI, 1, 471: "Quia facilius evenit aliquid possibile quam impossibile esse. Nam ad possibile nihil requiritur quam ut supponatur; ad impossibile vero ut dum supponitur, eius simul oppositum supponantur. Plura ergo requiruntur ad impossibile quam possibile […]. Imo requisita seu supposita possibilis in impossibilis suppositis continentur, non contra. *Praesumitur* autem cuius supposita etiam oppositi supposita sunt, non contra."

are objective characteristics of reality, which make one combination of things easier than another one, in the sense that one combination has fewer requisites than another. The degrees of probability in an objective sense, for Leibniz, are nothing else than the degrees of possibility analyzed in terms of the number of requisites. Moreover, he integrates into this account of possibility a generalization of the juridical notion of presumption. Again, he relates this notion to the ontological concept of a smaller number of requisites. Thereby, he combines this view about the objective structure of reality with corresponding epistemic concepts. The number of requisites determines not only the degree of possibility but also the degree of intelligibility. Hence, also, the concept of possibility as intelligibility is qualified by the idea that intelligibility involves gradual differences in terms of number of requisites. As we will presently see, Leibniz analyzes the epistemic concept of probability itself in terms of having fewer (cognitive) requisites. This connection between objective and subjective probabilities explains why his account of degrees of possibility in terms of easiness or the number of requisites plays a decisive role for his cognitivist theory of volition, as applied both to human and divine action.

4. Human Action and the Cognitivist Theory of Volition

The basic idea of the cognitivist theory of volition is presented in an early form in the already mentioned list of definitions following Wilkins's *Essay.* Leibniz there writes: "*(Sense)* is a thought which is followed by pleasure or pain, or appetite or flight, or the striving to act."[36] In reworking this piece around 1678, he replaces "sense" (*sensus*) by "belief" (*sententia*),[37] thus arriving at another view of the connection between belief and striving, a view that is also expressed elsewhere, for example, in *On the Analysis of Thoughts:*

> *Willing* is thinking and tending towards that which it thinks, striving at something insofar as it represents the same.
>
> *Willing* is tending towards thinking.
>
> *To be tending* towards something is to be striving towards it in the highest degree. It should be known that one can strive towards different things, but that among several strivings something is selected towards which the thing tends [...].
>
> *To be striving* towards something is being determined insofar as being active [...].
>
> *Being determined* is to have all requisites; viz. the absolute ones insofar as the thing has them.

[36] *Vorarbeiten zur Characteristica Universalis*; A VI, 2, 493: "(*Sensus*) est cogitation quam sequitur volupas et dolor, seu appetites et fuga, sive conatus agendi."

[37] *Ibid.*, note 31.

> *To have the absolute ones insofar as having them* is to have such requisites that, if their existence is supposed, they do not involve another ultimate subject.[38]

Moreover, he claims that this view of the nature of volition only makes our everyday concept of wanting something explicit. Thus, again, what he says about the nature of the will should be seen from a descriptive perspective. This becomes particularly clear in the *Elements of True Piety,* where he explicates the concept of will as follows:

> The *will* is a belief about good and bad.
>
> That this is understood by human beings under the term 'will' is obvious from standard ways of speaking, in which, if the definition is substituted for the defined, the sense remains the same. Thus, we say that all people want the good and flee the bad, that no-one wants the bad for the sake of the bad. We want what we think good, and, conversely, what we think good, we want. But if someone rejects this notion of will, he gives it a meaning other than the one that humans are accustomed to, and probably he will not even be able to say what willing is.
>
> A *belief* is a practical thought, or a thought with a striving to act. This namely is the distinction between simple thought or consideration, imagination, representation, on the one hand, and belief, on the other hand: that the person having some belief is ready to act in some way that conforms to this belief. Whoever is persuaded that there is fire in the oven will not put his hand in there, as long as he is in control of his mind and his actions [...]. [39]

Thus, the connection between belief and will is seen as something already implicitly contained in our everyday concepts and behavior. Moreover, the kind

[38] *De cogitationum analysi*; A VI, 4, 2768–2769: "*Volens* est cogitans et tendens ad id quod cogitat, conans ad aliquid quatenus idem repraesentans. *Volens* est cogitans tendens. *Tendens* ad aliquid est ad ipsum maxime conans. Sciendum enim posse aliquid conari ad plura, sed ex pluribus conatis eligi aliquid ad quod res tendit … *Conans* ad aliquid est determinatus quatenus agens. Seu determinatum quatenus potest esse novum … *Determinatus* est habens omnia requisita; sc. absoluta quatenus est habens. *Habens absoluta quatenus est habens*; est habens quae semel existentia supposita non involvunt aliud subjectum ultimatum."

[39] *Elementa verae pietatis, sive de amore Dei super omnia* (beginning 1677–beginning 1678 [?]); A VI, 4, 1360–1361: "*Voluntas* est sententia de bono et malo. Hanc ab hominibus Voluntatis nomine intelligi, patet ex loquendi formulis, in quibus si definitio pro definito substituatur, sensus sibi constabit. Hinc dicimus omnia appetere bonum, fugere malum. Neminem velle malum sub ratione mali. Volumus quae bona putamus, et contra quae bona putamus, ea volumus. Si quis autem hanc notionem voluntatis rejicit, is aliter voce utitur quam homines solent, et fortasse ne dicere quidem poterit, quid sit velle. *Sententia* est cogitatio practica, seu cogitatio cum agendi conatu. Hoc scilicet discrimen est inter simplicem cogitationem seu considerationem, imaginationem, repraesentationem, et inter sententiam, quod is qui aliquam sententiam habet paratus est ad agendum modo aliquo qui sit huic sententiae conformis. Quicunque persuasus est ignem esse in fornace, non utique manum immittet, quamdiu mentis atque actionum suarum est compos."

of determination of action Leibniz has in mind in these passages does not have to do with logical necessity. Rather, he connects the idea of a determination of action by the will with his account of the nature of possibility. Famously, he surmises that action is not necessitated because alternative courses of action are thinkable without incurring a contradiction.[40] However, there is a more specific connection between free action and the idea of degrees of possibility. Recall that he claims that "[w]hat is *easy* in things, is *probable* in the mind."[41] In the *Metaphysical Definition and Reflections,* he spells this claim out in terms of the ontological conception of having fewer requisites:

> That which is easier is more probable: By the easier I mean that which has fewer requisites, i.e. that for whose sake fewer suppositions must be made.
>
> There is no presumption that change will occur.
>
> That is to say, every single thing must be believed to remain in the state it was in, until one sees a reason for believing that it has abandoned this state.[42]

Thus, what on the logical level amounts to a greater number of requisites is the greater number of suppositions one has to make. At the same time, this amounts to the view that the epistemic concept of probability involves the ontological concept of a requisite. In this sense, epistemic suppositions are described as one of the forms that ontological requisites can take. Therefore, the conception of degrees of possibility is also applicable to the realm of thought, understood as activity of rational individual substances. Leibniz develops the connection between free action and a smaller number of requisites in a series of remarks in the various manuscripts of *On Affects.* There, he takes up the idea that beliefs by their nature involve an inclination towards something good (or an aversion against something bad), and analyzes the notion of inclination by making use of the concept of easiness:

> An *affect* is an occupation of the mind arising from the belief of the mind about good and bad.
>
> An *occupation of the mind* is an inclination to think about something rather than about something else.
>
> An *inclination* is the easiness of acting.

[40] For this line of defence of human freedom, see Elhanan Yakira, *Necessité, contrainte, choix, La métaphysique de la liberté chez Spinoza et chez Leibniz*, Zürich: Les Éditions du Grand Midi, 1989; Michael-Thomas Liske, *Leibniz' Freiheitslehre. Die logisch-metaphysischen Voraussetzungen von Leibniz' Freiheitstheorie*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1993.

[41] See above, note 34.

[42] *Definitiones cogitationesque metaphysicae* (summer 1678–winter 1680/81 [?]); A VI, 4, 1396: "Quod est facilius id est probabilius. Facilius autem intelligo, quod pauciora habet requisita seu cujus gratia pauciores faciendae sunt suppositiones. Mutatio non praesumitur. Sive unumquodque credendum est manere statu in quo fuit, donec appareat ratio credendi quod ab eo discesserit." Translation from Leibniz, *The Labyrinth of the Continuum*, p. 241.

> *Easiness* is what has fewer requisites compared to more similar and equal requisites of something else.[43]

Thus, the way in which beliefs incline towards a certain course of thought rather than towards another is analyzed in terms of the number of comparable requisites presupposed by both courses of thought. Thus, the idea of degrees of possibility is not restricted to the realm of objects in the external world but is also applied to the realm of mental activity. To put it differently: the smaller or greater number of objective circumstances required for a certain course of events is not only expressed on the epistemic level by a smaller or greater probability of the propositions describing a certain course of events; mental activity itself is also analyzed in terms of a smaller or greater number of objective requirements. In this sense, the idea of degrees of possibility is applicable both to series of events in the external world and to series of thoughts. Thereby, the possibility involved in rational deliberation is not only characterized in terms of an absence of logical contradiction; it is also characterized in terms of the number of objective requirements. The idea that degrees of easiness determine which particular series of thoughts among a number of alternatives is continued distinguishes a series of thoughts from a mathematical series in which each member is deduced from the law of the series. Whereas in the first case the determination does not involve necessity, the members of a mathematical series follow necessarily from the law of the series.

This conception of determination without necessitation stands behind the way *On Affects* develops the idea of laws of series of thoughts:

> A thought is the cause of another thought either because there is no reason for the contrary (in this case the same thought persists, which happens when we encounter something singular, which does not have any similarity or connection with other things) or because one thought involves another thought, or some order of thought, and among the several thoughts it involves, the mind is inclined in advance more to think the one than the other.
>
> A thought involves some order of thought, when it is the thought of some series [...].
>
> Each thought either occupies the mind as one in itself, or it occupies the mind by means of some series of thoughts according to a certain law.[44]

[43] *De affectibus*, MS [B]; A VI, 4, 1412: "*Affectus* est occupatio animi orta ex sententia animi circa bonum et malum. *Occupatio animi* est inclinatio ad aliquid prae alio cogitandum. *Inclinatio* est facilitas agendi. *Facilitas* est cujus pauciora sunt requisita requisitis alterius pluribus similia et aequalia."

[44] *Ibid.*, MS [D]; A VI, 4, 1424: "Cogitatio causa est alterius cogitationis vel quia nulla est ratio in contrarium (tunc enim eadem cogitatio durat, quod fit cum incidimus in aliquid singulare; quod cum aliis similitudinem aut connexionem non habet) vel quia una cogitatio aliam involvit, vel aliquem cogitandi ordinem et ex pluribus quas involvit, animus plus ad unam quam aliam cogitandam antea est inclinatus. Cogitatio involvit quendam cogitandi

Thus, in addition to the case of a stable state of thinking a single thought and to the case of deducing one thought from another thought, there is the case in which the transition from thought to thought is a matter of inclination. In this case, the connection between two thoughts is not one of logical necessity but one of a relation that allows for degrees. At this place, Leibniz makes a suggestion that in later remarks is qualified further, but clearly shows that there is one kind of forming a series of thoughts according to a law which nevertheless is a matter of degrees. As he says, "[t]he mind [...] is inclined towards one thought rather than towards another, when it involves more material for thought than the other [...]."[45] This implies that the relation between a law of a series of thoughts and the thoughts constituting the series is one of inclination allowing for degrees. Yet it also implies that the same holds for the decision about which series of thoughts (and, thus, which law of a series) is chosen. Leibniz brings out this second aspect very clearly in the following set of remarks:

> If we in pursuing a series of thoughts encounter some thought that is common with some other series, and there is more force in the second series, we follow this one and leave the first. A thought of this kind is the common intersection of several series or a node. A series of thoughts arises either from distinct ideas, like when we consider the causes of things, and the causes of causes; as well as when we consider the effects and the effects of the effects: But we also can follow some law of a series, which does not arise from causes and effects, but from degrees, similarities, and combinations. Or it arises from confused ideas, namely from those that we experience all at once, which we pursue according to a certain order of time and place.[46]

Thus, the existence of "nodes"—mental states common to several series—in Leibniz's view explains a basic characteristic governing the series of rational thoughts: the laws governing such series leave it open to the agent to follow a different course of thought. In this sense, they incline towards a particular course of thought without necessitating it.

ordinem, quando est cogitation cujusdam seriei […]. Omnis cogitatio animum vel in se una occupat, vel occupat aliqua cogitandi serie secundum quandam certam legem."

[45] *Ibid.*: "Inclinatus est autem animus ad unam cogitationem prae alia, cum una plus materiae cogitandi quam alia involvit saltem nobis."

[46] *Ibid.*, A VI, 4, 1424–1425: "Si persequendo seriem cogitandi incidamus in quandam cogitationem quae alteri cuidam seriei communis est, sitque plus virium in serie secunda, hanc sequimur deserta priore. Hujusmodi cogitatio est duarum serierum intersectio communis seu nodus. Series cogitandi oritur vel ex ideis distinctis, ut cum rei causas cogitamus, et causarum causas; itemque cum effectus consideramus et effectuum effectus: Sed et possumus aliam quandam seriei legem sequi, quae non a causis et effectibus, sed gradibus, similitudinibus, combinationibus oriatur vel oritur ex ideis confusis, nempe ex iis quae simul experti sumus, quae temporis locorumve ordine certo persequimur."

The fact that other laws can overrule it, however, does not imply that a given law of a series of thoughts would lose its causal properties. Rather, it is described as something that together with competing laws determines the choice of a course of thought governed by a particular law. Thus, the version of determinism that the early Leibniz defends is one that involves the idea that reasons of rational action make a certain course of action probable unless they are overruled by other reasons:

> A *determination* is a state from which something follows unless something else gets in the way. Therefore, determination amounts to the presumption of something in the future; until it is proved that an impediment is there [...].
>
> An *affect* is in the mind what an *impetus* is in the body. Since as the affect is a detennination of the mind to pursue some series of thoughts, so the impetus is the determination of the body to pursue some line of motion.
>
> Both determinations exist, even if by means of a supervening impediment the effect is prevented to occur. Both determinations have their place in the beginning, middle, and also in the end of the progression. Both compose, together with a supervening impression, a new determination.[47]

This analysis of determination in terms of presumption is accompanied by a shift in Leibniz's terminology. Whereas in earlier remarks in *On Affects,* he talked about *laws* of series of thoughts, here he shifts to talk about *rules* of series of thoughts: "A series is a multitude with a rule of order."[48] Moreover, he adds an alternative, but still tentative, suggestion about what inclines the mind to follow one series of thoughts rather than another one: "The determination towards a series of thoughts is the stronger the more reality the rule of the series involves."[49] Again, the determination Leibniz has in mind is

[47] *Ibid*., MS [E]; A VI, 4, 1426: "*Determinatio* est status ex quo quid sequitur nisi quid aliud impediat. Itaque determinatio praesumtionem facit futuri; donec impedimentum adesse probetur […]. *Affectus* est in animo, quod *impetus* in corpore. Nam ut affectus est determinatio animi ad quondam seriem cogitationum obeundam, ita impetus idem est quod determinatio corporis ad quandam lineam motus percurrendam. Utraque determinatio existit, etsi superveniente impedimento effectus sistatur. Utraque determinatio tum initio tum medio tum etiam in fine progressionis locum habet. Utraque cum alia impressione superveniente, novam determinationem componit." On Leibniz's metaphysics of choice, see Reginald Osburn Savage, *Real Alternatives: Leibniz's Metaphysics of Choice*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998; Francesco Piro, *Spontaneità e ragion sufficiente: determinismo e filosofia dell'azione in Leibniz*, Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2002; Henrik Lagerlund, "Possible World and the Nature of Choice in Leibniz," *Studia Leibnitiana* 38/39 (2006/2007), pp. 156–176; Markku Roinila, *Leibniz on Rational Decision-Making*, Helsinki: University Department of Philosophy, 2007; Markku Roinila, "Leibniz's Models of Rational Decision," in Marcelo Dascal (ed.), *Leibniz: What Kind of Rationalist?* Dordrecht: Springer, 2008, pp. 357–370.

[48] *Ibid*.: "Series est multitudo cum ordinis regula."

[49] *Ibid*., A VI, 4, 1427: "Determinatio ad cogitandi seriem eo fortior est, quo plus realitatis involvit regula seriei."

one that allows for degrees. The same holds for a more detailed but not yet final suggestion that he develops later in *On Affects:*

> The cause of the determination towards one series of thoughts rather than to the other is that the thoughts of the one series involve more reality than the thoughts of the other series. Since the general rule is that always the event takes place that involves more reality, or that is more perfect.[50]

This passage suggests that if "degrees of reality" are what account for the determination towards one series of thoughts, determination is a matter of degree. Talk about degrees of reality, of course, is not as perspicuous as it could be. Leibniz himself seems to have felt the difficulty, since finally he comes back to the initial idea of a determination of thoughts through the greater degree of what is good for us in them:

> Out of several series of thoughts each is the stronger the more material it provides for us to think distinctly, i.e. the more of an object we can conceive in our thoughts, or the greater consideration of what is good or bad for us is contained in it.[51]

Thus, what he said earlier in *On Affects* about the fact that belief about something's being good (or bad) to a certain degree always involves a degree of inclination towards (or aversion against) this object applies not only to choosing a course of action but also to choosing a course of thought. In this sense, the choice between different series of thoughts, and thus between different rules of series, is a matter of inclination rather than necessity.

5. Divine Action and the Cognitivist Theory of Volition

The theory of striving possibles incorporates this view of the nature of volition, as well as a theory of possibility that comprises, in addition to the idea of non-contradiction, the idea of degrees of possibility. Yet it also makes use of a further descriptive aspect of Leibniz's conception of possibility, namely the idea that there are possibilities that are not realized. In metaphysical notes

[50] *Ibid.*, MS [G]; A VI, 4, 1428: "Causa determinationis est, ad unam seriem cogitandi potius quam ad aliam, cum cogitationes seriei unius plus involvunt realitatis quam cogitationes seriei alterius." Leibniz emphasizes this definition by surrounding it with a line.

[51] *Ibid.*, A VI, 4, 1434-1435: "Ex pluribus autem cogitandi seriebus eo fortior unaquaeque est quo majorem exhibet nobis materiam distincte cogitandi, id est quo plus objectum in cogitationes nostras posse concipimus, sive quo major ei inest consideratio boni et mali nostri." Again, Leibniz emphasizes this sentence by surrounding it with a line.

probably written in 1677, Leibniz points out that the idea of non-existing possibilities has a foundation in our everyday way of thinking about fictions:

> It can be proved that not everything possible exists, viz. in this series of things, or in this space or world, since if we make the fiction that another state would follow the immediately preceding one rather than the one that actually follows, other forms of things would appear, which never would have appeared unless someone said they appear in a different universe, or that there are as many possible universes as there are possible ways to make fictions.[52]

Leibniz adds: "If essence were the same as existence, nothing would change in any series. Hence, since existence adds something to essence, it follows that not all things that have essence also have existence, but that there is a peculiar reason to exist."[53] Similarly, in the *Elements of True Piety*, which contains one of his most extended early discussions of divine agency, he argues for the view that there are non-existing possible substances as follows: "[S]everal series of things can be feigned, and it should not be thought that all possibles exist. Who would think that there cannot be imagined any story which would not actually have existed or is to exist."[54] Again, Leibniz adds: "In other words: since something exists rather than nothing, it is necessary that in Essence itself, or in the possibility, something is contained from which the actual existence follows, and therefore that reality or possibility brings with it some propensity to exist."[55] The idea of a propensity of essences to exist results, to a large extent, from an application of the cognitivist theory of volition to the theory of divine agency. As Leibniz assumes already in the Paris years, God is to be seen as a personal, rational, deliberating being:

> God is not something metaphysical, imaginary, incapable of thought, will, action, such as not few thinkers make him, so that the same things follow whether you say God is nature, fate, destiny, necessity, or the world; but God is some substance, person, mind [...]. It has to be shown that God is a person

[52] *Notae plerumque metaphysicae* (1677 [?]); A VI, 4, 1349: "Demonstrabile est, quod non quodlibet possibile existat saltem in hac serie rerum, seu in hoc spatio vel mundo, nam si fingeremus alium statum sequi immediate praecedentem, quam qui sequitur, utique aliae apparerent rerum formae, quae nunquam apparebunt, nisi quis dicat in alio apparere universo, seu tot esse universa quot possibiles fingendi modi."

[53] *Ibid*.: "Si essentia idem esset quod existentia, mutaretur nihil in ulla serie. Hinc cum existentia addat essentiae sequitur non omnia essentiam habentia habere existentiam, sed esse rationem existendi peculiarem."

[54] *Elementa verae pietatis*; A VI, 4, 1363: "Utique enim plures series fingi possunt, neque putandum est omnia possibilia existere. Quis enim credat nullam fabulam fingi posse quae non reapse alicubi extiterit aut extitura sit."

[55] *Ibid*.: "quoniam aliquid potius existit quam nihil, necesse est in ipsa Essentia, sive possibilitate aliquid contineri unde existentia actualis sequatur, ac proinde realitatem sive possibilitatem quandam ad existendum propensionem inferre."

> or intelligent substance. It has to be rigorously demonstrated that he senses that he acts on himself […].[56]

If this is the case, everything that holds about rational, deliberating persons is true about God. In the *Elements of True Piety*, the consequences of such a view are developed:

> Also God understands that some things are good; or better than others. Since God has will, and the will is for the sake of the good. In other words: All action of God arises from cognition, all action arising from cognition is voluntary, all voluntary action is the cause of something good or bad.[57]

Given that, as Leibniz claimed in *On Affects,* good is what contributes to pleasure, and bad what contributes to pain, this can be expressed differently: "some things are more perfect than others [...], therefore for someone knowing them (such as God) they are more enjoyable *by the definition of pleasing.* Therefore better, since the good is the enjoyable or what contributes to what is enjoyable."[58] Thus, the basic insight of the cognitive theory of volition also holds for the divine mind: knowing the degree of goodness of a thing involves knowing that it is enjoyable to this degree and therefore is identical with wanting it to this degree. In this sense, insight into the degree of the goodness of something involves a degree of inclination, in the case of the divine mind as well as in the case of human minds. Moreover, even if this inclination is overruled by other, stronger inclinations this does not mean that it loses its causal relevance. Rather, the final choice is to be seen as the outcome of several competing inclinations. In this sense, divine cognition of possible substances is, by the very nature of cognition, causally relevant.

Leibniz brings out the connection between divine cognition and will more clearly in his discussion of a possible objection. The objection goes as follows: "God is the cause of things, therefore also of the goodness that is in

[56] *De arcanis sublimium vel De summa rerum*; A VI, 3, 474–475: "Deus non est quiddam Metaphysicum, imaginarium, incapax cogitationis, voluntatis, actionis, qualem nonnulli faciunt, ut idem futurum sit ac si diceres Deum esse naturam, fatum, fortunam, necessitatem, Mundum, sed Deus est Substantia quaedam, persona, Mens […]. Ostendendum est Deum esse personam seu substantiam intelligentem. Rigorose demonstrandum est, quod sentit se agere in se ipsum […]."

[57] *Elementa verae pietatis*; A VI, 4, 1361: "Etiam Deus aliqua bona esse deprehe dit; aut aliis meliora. Nam Deus praeditus est voluntate, voluntas est sub ratione boni. Aliter: Omnis Dei actio est ex cognitione, omnis actio ex cognitione est voluntaria, omnis actio voluntaria est alicujus boni vel mali causa."

[58] *Ibid.*, A VI, 4, 1361–1362: "alia aliis perfectiora sunt ut ostendimus supra, ergo scienti (qualis Deus est) jucundiora *per definitionem delectationis*. Ergo meliora, nam bonum est jucundum aut confert ad jucundum."

them. Hence, his will is prior to the goodness of things."[59] Leibniz rejoins: "The response is easy. God is the cause of the existence of things, however not of their essence, so that even if he is the cause of the existence of the good things, he is not the cause of the goodness, which is found in the essence itself by means of thought [...]."[60] Thus, cognitive insight into essences is at the same time insight into their degree of goodness. In this sense, insight into essences is intrinsically connected with a certain degree of inclination. In this sense, the ideas of possible substances such as possible human beings in the divine mind "are never indifferent."[61] As Leibniz points out, inclination for the divine mind has a different structure with respect to the temporal order between motives for actions and the actions themselves than inclination for the human mind. In his view, this is the only way to avoid an infinite regress of reasons to act in the divine mind:

> God […] freely likes what is more perfect. Therefore, again, a free action is involved. But is it not possible to give a reason for the free action itself? To be sure, if we assume the free action of God to be in time, another, equally free, preceding action of God would be its reason, and so on. If we suppose an eternal free action, we have grasped the reason why God would always form this rather than that. Certainly, this is the Divine nature or perfection; nevertheless, it has to be said that in contingent matters the predicate cannot be demonstrated from the notion of the subject; it is only possible to give a reason for it, which does not necessitate but inclines.[62]

Hence, apart from the differences as to the temporal structure of motives and actions, inclination for the divine mind means exactly the same with respect to necessity as inclination for the human mind. Moreover, inclination governs not only the divine acts on external things but also the course of his thoughts. In this sense, the relation between predicate concepts and subject concepts of possible substances is characterized as one governed by reasons that incline without necessitating.

[59] *Ibid*.; A VI, 4, 1361: "Deum esse causam rerum, ergo et bonitatis quae est in ipsis. Ergo voluntatem ejus esse priorem rerum bonitate."

[60] *Ibid*.: "Responsio est facilis. Deum esse causam existentiae rerum, non vero essentiae, adeoque etiam causa erit existentiae bonorum, non vero bonitatis quae in ipsa essentia cogitatione deprehenditur."

[61] *De libertate et gratia* (summer 1680–summer 1684 [?]); A VI, 4, 1459.

[62] *De necessitate et contingentia* (summer 1680–summer 1684 [?]); A VI, 4, 1449: "Deo autem libere placet quod perfectius est. Itaque involvitur demum actio libera. At nonne ipsius actionis liberae reddi ratio potest. Utique si actionem Dei liberam sumamus ut in tempore, erit ejus ratio alia actio Dei praecedens aeque libera, et sic porro. Si sumamus actionem liberam aeternam, quaenam ratio cur Deus potius talem semper formaverit. Est utique ipsa natura seu perfectio divina, dicendum est in contingentibus non quidem demonstrari praedicatum ex notione subjecti sed tantum ejus rationem reddi, quae non necessitet, sed inclinet."

As Leibniz claims in *On Freedom and Grace,* something also holds for the acts of divine foreknowledge. They are not a matter of deducing (with logical necessity) future actions of rational creatures from their complete concepts, but rather a matter of knowing their propensities to choose a particular course of action rather than an alternative one:

> Because the assumption that the creature operates without the concourse of God is impossible, it is impossible for God to foresee what the creature will do by means of the force of its own free choice alone. Hence, God can only foresee to which action the Creature will be more inclined. Therefore, the matter reduces to the doctrine of inclinations that do not necessitate.[63]

Leibniz's thought seems to be that knowing the inclinations of rational agents is not enough for deducing insights into their future action because these actions depend on a further causal factor, namely, divine concurrence. Here one might puzzle why Leibniz believed that acts of future divine concurrence would not be transparent for divine foreknowledge. In any case, it is clear that Leibniz believes that, even for the divine mind, contingency cannot be reduced to the idea of the infinite analyzability of contingent propositions. Rather, divine foreknowledge, and thus the evaluation of possible worlds, is based on presumptions about the most probable courses of action rational creatures will take. As is the case for human action, divine action in this case is governed by rules that provide presumptions for a certain course of action. But for this reason, divine action can be superseded by other rules involving insights into a greater degree of what is good in another series of thoughts. If the series of divine thoughts are governed by defeasible inclinations, overruled inclinations remain causally relevant because they contribute to the determination of the choice of action. In this sense, the striving of possibles is ideal in the sense of being dependent on God's intellect but at the same time also real since divine insight into the degree of goodness of a possible substance always involves a certain degree of a causally relevant inclination to create this substance.

6. Conclusion

The basic insight of Leibniz's theory of volition is that there is no belief that does not involve a propensity to act according to this belief. This insight has the implication that there are no causally indifferent contents in the divine knowledge of possible substances. This opens up a line of interpretation that

[63] *De libertate et gratia*; A VI, 4, 1460: "Quia impossibilis est conditio ut creatura operetur sine concursu Dei, impossibile est Deum praevidere quid creatura per se vi solius liberi arbitrii esset factura. Itaque tantum Deus praevidere potest ad quod Creatura sit magis inclinata. Itaque res redit tandem ad doctrinam de inclinationibus non necessitantibus."

would understand the striving of possibles in a non-metaphorical way—thus accommodating the textual evidence that makes a metaphorical interpretation problematic. Such an interpretation leaves room for distinguishing modifications of the divine mind from existing substances. Because the real side of the striving of possibles belongs to the causally relevant aspects of divine cognition, the activity Leibniz ascribes to possible substances is not identical to the activity he ascribes to existing substances. Rather, similarities hold between the structure of the actions of existing rational substances and the actions of God. In Leibniz's view, what characterizes both the human and the divine mind is the idea that there is no belief about the goodness or badness of a thing detached from the striving for or aversion against this thing. As far as the human mind goes, he surmises that this is implicit in our everyday conception of belief and will. As far as the divine mind goes, the theory of striving possibles is an application of this descriptive insight into the connection between thinking and striving. Thinking the degree of goodness of a possible substance, for the divine mind, is identical with being inclined to a certain degree to create this substance. Because inclinations involve presumptions towards a certain course of thought or action that can be overruled, not all inclinations of the divine mind result in creating actual substances. Nevertheless, because inclinations are determinations that remain causally effective in the choice of a course of action even if they are overruled, insight into the degree of goodness of a possible substance remains causally relevant in the process of creation. In the sense that the striving of possibles is rooted in the divine intellect and will, it is something ideal. However, in the sense that divine insight into the degree of goodness of a possible substance by itself involves causally relevant inclinations to create this substance, possible substances—ideas in the divine intellect—themselves have a causally relevant side. In this sense, their striving towards existence is also something real.

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