Spinoza and Leibniz on the Principle of Sufficient Reason (02.20.23)

(forthcoming in Michael Della Rocca and Fatema Amijee (eds.), *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A History*. Oxford University Press)

Yitzhak Y. Melamed

Introduction

The early modern period was the natural historical habitat of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, i.e., the demand that everything must have a cause, or reason. It is in this period that the principle was explicitly articulated and named, and throughout the period we find numerous formulations and variants of the PSR and its closely related ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit’* principle, which the early moderns inherited from medieval philosophy.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Contemporary discussions of these principles were not restricted to philosophy. “Nothing will come of nothing; speak again” old King Lear tells his daughter Cordelia at the beginning of Shakespeare’s celebrated tragedy,[[2]](#footnote-2) and in early modern science, conservation principles were the order of the day. Within philosophy, Malebranche stipulates that there cannot be an effect without a cause,[[3]](#footnote-3) and Berkeley motivates his idealism by an appeal to ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit*.’[[4]](#footnote-4) Were we to try to provide an exhaustive survey the various formulations of the PSR in this period – including the weaker ones – we would be writing an encyclopedia. In fact, one wonders whether any early modern thinker was willing to accept a wholesale rejection of the PSR, i.e., a view which states that *no fact* requires an explanation. Moreover, the view that many – perhaps most – facts require an explanation seems to be tacitly assumed even by us today, in both our theoretical and colloquial discourse. For these reasons, this chapter will focus on two early modern philosophers who advocated very *strong* (i.e., virtually exceptionless) versions of the PSR: Benedict de Spinoza and G.W. Leibniz. Following a brief overview of Descartes’s restricted endorsement of the PSR, I will turn to discuss the central features of the PSR in the writings of Spinoza (§2) and those of Leibniz (§3). In the cases of each of these philosophers, we will examine carefully: (i) their main statements of the PSR, (ii) the scope they assign to the principle (i.e., what requires an explanation and what counts as an explanation), (iii) the modal strength they assign to the principle, (iv) the main implications they draw from the principle, (v) exceptions to the principle, and, finally, (vi) the justification of the principle. In §4, we will study a principle, complementing the PSR, namely, the assertion that everything and every fact must have an effect (or as Leibniz would put it: “nothing is sterile”).

§1. Descartes’s Either/Or

In the course of developing his proof of God’s existence in the Third Meditation, Descartes suggested that whatever “derives its existence from oneself [*a se*]… is itself God [*illam ipsam Deum esse*]” (AT VII 49-50| CSM II 34). Addressing this suggestion, Johannes Caterus, a Dutch theologian and the author of the First Set of Objections appended to the *Meditations*, asked Descartes whether by describing God’s existence as being “from itself” he used the expression as “everyone takes the phrase,” namely, as merely indicating that God is not caused by another, or whether, alternatively, Descartes positively meant that God is its own cause, and thus “bestows its own existence upon itself” (AT VII 95| CSM II 68). Responding to Caterus’ inquiry, Descartes writes:

The light of nature does establish that *if anything exists we may always ask why it exists*; that is, we may inquire into its efficient cause, or, if it does not have one, we may demand why it does not need one.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Later, in the same response to Caterus, Descartes adds:

What does seem to me self-evident is that *whatever exists either derives its existence from a cause or derives its existence from itself as from a cause* [*vel esse a causâ, vel a se tanquam a causâ*]. For since we understand not only what is meant by existence but also what is meant by its negation, it is impossible for us to imagine [*fingere*] anything deriving existence from itself *without there being some reason why it should exist rather than not exist*.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In the Second Set of Replies, Descartes is even more explicit both in stating the (almost) universal stipulation that everything requires a cause in order to exist, and in flagging God as a unique exception (or apparent exception) to this stipulation:

Concerning every existing thing it is possible to ask what is the cause of its existence. This question may even be asked concerning God, not because he needs any cause in order to exist, but because the immensity of his nature is the cause or reason [*ipsa ejus naturae immensitas est causa sive ratio*] why he needs no cause in order to exist.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Descartes never settled his view on whether God is a genuine efficient cause of itself. It is clear that he wished to hold the requirement that everything must have an efficient cause of its existence as being as universal as possible, since he considers this requirement as the major path to proving God’s existence.[[8]](#footnote-8) Still, when confronted with the traditional scholastic view that efficient self-causation is simply absurd, Descartes is stuck. He never fully withdraws from this claim, but instead provides sinuous formulations according to which God is a special case where we “form a concept of a cause that is common to both an efficient and a formal cause,”[[9]](#footnote-9) and that in God’s case, his essence functions as a “formal cause that is strongly *analogous* to an efficient cause, and hence can be called something close to an efficient.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Thus, it seems that Descartes’ considered view is that every existing thing has a reason for its existence, and in all cases but God’s, this reason is the efficient cause of the thing. In God’s unique case, the reason for God’s existence is his immense nature (or “inexhaustible power [*inexhausta potentia*]”[[11]](#footnote-11)) which in some sense “can be called” an efficient cause.

Other than the unique and eminent case of God, Descartes allows for some (other) exceptions to the requirement that everything must have a positive efficient cause: limitations, or mere negations of a perfection “do not proceed from a cause,”[[12]](#footnote-12) and errors may come “from nothing.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

§2. Spinoza and the PSR

*(i) Statements of the PSR*. – Spinoza’s first book – and the only one published under his name in his lifetime – is *Renati des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae* (1663). The book is an attempt to present in a geometrical (or axiomatic) form parts one and two (and the very beginning of part three) of Descartes’ *Principle of Philosophy* (1644). The seventh axiom of Part One of the book reads:

No actually existing thing and no actually existing perfection of a thing [*rei perfectio actu existens*] *can* have nothing, or a thing not existing, as the cause of its existence.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The axiom seems to be a middle link between the common ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit*’ principle and the PSR statements in Spinoza’s later writings. Notice that according to this axiom both things *and qualities* (“perfections”) must have a cause that is not nothing. The modality of the assertion (“no thing… *can*”) should also be noted.

Immediately after the axiom, Spinoza notes: “In P4S I have demonstrated that this axiom is as evident to us as I am thinking” (I/155/20). Indeed, in the scholium to the fourth proposition of Part One of DPP, Spinoza suggests a surprising justification for the ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit*’ principle. The principle, claims Spinoza, can be derived from the certainty of the Cartesian *cogito*: “if someone should wish to doubt whether something comes from nothing, he will at the same time be able to doubt whether we exist when we think.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Since we cannot doubt the *cogito*, claims Spinoza, we can equally not doubt ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit*’ which is presupposed by the *cogito*.[[16]](#footnote-16) This intriguing line of motivating ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit*’ will – as far as I can see - never be restated in Spinoza’s later writings (probably because he would assign much less importance to the *cogito* argument in his later writings).

Just in case the readers of Axiom Seven did not take sufficient notice of this claim, Spinoza spells it out more explicitly in another axiom, Axiom 11, adding an explanation:

Nothing exists of which it cannot be asked, what is the cause, or reason, why it exists. See Descartes’ A1. [Exp.]: Since existing is something *positive*, we *cannot* say that it has nothing as its cause (by A7). Therefore, we *must* assign some *positive* cause [*aliquam causam positivam*], or reason, why [a thing] exists—either an external one, i.e., one outside the thing itself, or an internal one, i.e., one comprehended in the nature and definition of the existing thing itself.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Notice Spinoza’s insistence on the requirement that the explanans must be “something positive” i.e., *not nothing*. This will be important for us later on, as we approach passages in the *Ethics* where Spinoza requires that the causes of things are “something positive.” Arguably, in all these passages, the requirement that the causes of things must be “something positive” and not nothing is a statement of the PSR.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Spinoza states a variant of the PSR already at the very beginning of the *Ethics*. Axiom 2 of Part One of the book reads: “What cannot be conceived through another, must be conceived through itself.”[[19]](#footnote-19) For Spinoza, x is conceived through y when x is explained by y.[[20]](#footnote-20) Thus, E1a2 amounts to the claim that what cannot be explained by another, must be explained by itself, or, in other words: everything must be explainable.

Another two clear statements of the PSR appear in E1p8s and E1p11d:

…there *must* be, for each existing thing, a certain [NS: *positive*] cause on account of which it exists.[[21]](#footnote-21)

For each thing there *must* be assigned a cause, or reason, as much for its existence as for its nonexistence. For example, if a triangle exists, there *must* be a reason or

cause why it exists; but if it does not exist, there *must* also be a reason or cause which prevents it from existing, or which takes its existence away.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The PSR statement in E1p11d stipulates that not only existence, but even the non-existence of a thing must have a cause.[[23]](#footnote-23) Following the statement of the PSR in E1p11d, Spinoza notes “these things are evident through themselves” (II/52/11). Shortly, we will examine the PSR statement in E1p26d to which Spinoza adds the gloss: “as is known through itself.”

Notice the modality of the PSR statements in E1p8s and E1p11d (“there *must* be”) as well as stress by the Dutch translator of the *Nagelate Schriften* that the cause at stake in E1p8s must be *positive*. Both these points are also salient in a January 1666 letter to Hudde where Spinoza suggests as a mutually agreed presupposition that

There must necessarily be a positive cause of each existing thing, through which it exists [*per quam existit*].[[24]](#footnote-24)

This leads us to an important statement of the PSR in the *Ethics* that is frequently misunderstood and missed by readers. Here is E1p26 and the first half of its demonstration. Read it carefully:

E1p26: A thing which has been determined to produce an effect has necessarily been

determined in this way by God; and one which has not been determined by God cannot determine itself to produce an effect.

Dem.: *That through which things are said to be determined to produce an effect must be something positive (as is known through itself)* [*Id, per quod res determinatae ad aliquid operandum dicuntur, necessario quid positivum est (ut per se notum)*]. And so [*Adeóque*], God, from the necessity of his nature, is the efficient cause both of its essence and of its existence (by P25 & 16); this was the first thing…

The first sentence of this demonstration is a statement of the PSR: it requires that the cause which makes other things act must be something *positive*, i.e., it cannot be nothing. In other words, things cannot act without there being a (positive) cause for their action.[[25]](#footnote-25) The second sentence points out God’s nature as the cause of both the essence and existence of all things, relying on E1p16 and E1p25.

Why does Spinoza include the PSR in E1p26d? Couldn’t he simply prove the proposition by relying *only* on the assertions in E1p16 and E1p25 that God (or God’s nature) is the cause of all things? Arguably, Spinoza felt the need to include the PSR in this demonstration because without it one could read these two propositions as starting that God is the cause of everything *which has a cause*. The first sentence of E1p26d reminds us – what Spinoza considers an obvious and trivial truth – that everything must have a (positive) cause.

There are other statements of the PSR and of ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit’* in Spinoza’s correspondence and in his other works,[[26]](#footnote-26) but by now we have surveyed a fair number of such statements and are ready to discuss their characteristics.

*(ii) The Scope of the PSR.* – In numerous formulations of the PSR, Spinoza insists that the scope of the explanans must be something positive, i.e., not nothing. However, we should note that for Spinoza the lack of a reason for p *is* a sufficient reason for not-p. Thus, in E1p11d, he writes:

…a thing necessarily exists if there is no reason or cause [*cujus nulla ratio, nec causa datur*] which prevents it from existing. Therefore, if no reason or cause can[[27]](#footnote-27) be given which prevents God from existing, or which takes his existence away, it must certainly be inferred that he necessarily exists.[[28]](#footnote-28)

There seems to be a certain ambivalence in this passage because its first sentence asserts that a thing necessarily exists *if there is* no reason which prevent it from existing, while the second sentence seems to claim that a thing necessarily exists *if there cannot be* a reason which prevents it from existing. Still, regardless of the precise modal strength of this claim, it would seem that for Spinoza the lack (or impossibility) of a reason for a thing’s non-existence is considered a genuine *positive* reason for the thing’s existence.[[29]](#footnote-29)

One interesting question we may pose here is whether, for Spinoza, the PSR itself serves as the explanans of anything.[[30]](#footnote-30) In Ep. 10 (1663), Spinoza claims that eternal truths, such as ‘*à nihilo, nihil fit*’ “do not explain any thing or affection of a thing [*nullam rem, reive affectionem explicant*].”[[31]](#footnote-31) Assuming Spinoza’s view did not change in his late period, it would seem that, for Spinoza, the PSR itself cannot serve as an explanans of the existence or non-existence of things.[[32]](#footnote-32)

What is the scope of the explananda under Spinoza’s PSR? With the exception of the early DPP-1a7 (and E1p26d), all the formulations we have surveyed required explanation for the existence and non-existence of things, and one might be tempted to suggest that, for Spinoza, qualities, or at least some qualities, do not require an explanation.[[33]](#footnote-33) I do not think this is the case, for the following reason. For Spinoza, all the qualities of a given thing, x, follow either from x’s essence or from the essences of the external things x encounters.[[34]](#footnote-34) Free-floating accidents that are not grounded in the essences of things are barred from Spinoza’s ontology.[[35]](#footnote-35) Now, God’s essence is the efficient cause of both the essence (and existence) of all things (E1p25). Therefore, God’s essence is the ultimate cause which *fully* explains all the qualities (i.e. both the essences and whatever qualities following the essences) of all things. As we have seen, at the beginning of E1p26d, Spinoza appeals to the PSR in order motivate the claim that God’s essence is the efficient cause of the essence of all things. Therefore, it seems that for Spinoza a situation in which even one essence of a thing lacks a sufficient cause is inconsistent with the principle stated at the beginning of E1p26d.

*(iii) Modal Strength*. – In virtually all of the formulations we have surveyed, Spinoza presents the PSR as a necessary principle. Time and again he asserts: “There must be….” This is not a trivial point, since as we shall shortly approach Leibniz’s attitude to the same question, we will find him much more hesitant to provide a clear and final answer to the question.

*(iv) Implications.* – We have seen that Spinoza frequently refers to the PSR as an obviously, perhaps even trivially, true statement. In E1p11d, after stating the PSR, he notes that “these things are evident through themselves” (II/52/11), and in E1p26d he glosses the statement of the principle with the phrase “as is known through itself.” It seems therefore likely that Spinoza employed the PSR as a trivial, tacit premise in quite a few arguments. In the following, I will list only the more salient implications which Spinoza draws from the PSR.

Spinoza relies on the PSR, or the ‘*ex nihilo, nihil fit’* principle, in motivating: the seminal doctrine of the causal barrier between the attributes,[[36]](#footnote-36) Spinoza’s version of the identity of indiscernibles,[[37]](#footnote-37) the claim that substance must be self-caused,[[38]](#footnote-38) the proofs of God’s existence,[[39]](#footnote-39) the rejection of emanation theory,[[40]](#footnote-40) necessitarianism,[[41]](#footnote-41) the necessity of essences,[[42]](#footnote-42) and the rejection of free will.[[43]](#footnote-43) Moreover, given that Spinoza’s doctrine of the third kind of cognition and his ethical theory both rely heavily on his necessitarianism, these too are at least partly grounded in the PSR.

*(v) Exceptions.* – In his early writings, Spinoza occasionally speaks about God, or the substance, as uncaused.[[44]](#footnote-44) Similarly, in some early works we find the claim that God acts from “absolute freedom of the will.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Both claims are incompatible with Spinoza’s employment of the PSR in his later works, and there is no trace of these claims in Spinoza’s later works.

An important objection against interpretations of Spinoza as an advocate of a strict and strong version of the PSR has been suggested, independently, by both Dan Garber and Oded Schechter.[[46]](#footnote-46) According to Schechter and Garber, God’s essence – which is the ultimate cause and ultimate explanation of all things – is just one, huge, brute fact. If successful, this objection would be devastating for the entire family of Spinoza interpretations that consider a strong version of the PSR as being at the very center of Spinoza’s philosophy.[[47]](#footnote-47) In response to such objections, (the strict rationalist) Spinoza could argue that if God’s essence would have been any different than how it actually is, it would involve a contradiction, but the obvious question is how can Spinoza establish, or even motivate, the last claim.

For Spinoza the main (if not sole) reason for asserting that God’s essence is self-caused (rather than uncaused), and self-conceived (rather than conceptually primitive) is the PSR itself. Thus, as a matter of simple historical fact it is clear Spinoza wished to assert the PSR in a manner that will include God’s essence within its scope. The question is whether he can make sense of the notions of self-causation and self-conception. In another work, I have argued that the standard objections to the notion of *causa sui* have little power against Spinoza’s notion.[[48]](#footnote-48) I have not shown that this notion is free from problems (let alone proven its consistency), but I hope to have shifted the burden of proof. In a similar vein, I believe that the question of the defensibility of Spinoza’s notion of self-conception should be set quite high on our scholarly agenda. For all I can tell, the fate of Spinoza’s entire rationalist endeavor depends significantly upon it.[[49]](#footnote-49)

*(vi) Justification.* – In §*(i)* above, we have mentioned briefly Spinoza’s attempt in the DPP to derive ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit*’ from the certainty of the *cogito*. If I understand Spinoza’s claims in this passage correctly, he seems to ground ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit*’ in a more basic principle, i.e., that nothingness can have no properties (or that nothing can be affirmed of nothing). Here are the crucial steps in Spinoza’s argument:

If someone should wish to doubt whether *something comes from nothing*, he will at the same time be able to doubt whether we exist when we think. For *if I can affirm something of nothing*—viz. that it can be the cause of something—I shall be able at the same time, with the same right, to affirm thought of nothing, and to say that I am nothing when I think. But since I cannot do that, it will also be impossible for me to think that something may come from nothing.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Spinoza’s aim in this passage is to show that one cannot doubt “whether something comes from nothing.” Allowing something to come from nothing, he claims, amounts to “affirming something of nothing” i.e., affirming that nothing is the *cause* of something.[[51]](#footnote-51) Now, if we allow something to be affirmed of nothing, we should also allow for thought to be affirmed of nothing, and thus, doubt the *cogito*.

Notice that here Spinoza provides a reason *why* ‘something cannot come from nothing.’ ‘Something cannot come of nothing’ because in such a case ‘something will be affirmed of nothing’ and *this* would conflict with the certainty of the *cogito*. Thus, it seems that in this passage the certainty of ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit*’ is grounded in the certainty of ‘something cannot be affirmed of nothing.’

I am not aware of any later text in which Spinoza attempts to motivate the PSR or ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit*.’[[52]](#footnote-52) It is likely that Spinoza would consider the PSR as a principle on par with the law of non-contradiction, and thus as a condition for both being and thinking.

*(vii) Is it a PSR?* – The term “Principle of Sufficient Reason [*principe* de *raison suffisante*]” was coined only by Leibniz, and so one might wonder whether it is legitimate to ascribe to Spinoza the advocacy of this principle in spite of the fact that he was not familiar with the term. Perhaps one way to alleviate such concerns is by pointing out that Leibniz himself referred to one of Spinoza’s arguments as an instance of the PSR. Thus, in an April 1676 marginal note on his copy of Spinoza’s celebrated Letter on the Infinite, Leibniz comments on Spinoza’s proof of God’s existence which appears at the very end of that letter:

This is rightly observed, and agrees with what I am accustomed to saying that nothing exists but that for whose existence a sufficient reason can be provided [*nihil existere, nisi cuius reddi possit ratio existentare sufficiens*] .[[53]](#footnote-53)

By Leibniz’s own lights, Spinoza’s proof of God’s existence in the Letter on the Infinite employed the PSR. Moreover, there is one specific feature in the formulation of the PSR that seems to be introduced by Spinoza. Descartes’ formulations of the requirement that everything must have a cause (or a reason why it does not require a cause) do not stipulate that the cause, or reason, must be *sufficient*.[[54]](#footnote-54) We do find such stipulations in Spinoza:

[I]t will not be sufficient (i.e., to give a reason why 20 men exist) to show the cause of human nature in general [*non satis erit (ut scilicet rationem reddamus, cur 20 homines existant) causam naturae humanae in genere ostendere*].[[55]](#footnote-55)

And the human mind, insofar as it is conceived as sufficient cause [*ut causa sufficiens*] for producing such actions, is called the *will*.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Whether these passages influenced Leibniz’s formulation of the PSR will require further study. Still, this seems to be at least a possibility.

§3. Leibniz and the PSR

*(i) Statements of the PSR*. — *Primae veritates* (“Primary Truths,” 1689?) is a short, intriguing, text presenting the principles of Leibniz’s metaphysics. Shortly after the beginning of this text, Leibniz states his “Predicate in Subject” principle, i.e., that in every truth, the predicate of a proposition is included in the subject. This inclusion is “explicit in identities, but in all other propositions it is implicit and must be shown through the analysis of notions.”[[57]](#footnote-57) Following the presentation of the “Predicate in Subject” principle, Leibniz notes:

[T]he *received axiom* [*axioma receptum*] that nothing is without reason, or there is no effect without a cause [*nihil esse sine ratione, seu nullum effectum esse absque causa*], directly *follows from these considerations*; otherwise there would be a truth which could not be proved a priori, that is, a truth which could not be resolved into identities, contrary to the nature of truth, which is always an explicit or implicit identity.[[58]](#footnote-58)

There are at least two remarkable features in this statement of the PSR. First, Leibniz refers to the PSR as a “received axiom,” rather than his own discovery or invention. Second, in this passage Leibniz treats the PSR as following from the “Predicate in Subject” principle, i.e., the PSR is not taken as primitive but rather derived from, and motivated by, another principle.

Let us turn now to another statement of the PSR from the very same period, this time in an essay titled (by the editors) “On Freedom” and dated tentatively to 1689.

[T]wo ways remain for us to know contingent truths, one through experience, and the other through reason—by experience when we perceive a thing sufficiently distinctly through the senses, and by reason when something is known from the general principle that *nothing is without a reason, or that there is always some reason why the predicate is in the subject* [*nihil fit sine ratione; seu quod semper praedicatum aliqua ratione subjecto inest*]. And so, we can take it for certain that God made everything in the most perfect way, and that he does nothing without a reason [*neque quicquam ab eo praeter rationem agi*], and that nothing *happens* [*evinire*]anywhere unless he who understands, understands its reason, that is, why the state of things is this way rather than that.[[59]](#footnote-59)

In this source, too, Leibniz ties the PSR with the “Predicate in Subject” principle, though here the relation between the (apparently) two principles seems somewhat different. Depending on how one reads the Latin ‘*seu*,’ either the two phrases are just equivalent formulations of the very same principle, or the ‘Predicate in Subject’ principle is just a spelling out of the PSR. We should also notice the scope of the explananda in this source, which are: predications in propositions, God’s actions, and events.

Moving to the later phases of Leibniz’s philosophy, we find the following famous passage in his *Monadology* (§§31-32. 1714):

§31. Our reasonings are based [*fondés*] on two great principles, that of contradiction, in virtue of which we judge that which involves a contradiction to be false, and that which is opposed or contradictory to the false to be true. §32. And that of sufficient reason, by virtue of which we consider that *we can find no true or existent fact* [*fait*], *no true assertion* [*énonciation véritable*], without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise, although most of the time these reasons cannot be known to us.[[60]](#footnote-60)

The view of the Law of Non-Contradiction and the PSR as the two great principles of reasoning appears already in Leibniz’s earlier works,[[61]](#footnote-61) and presenting the two principles on a par seems to exclude the possibility of reducing the one to the other.[[62]](#footnote-62) We should also observe the delicate modality of the PSR statement in the last passage: “aucun fait ne saurait trouver vrai… sans qu’il y ait une raison suffisiante.” This sounds very close to asserting the necessity of the PSR, but without fully committing to it.

The PSR plays also an important role in the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence (1715-16). In his Second Letter to Clarke (§1), Leibniz presents again his two great principles of reasoning:

[The Principle of Contradiction or Identity] is sufficient to demonstrate every part of arithmetic and geometry, that is, all mathematical principles. But in order to proceed from mathematics to natural philosophy, another principle is required, as I have observed in my *Theodicy;* I mean the *principle of sufficient reason,* namely, that *nothing happens without a reason* [*rien n’arrive sans qu’il y ait une raison*] why it should be so rather than otherwise.[[63]](#footnote-63)

The explananda in this passage are *happenings* or *events*, and this certainly fits the topic addressed in the passage: natural philosophy and physics. The modality of the PSR assertion here seems rather weak and not necessary, and yet, as we continue reading the section, just a few lines below, Leibniz addresses the role of the PSR in Archimedes’s discussion of equilibrium. Notice the delicate yet important shift in the modal status of the principle:

That is because there is no reason[[64]](#footnote-64) [*parce qu'il n'y a aucune raison*] why one side should weigh down rather than the other. Now by that single principle, namely, that *there ought to be* a sufficient reason [*qu'il faut qu'il y ait une raison suffisante*] why things should be so and not otherwise, one may demonstrate the being of God and all the other parts of metaphysics or natural theology.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Claiming that “everything has a reason” is clearly not the same as claiming that “everything *ought to* have a reason,” and yet, Leibniz seems to be moving quite freely from the one to the other.[[66]](#footnote-66)

*(ii) The Scope of the PSR.* – The scope of the explananda in Leibniz’s formulations of the PSR is quite wide and includes assertions (or predications), eternal truths,[[67]](#footnote-67) facts, states of things, actions, and happenings (or events). Presumably, Leibniz considered formulations with different explananda as essentially equivalent to each other. Leibniz does not frequently discuss the scope of explanantia. Obviously, the ultimate explanans of all things is God’s reasoning and goodness.

*(iii) Modal Strength*. – Unlike Spinoza’s unhesitant assertions of the necessity of the PSR, the modal status of the principle in Leibniz is unclear. Formulations in which Leibniz asserts that “there ought to be a reason” for everything are not rare in Leibniz’s writings. On occasion, Leibniz would even refer to the PSR as necessary.[[68]](#footnote-68) Yet, in many texts the principle appears as an indicative, general, claim. In his Fifth Letter to Clarke, the PSR is presented as an empirical generalization, supported by “infinite number of instances, wherein it succeeds,” and refuted by none.[[69]](#footnote-69) Leibniz then concludes hesitantly that the PSR is justified according to the methods of empirical philosophy “though the principle were not *perhaps* justified by bare reason, or a priori.”[[70]](#footnote-70) This sort of diffident evaluation from the very end of Leibniz’s life might indicate a certain disillusionment about the possibility of providing a necessary and a priori ground for the principle. This being said, it is highly questionable whether a mere contingent version of the PSR could deliver the results Leibniz wished to substantiate by it.

*(iv) Implications.* – Leibniz employs the PSR explicitly in proving numerous claims in his metaphysics and physics. We will concentrate mostly on the former. Among these PSR-motivated claims are: the proof of God’s existence,[[71]](#footnote-71) determinism,[[72]](#footnote-72) mind-body parallelism,[[73]](#footnote-73) the identity of indiscernibles,[[74]](#footnote-74) the principle of continuity,[[75]](#footnote-75) the rejection of “mere will without any motive,”[[76]](#footnote-76) the rejection of solipsism,[[77]](#footnote-77) the rejection of bare occult qualities and bare faculties,[[78]](#footnote-78) the equipollence of cause and effect,[[79]](#footnote-79) the rejection of the possibility of empty, absolute, space and time,[[80]](#footnote-80) the impossibility of atoms,[[81]](#footnote-81) the indefinite extension of space,[[82]](#footnote-82) and that enduring substances “will always endure.”[[83]](#footnote-83) This is a very partial list.

*(v) Exceptions.* – In “Primary Truths” Leibniz notes that geometrical figures and abstracta violate the Identity of Indiscernibles:

[P]erfect similarity is found only in incomplete and abstract notions, where things are considered only in a certain respect, but not in every way, as, for example, when we consider shapes alone, and neglect the matter that has shape. And so it is justifiable to consider two similar triangles in geometry, even though two perfectly similar material triangles are nowhere found.[[84]](#footnote-84)

Consider the case of a square (my example). By the very definition of a square, the four sides of the square are equal. What distinguishes then the four sides? The distinction cannot be brute (this would violate the PSR), and if there is no distinguishing feature among the sides, the four sides should collapse into one. This absurd result, claims Leibniz, obtains only when we deal with abstracta. Were we to address any real square figure existing in nature, there would have to be a feature (other than the length) that would account for the difference among the four sides. Since in “Primary Truths” the identity of indiscernibles is a corollary of the PSR, abstracta and geometrical figures turn out to be violations of the PSR as well.

In his correspondence with De Volder, Leibniz makes a similar point by noting that two equal parts of a straight line violate the identity of indiscernibles, and here too Leibniz argues that such a violation is possible only because we are dealing with incomplete abstracta.[[85]](#footnote-85)

*(vi) Justification.* – In his early *Demonstratio Propositionum Primarum* (1671-2) Leibniz attempted to prove the PSR by arguing that once all the *requisites* of a thing are given, the thing itself must be given (a requisite being defined as a condition necessary for the existence of a thing).[[86]](#footnote-86) The argument seems to commit an obvious *petitio*, since the opponent of the PSR will clearly reject the claim that the totality of necessary conditions for x is also sufficient for the existence of x.[[87]](#footnote-87) Recently, Della Rocca suggested an amended version of Leibniz’s argument which attempts to avoid being question-begging.[[88]](#footnote-88)

In §(i) above, we have noted Leibniz’s attempt, in “Primary Truths”, to derive the PSR from his “Predicate in Subject” principle. In other texts, the two principles seem either equivalent, or the direction of the derivation is inverted.[[89]](#footnote-89)

As noted above (§ (iii)), in his fifth letter to Clarke, Leibniz appeals to “the method of experimental philosophy” i.e., induction, to provide justification for the PSR.[[90]](#footnote-90)

§4. Sufficient Effect

We have thus far scrutinized Spinoza’s and Leibniz’s formulation of the PSR. Still, both were not only committed to the assertion that everything must have a cause, but also to the claim that *everything must have an effect*. Spinoza commits himself to this claim in the last proposition of Part One of the *Ethics*:

E1p36: *Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow*.

Dem: Whatever exists expresses the nature, or essence of God in a certain and

determinate way (by P25C), i.e. (by P34), whatever exists expresses in a certain and

determinate way the power of God, which is the cause of all things. So (by P16), from [NS: everything that exists] *some effect must follow* [*ex eo aliquis effectus sequi debet*], q.e.d. (Italics added).

“Some effect *must* follow from everything,” concludes Spinoza at the end of E1p36d. The unrestricted formulation (“whatever exists”) of this claim implies that there cannot be even *any part or aspect* of the cause which does not have an effect (for otherwise, that effectless part or aspect would be a thing which violates the principle here stated). Therefore, every part and aspect of the cause must be accounted for in the effect, and the effect must *sufficiently* express the cause.

Spinoza relies explicitly on E1p36 in three later proofs in the *Ethics*: E2p13d, E3p1d and E5p4s. In all three proofs he employs this claim or principle along the lines described above.[[91]](#footnote-91)

Leibniz seems to be asserting a closely related view in the numerous passages in his writings where he asserts that “nothing is sterile.” Thus, for example, in the *Monadology*, after asserting that “there is nothing fallow, sterile, or dead in the universe,” he expounds:

That is why there is never total generation nor, strictly speaking, perfect death, death consisting in the separation of the soul. And what we call *generations* are developments and growths, as what we call deaths are enfoldings [*enveloppements*] and diminutions.[[92]](#footnote-92)

For Leibniz, death is nothing but “the separation of the soul,” but it is not – and cannot be – the complete annihilation of anything. Just as nothing comes from nothing, so does nothing come into nothing.[[93]](#footnote-93) Birth and death are only *développements* and *enveloppements.*

Indeed, if we conjoin the claims that nothing comes from nothing and that nothing turns into nothing, we have the rough outlines of a certain principle of conservation. Leibniz seems to employ just such a conservation principle at the very conclusion of “Primary Truths”: “[W]hen corporeal substance once endures, it will always endure, since there is no reason for any difference[[94]](#footnote-94)… Therefore, *animate things never arise nor perish, but are only transformed*.”[[95]](#footnote-95) Animate things cannot (naturally) arise from nothing, nor can they perish into nothing, because both of these radical changes violate the stipulation that everything must have a reason.

§5. Conclusion

In the current chapter we have analyzed the variety of formulations of the PSR in writings of Spinoza and Leibniz. We have focused on these two philosophers because they were the main partisans of the principle in the modern period. There are significant differences between Spinoza’s and Leibniz’s variants of the PSR: Spinoza’s rejection, and Leibniz’s enthusiastic endorsement, of teleological explanations are arguably the main point of disagreement between the two philosophers’ versions of the PSR. Still, there is a very significant common ground between the two, and this common ground – which as we have seen was also recognized by Leibniz – justifies the ascription of, broadly, the same major principle to both.

There are several interesting issues related to the PSR in Spinoza and Leibniz –

and more broadly, in the early modern period – that were not addressed in this chapter. Of such a kind is Euler’s important critique of the “wretched abuse” of the PSR by those who

“employ it so dexterously that by means of it they are in a condition to demonstrate whatever suits their purpose, and to demolish whatever is raised against them.”[[96]](#footnote-96) We have also passed over Spinoza’s crucial observation that we frequently tend to neglect our duty to inquire about the causes of things simply because they are *familiar* to us, and therefore cause no wonder. For Spinoza, our familiarity with a thing has nothing to do with the demand for intelligibility, and the quotidian requires an explanation just like what is deemed to be bizarre.[[97]](#footnote-97) A closely related issue is whether the reasons providing the explanations for things and facts must be available to us, even in principle: both Spinoza and Leibniz denied the requirement that explanations must be available to us.[[98]](#footnote-98) For Spinoza, such a requirement would be a gross form of anthropocentrism: the world does not dance according to our whims, nor is reason restricted to what is available to our cognitive perspective.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Bibliography

Alexander, H.G. (ed.), *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956.

Amijee, Fatema. “The Disharmony of Leibniz and Du Châtelet.” Unpublished manuscript.

Berkeley, George. *Philosophical Works*. Ed. Michael R. Ayers. Everyman’s Library: London, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *Philosophical Writings*. Ed. Desmond M. Clarke. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Carraud, Vincent. *Causa sive Ratio: la Raison de la Cause, de Suarez à Leibniz*, Paris: PUF, 2002.

Della Rocca, *Michael, Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. “A Rationalist Manifesto”, *Philosophical Topics*, 31 (2003): 75–93.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *Spinoza*, New York: Routledge, 2008.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. “A New Defense of the Principle of Sufficient Reason” *Journal of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

Descartes, Rene. *Oeuvres de Descartes* [**AT**]. 12 volumes. Edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. Paris: J. Vrin, 1964-76.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* [**CSM**]. 3 volumes. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Euler, Leonhard, *Letters to a German Princess* in E. Watkins (ed.), *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason: Background Source Materials*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 183–230.

Garrett, Don. *Nature and Necessity in Spinoza’s Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Garber, Daniel. *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. “Superheroes in the History of Philosophy: Spinoza, Super-Rationalist” *Journal of the History of Philosophy 5* (2015): 507-522.

Halevi, Judah. *The Kuzari (Kitab al Khazari)*. Translated by Hartwig Hirschfeld. New York: Schocken, 1964.

Harrop, Stephen, “On Some Leibnizian Arguments for the Principle of Sufficient Reason” *History of Philosophy Quarterly 37* (2020): 143-161.

Leibniz, G.W., *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften. Multiple volumes in 7 series. Berlin: Akademie Verlag. Abbreviated [**A**], cited by series, volume, and page.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *Philosophical Essays*, translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *Die philosophischen Schriften*, C.I. Gerhardt (ed.) 7 vols., Berlin: Weidmann, 1875-90.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, Leroy E. Loemker (ed. and trans.), 2nd edition, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *Philosophical Writings*. Edited by G.H.R. Parkinson. London: Everyman’s Library, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *The Labyrinth of the Continuum: Writings on the Continuum Problem, 1672-1686*. Translated and edited by Richard T.W. Arthur. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Lin, Martin. *Being and Reason:  An Essay on Spinoza’s Metaphysics.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Look, Brandon C. “Grounding the Principle of Sufficient Reason: Leibnizian Rationalism and the Humean Challenge” in Carlos Fraenkel, Dario Perinetti, and Justin E.H. Smith (eds.), *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation*, Springer: Dordrecht, 2011, 201-219.

Malebranche, Nicloe. *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Vrin, 1958-68.

Melamed, Yitzhak Y*. “The Metaphysics of Spinoza’s Theological Political Treatise”,* in Melamed and Rosenthal (eds.), *Spinoza’s Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical* Guide (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 128-42.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *Spinoza’s Metaphysics: Substance and Thought.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. “Hasdai Crescas and Spinoza on Actual Infinity and the Infinity of God’s Attributes” in Steven Nadler, *Spinoza and Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 204-215.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. “Spinoza’s *causa sui*” in *The Blackwell Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Oxford: Blackwell, 2021), 116-125.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. “The Banishment of Accidents from Spinoza’s Paradise.” *Acta Philosophica 31* (2022): 47-60.

Melamed, Yitzhak Y. and Martin Lin, "Principle of Sufficient Reason", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/sufficient-reason/>

Newlands, Samuel. *Reconceiving Spinoza*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Rodriquez-Pereyra, Gonzalo. “The Principles of Contradiction, Sufficient Reason, and Identity of Indiscernibles” in Mario Rosa Antognazza (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Leibniz*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 45-64.

Rutherford, Donald. *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Schechter, Oded. *Existence and Temporality in Spinoza*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Chicago, 2014.

Shakespeare, William. *The History of King Lear*. Ed. Stanley Wells. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Spinoza, Benedict. *Opera*. 4 volumes. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *The Collected Works of Spinoza.* Two Volumes. Edited and translated by Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985/2016.

Additions:

- Check my discussion of E1p26d: why is the first sentence needed?

- FN on Leibniz’s PSR as non-necessary since it cannot be proven by LNC alone. Kant’s synthetic a priori/Maimon’s full PSR as necessary.

1. On the earliest formulations of ‘*ex nihilo nihil fit’*, see Carraud, *Causa sive Ratio*, 35. I presented drafts of this chapter in workshops at Yale (June 2022) and at Johns Hopkins (September 2022). I would like to thank the participants at these workshops – especially, Fatema Amijee. Michael Della Rocca, Stephen Harrop, Paul Lodge, Luce DeLire, Hao Dong, Daniel Garber, and Jason Yonover – for their most helpful comments and criticisms. I would also like to thank Aaron Wells and Zach Gartenberg for their most helpful written comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 104 (Sc. 1). ‘From nothing, nothing comes’ is cited several times in Shakespeare’s *Lear*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Malebranche, *Oeuvres*, vol. 12, 175. Cf. Look, “Grounding the PSR,” 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Berkeley’s Third Dialogue: “Nothing can give to another that which it has not of itself” (Berkeley, *Philosophical Writings*, 217. In his Notebook, Berkeley writes: “*Ex nihilo nihil fit*…to make this axiom have a positive signification, one should express it thus: Every Idea has a Cause, i.e., is produced. By a Will” (Berkeley, *Philosophical Works*, 406). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Descartes, First Set of Replies (AT VII 108| CSM II 78). Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Descartes, First Set of Replies (AT VII 112| CSM II 80). Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Descartes, Second Set of Replies (AT VII 165| CSM II 116). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Denying this requirement would – according to Descartes – block “the primary and principle way, if not the only way, that we have of proving the existence of God” (AT VII 238| CSM II 166). Cf. Melamed, “Spinoza on *Causa Sui*,” 119-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Descartes, Fourth Set of Replies (AT VII 238| CSM II 166). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Descartes, Fourth Set of Replies (AT VII 243| CSM II 170). Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Descartes, First Set of Replies (AT VII 109| CSM II 78). The “inexhaustible power” formulation seems to tilt in the direction considering God an efficient cause of itself since the terminology of power is closely associated with efficient causation. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Descartes, First Set of Replies (AT VII 111| CSM II 80). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Namely, from a mere defect and not from anything positive (AT VI 34| CSM I 128). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Spinoza, DPP-1A7. Italics added. Unless otherwise marked, all references to Spinoza’s works and letters are to Curley's translation: *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. I have relied on Gebhardt’s critical edition (*Spinoza Opera*, 4 volumes (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, 1925)) for the Latin and Dutch text of Spinoza. I use the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza’s works: **TdIE** - *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* [*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*], **DPP** – *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy* [*Renati des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I & II*], **CM** – *Metaphysical Thoughts* [*Cogitata Metaphysica*], **KV** – *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being* [*Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch en deszelfs Welstand*], **TTP** –*Theological-Political* *Treatise* [*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*], **Ep.** – *Letters*.Passages in the *Ethics* will be referred to by means of the following abbreviations: a(-xiom), c(-orollary), p(-roposition), s(-cholium) and app(-endix); ‘d’ stands for either ‘definition’ (when it appears immediately to the right of the part of the book), or ‘demonstration’ (in all other cases). Hence, E1d3 is the third definition of part 1 and E1p16d is the demonstration of proposition 16 of part 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Spinoza, DPP-1 p4s| I/154/10. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Spinoza, DPP-1 p4s| I/154/11-15. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Spinoza, DPP-A11| I/158/4-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Notice also the modality of Spinoza’s claim: “*assignare* debemus [we *must* assign].” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. E1a2: “*Id, quod per aliud non potest concipi, per se concipi debet*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Della Rocca, *Representation*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. E1p8s: II/50/28. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. E1p11d| II/52/3-53/2. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The requirement that non-existence must also have a cause is quite common in medieval philosophy. See, for example, Halevi, *Kuzari*, V 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Spinoza, Ep. 34| III/179/29-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. An obvious implication of this requirement is the rejection of free will. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See, for example, Ep. 4 (IV/14/12), Ep. 10 (IV/47/22); KV I, ii (I/21/13), KV II, xvi (I/81/4-9); TTP Ch. 6 (III/86/9-14). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. “*dari possit*.” I have corrected Curley’s translation which had instead “there is no...” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. E1p11d| II/53/12-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. One may raise here the question of how Spinoza would respond to a suggested scenario in which there is no reason either for the existence or for the non-existence of a thing. Should existence or non-existence be considered as the default position? For all I could tell, Spinoza would probably argue that the PSR rules out the scenario in which a thing has no reason either for its existence, or for its non-existence. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. In his exciting 2008 Spinoza book, Michael Della Rocca argues that Spinoza employed a “two-fold” use of the PSR. According to Della Rocca, the PSR not only requires that everything must be explainable, but also that ultimately everything must be explicable in terms of intelligibility or explicability (Della Rocca, Spinoza, 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ep. 10| IV/47/21. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See also Don Garrett’s critique of Della Rocca’s “two-fold” use of the PSR (Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 2) which addresses a related, though different, issue: “[The PSR] cannot properly quantify over itself by treating its own purported truth as an infallible second-order back-up reason in the absence of any first-order reasons for a state of affairs” (Garrett, *Nature and Necessity*, 61). Admittedly, Spinoza’s assertion in Ep. 10, while not vague, require some further textual support in order to establish the issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See, for example, Lin, *Being and Reason*, 166-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. E2p13sA’’ (II/99/10). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Melamed, “Banishment of Accidents.” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Ep. 4| IV/14/11-12. On the causal barrier between the attributes, see Della Rocca, *Representation*, 9-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. In E1p4d Spinoza seems to assume that distinct things cannot be distinguished in a brute manner (i.e., without there being a reason for the distinction between the things). See Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 47. See however, Lin (*Being and Reason,* 179) who argues that Spinoza’s reasons for accepting E1p4 are unclear. Lin believes that the PSR does not play any role in motivating E1p4. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. E1p7d tacitly, yet obviously, assumes that everything must have a cause for its existence. Without this assumption E1p7d would be trivially invalid. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See the second proof in E1p11d. The first proof relies on E1p7, and thus – per my previous note –

    also relies on the PSR. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See KV I, ii| I/21/24-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. E1p29 relies on E1p26d. Cf. Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 76-8 and Garrett, *Nature and Necessity*, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See E1p26d. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See E1p32d: “In whatever way it is conceived, whether finite or infinite, [the will] *requires a cause by which it is determined to exist and produce an effect*.” Italics added. E1p32d relies in E1p28 which in turn relies on E1p26d. Cf. E2p48 and KV II, xvi| I/81/1-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See TIE §§70 and 97, and CM II, i |I/237/20. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. CM I, ii (I/238/6 and 15) and CM II, ix (I/266/12). It is not clear whether these claims represent Spinoza’s own views in his early period. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See Garber, “Superheroes,” 517-19, and Schechter, *Existence and Temporality*, Ch. 2 §§4-5 (Schechter refers to the alleged bruteness of God’s nature as “the principle of excessive existence.”) [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. In “Violations of the PSR,” Della Rocca argues that, for Spinoza, modes are not fully intelligible (and hence not fully real) due to their passivity and the alleged pure activity of God (156-161). While the argument is fascinating, it is hard to square its conclusion with Spinoza’s clear commitment to determinism. Since for Spinoza causation and intelligibility are, *at least*, co-extensive (Della Rocca would have them strictly identical), the partial intelligibility of modes would entail also partial causation (i.e., rejection of determinism), and this seems to fly in the face of the core argument of the *Ethics*. For all I can tell, Spinoza would avoid the path charted by Della Rocca by affirming that God is indeed, in some respects, passive (though, admittedly, the topic requires detailed exploration). One way or another, the challenge posed by the objection of Garber and Schechter poses much more of a threat to the PSR since it alleges that God’s essence (which is most real) is brute. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Melamed, “Spinoza on *Causa Sui*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Before moving to the next section, let me note another possible significant exception to the PSR in Spinoza: it is not clear whether the PSR also governs cases of immanent causation, especially when the effect is *in another* [*in alio*]. Immanent causation is an efficient-causal relation in which the effect inheres in the cause (see E1p18. Cf. Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 61-66). This could happen in either one of two ways: *(i)* the effect and cause are *identical* – call it *in se* immanent causation(in this sense, God’s essence is said to be the immanent cause of itself) – or *(ii)* the effect and cause are *distinct*: call it, *in alio* immanent causation (as when God’s essence is said to be the immanent cause of any mode). Now, let’s focus on *(ii): in alio* immanent causation. In such a scenario, it would seem that, according to the PSR, the effect cannot be any different from its cause because any feature which would distinguish the effect from its cause would come from nothing. But, on the other hand, the effect also cannot be identical to its cause because, per our assumption, we are dealing with a case of *in alio* immanent causation. Thus, it seems that *in alio* immanent causationis simply ruled out by the PSR. Yet, we have plenty of textual evidence for cases where modes both inhere in, and are caused by, God’s essence. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Spinoza, DPP-1p4s| I/154/8-16. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. For another passage where Spinoza assimilates causation with having a property, see TTP, Ch. 4| III/60/9: “[k]nowing an effect through its cause is nothing but knowing some property of the cause.” [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Spinoza’s polemics against Judah Alfakhar (TTP Ch. 15| III/181-2) might appear as a promising source for a Spinozist justification for the PSR. Still, as far as I can see, the most this source can offer is the assertion that acting without reason is “acting foolishly and without judgement” (III/182/7), and this is still far from motivating the PSR. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Leibniz, *Labyrinth of the Continuum*, 117/|A VI 3, 71. Spinoza adopted the proof from the late medieval Jewish philosopher, Hisdai Crescas. See Melamed, “Crescas and Spinoza on Actual Infinity.” [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. I am indebted to Alan Gabbey for this observation. Aaron Wells drew my attention to the fact that the term ‘sufficient cause’ appears occasionally both in Suarez and in Hobbes. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. E1p8s2| II/51/3-5. Underlining added. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. CM II 12|I/277/29. Underlining added. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 31| VI 4 1644. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 31| VI 4 1645. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 96| VI 4 1656-7. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 217| VI 4 1645. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See, for example, “A Specimen of Discoveries About Marvelous Secrets of Nature in General” (1668?), in Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Though in his notes Leibniz did consider this possibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 321|*Philosophischen Schriften*, VII 355-6. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. I have here amended the translation. Ariew and Garber have “because no reason *can be given*.” The temptation to read strong modality into this sentence is understandable. Still, I prefer to stick to the original French as strictly as possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 321| *Philosophischen Schriften*, VII 356. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. For references to further statements of the PSR in Leibniz, see Rodriguez-Pereyra, “The Principle of Contradiction,” §1. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Leibniz, “Primary Truths” in *Philosophical Essays*, 31-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. See, for example, the postscript to Leibniz’s Fourth Letter to Clarke: “to admit a vacuum in nature, is ascribing to God a very imperfect work: ‘tis violating the grand principle of the *necessity* of a sufficient reason.” Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence, Leibniz 5th Letter, §129| *Philosophischen Schriften*, VII 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence, Leibniz 5th Letter, §129| *Philosophischen Schriften*, VII 420. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. See, for example, Leibniz, *Labyrinth of the Continuum*, 117 and 307, and *Monadology* §§37-38 (*Philosophical Essays*, 217-218). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Leibniz, *Leibniz-Stahl Controversy*, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Leibniz, *Leibniz-Stahl Controversy*, 23 and “Metaphysical Consequences of the Principle of Reason” in *Philosophical Writings*, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Leibniz, “Primary Truths” in *Philosophical Essays*, 31-32 and Leibniz’s Fifth Letter to Clarke, §21. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Leibniz, *Labyrinth of the Continuum*, 199 and 414 (n. 16). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Leibniz’s Fourth Letter to Clarke, §§1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Leibniz’s Letter to Foucher (1675) in Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 3| A II 12, 390. Cf. Garber, *Leibniz*, 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Leibniz, “Metaphysical Consequences of the Principle of Reason” in *Philosophical Writings*, 172-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Leibniz, A VI 4, 1963-4. Cf. Garber, *Leibniz*, 243-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Leibniz’s Third Letter to Clarke, §§5-6 and “Primary Truths” in *Philosophical Essays*, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. See the postscript to Leibniz’s Fourth Letter to Clarke. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Leibniz, *Labyrinth of the Continuum*, 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Leibniz, “Primary Truths” in *Philosophical Essays*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Leibniz, “Primary Truths” in *Philosophical Essays*, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Leibniz to De Volder (June 20th, 1703) in Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 529| *Philosophischen Schriften*, II 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Leibniz A VI 2, 483. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. See Harrop’s careful reconstruction of the variants of the PSR at work in Leibniz’s argument. Harrop, however, does not absolve Leibniz from the charge of *petitio*. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See, Della Rocca, “New Defense.” [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. See, for example, “Metaphysical Consequences of the Principle of Reason” in Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings*, 172. Cf. Leibniz’s *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §8 (*Philosophical Essays*, 41) and my discussion of the excerpt from “On Freedom” in §(i) above. For further discussion of the relation between the Predicate in Subject principle and the PSR, see Rutherford*, Leibniz and he Rational Order of Nature*, 75-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence, Leibniz 5th Letter, §129| *Philosophischen Schriften*, VII 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Thus, in E2p13d he states: “nothing exists from which there does not follow some effect.” [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Leibniz, *Monadology*, §73, in *Philosophical Essays*, 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. God, however, can create and annihilate. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. “There is no reason for any difference” (i.e., arising and perishing) since created substances do not causally interact (“Primary Truths,” 33). God, however, creates and can annihilate these substances. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Leibniz, “Primary Truths” in *Philosophical Essays*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Euler, Letters to German Princess, Letter XIII. See also Aaron Wells’ contribution to this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. For a brief discussion of this issue, see Melamed, “The Metaphysics of the TTP,” 130-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See, for example, Leibniz, *Monadology*, §31 in *Philosophical Essays*, 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. “Nature is not constrained by the laws of human reason, which aim only at man’s true advantage and preservation” (TTP Ch. 16 |III/191/1). See, however, Amijee’s “Disharmony of Leibniz and Du Châtelet” which attributes to Du Châtelet an intriguing argument attempting to prove that reasons must be accessible to us, at least in principle. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)