

## A PERFECT BEING EXISTS: THE ARGUMENT FROM CONTINGENCY\*

### Preliminaries

The **Principle of Sufficient Reason** (“There can be no real or existing fact, no true statement, unless there is a sufficient reason, why it should be so and not otherwise, although these reasons are usually cannot be known by us.”)

A **necessarily existent being** contains the “sufficient reason” of its own existence.

A **contingent thing** does not. By the Principle of Sufficient Reason, it must depend on something outside itself for its existence.

### The argument from contingency:

1. There are infinitely many contingent things.
2. The world of contingent things (i.e., the set of *all* contingent things) is itself contingent.
3. By the **Principle of Sufficient Reason**, there must be a sufficient reason of the world of contingent things.
4. This sufficient reason cannot be found *within* the world of contingent things.
5. It must therefore be found in something that lies *outside* the world of contingent beings.
6. Whatever lies outside the world of contingent things must be a necessarily existent substance.
7. Therefore there is a necessarily existent substance that contains the sufficient reason of the world of contingent things.
8. This we call **God**.
9. God contains the reason for the unity and the diversity of the world. (#39)
10. So “there is only one God and this God is sufficient.” (#39)
11. There is nothing apart from God that is independent of God. (#40)
12. Therefore God is “incapable of limits” and must “contain as much reality as possible.” (#40)

Perhaps the argument for deriving 12 from 11 is supposed to go like this.

- If God were limited by something, God would have to be limited by something independent of God.
  - But can be nothing independent of God.
  - Therefore, God cannot be limited.
13. Perfection is “nothing but the magnitude of positive reality.” (#41)
  14. So God is absolutely perfect. (#41)

### A few questions:

- What does PSR really say? What is a “reason?” What does it take for a reason to be *sufficient*
- Why believe PSR? Why believe that it applies to the whole set of contingent things? To the world as a whole?
- Given PSR, can anything really be contingent?
- Why is there just one necessarily existent substance? (See *Monadology* #39)
- Why couldn’t God be limited in power or goodness by his own nature?

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\* I’m relying here on three of Leibniz’s shorter works: *Monadology* (#31 – #41), *Principles of Nature and Grace* (#7 – #10), and *On the Ultimate Origination of Things*.

## THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

1. Since God is perfect, he does nothing without sufficient reason.
2. God could not have a sufficient reason for creating any world less than the best possible one.  
Leibniz holds that if there were a tie for “best possible,” God could not choose to create because there would not be a sufficient reason for choosing one possible world rather than the other.  
He also holds that if, for every possible world, there were another even better, God could not choose to create, since there would be as much reason against creating any possible world as there is for creating it.
3. God has created the actual world.
4. Therefore, the actual world is the best possible world.
5. This world is very imperfect.
6. So God has created an imperfect world, which is nonetheless the best of all possible worlds.

## IS THE WORLD NECESSARY?

The actual world is *not* necessary “in itself.”

There is no contradiction in the proposition that it does not exist. There are other possible worlds.

But it may nevertheless be necessary *in relation to God*. (Leibniz was very reluctant to admit this. Whether it’s true depends on the answer to the next question... )

## COULD GOD HAVE FAILED TO CREATE THIS WORLD?

Leibniz waffled on this. Had he been completely consistent, I think he would have said no.

## PRE-ESTABLISHED HARMONY

Amongst the monads.

Remember that they are “windowless.” There are no causal relations between monads.

Between mind and body.

Note that bodies are systems of monads, organized around a “dominant monad.” The dominant monad for the human body is the human soul or mind.

The clock analogy.