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ARTICLE

Leibniz's Moral Psychology of an Evil Person

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Abstract
Our focus in this article concerns Leibniz's views on evil. Our goal is to examine which are the consequences of his conception of moral agency for the moral psychology of the genuinely evil person. For Leibniz, moral failure is an epistemic error since it involves some false practical judgement. Moral maxims may be represented in blind or symbolic cognitions, but then moral agents can misrepresent the evil consequences of their behaviour. Finally, we discuss Leibniz's view on habits that may help virtuous persons strive for perfection but also enable evil persons to continue sinning.

Résumé
Dans cet article, nous nous concentrons sur les vues de Leibniz à propos du mal. Notre objectif est d'examiner quelles sont les conséquences de sa conception de l'agence morale pour la psychologie morale de la personne véritablement mauvaise. Pour Leibniz, le mal moral est une erreur épistémique puisqu'il implique un faux jugement pratique. Les maximes morales peuvent être représentées par des cognitions aveugles ou symboliques, et par conséquent, un agent moral peut se tromper dans sa représentation des conséquences mauvaises de ses décisions. Enfin, nous discutons de la perspective de Leibniz sur les habitudes qui peuvent aider les personnes vertueuses à rechercher la perfection, mais aussi permettre aux personnes mauvaises de continuer à pécher.

Keywords: Leibniz; deliberation; evil; moral failure; habits; weakness of will

1. Introduction

In his theological writings on evil, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz often emphasizes a general picture focused on God and creation. According to this approach, Leibnizian theodicy is founded on the idea that God is a supreme judge who maintains harmony. If this harmony is violated by a human being, the view holds, God can punish her in various ways, ultimately forcing eternal punishment upon the sinful person. As a rule, Leibniz considers human beings to be sociable creatures, following a natural instinct of loving one's fellow human beings and being charitable to them. Moreover, it is usually thought that Leibniz prefers to discuss good rather than evil and fails to give a detailed or even plausible account of the nature of sin, the

unfortunate but unavoidable part of God's creation. And, more importantly, some features of Leibniz's moral psychology — his conceptions of how moral agents make choices — make it difficult to see how genuine sinners do evil to others and continue sinning. In this article we will show how this is possible in the Leibnizian framework, and will consider the motivation of these evil persons.

Leibniz believed that it is possible to account for an agent's choice since the ability to distinguish between good and evil is not beyond the limits of understanding; as well, he adheres to the view that volition follows the judgement of the understanding. But, since he also holds that moral agents act *sub specie boni*, it is hard to see the moral origins of evil so as to make the evil agent responsible for her malevolent intentions and actions. In the following sections, we will analyze Leibniz's conception of malevolent moral agency from the point of view of his moral psychology.

Leibniz scholarship regarding the problem of weakness of the will often holds that the philosopher rejects the possibility of true evil decisions within his practical philosophy. According to our reading, however, a better understanding of the Leibnizian conception of judgement and cognition can shed light on his view on moral failure that is not as implausible as some interpretations hold. The discursive nature of moral maxims of human beings requires blind or symbolic cognitions, but given the nature of these cognitions, a moral agent can misrepresent the evil consequences of her behaviour. Also, the process by which an agent forms her practical judgements can account for the type of doxastic involuntarism that Leibniz advocates, but only insofar as this view is complemented with his idea that we have indirect control over our doxastic attitudes, and therefore they are susceptible to normative evaluation. More importantly, the right kind of intellectual habits can turn our moral judgements into motivations for our actions.

In what follows, we will focus on the general framework concerning Leibniz's views on evil in order to point out those features of human nature concerning motivation that give room to the possibility of wrongdoing that combines altruistic as well as egoistic motives (Section 2); then we will analyze the role of the will and the understanding in deliberation (Section 3); and finally, we will explore the consequences of Leibniz's views on practical judgement for the moral psychology of the evil person (Sections 3 and 4), and how vicious patterns of behaviour are formed (Section 5).

2. Moral Agency, Pleasure, and Prudence

As we are interested in the moral psychology of the evil person, it is reasonable to start with a brief consideration of moral agency.[1] In this section, we will introduce the moral truths Leibniz presents in his writings on metaphysics, theology and natural law, which are supposed to guide the virtuous agent, but which the sinner has missed. Therefore, this section is to be understood as a brief summary of Leibniz's metaphysically motivated moral philosophy that is acknowledged and accepted by the virtuous person, but ignored or misunderstood by the evil person.[2]

[1] On Leibniz's views on agency in general, see Julia Jorati (2017); Peter Myrdal (2012).

[2] On Leibniz's moral philosophy in general, see, for example, Gregory Brown (1995); Jennifer Frey (2016); Albert Heinekamp (1969); Patrick Riley (1996); Donald Rutherford (1995).

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In his metaphysical and theological texts, Leibniz argues that all men are part of the Kingdom of Grace or City of God which includes all minds.[3] In *Monadologie*, §88 (1714), he says that the subjects of God, the monarch of such a city, including human beings, are subject to praise and blame, or rewards or punishments by God (GP 6, p. 622).[4] We cannot know God's reasons as our understanding is finite, but as he has all of the perfections, he is supremely good. Therefore, we can believe that he is also a just ruler, and we should love him and act according to his wishes, following universal jurisprudence.[5] This is how a wise and virtuous person acts, but as we will see in Section 4, a genuinely evil person can rebel against God, doubting the supreme goodness of the world and even start to hate him.

In his jurisprudential writings, such as *Elementa juris naturalis* (1671),[6] Leibniz argues from the point of view of natural law — due to the natural harmony of the best world (maintained by God), a virtuous person gains her reward from her good deeds in the form of pleasure, joy, and happiness, while vice leads her to pain, sorrow, and misery (natural retribution theory). In this way, virtue is one's own reward and sorrow one's own punishment.[7] However, as God has chosen and created the best possible world, its structure is such that virtuous deeds are rewarded and evil ones punished in one way or another, in this life or in the next to come, so in the end God is the ultimate guarantee that justice is done.[8]

[3] See, for example, *Principes de la nature et de la grace, fondés en raison* (1714), §15, GP 6, p. 605. We refer to Leibniz's texts by titles in their original languages, sometimes abbreviating them, in which case the abbreviation is given the first time the text is mentioned. We also give the year(s) of writing of the text at the first occurrence. The texts have been published in various editions, of which we use the abbreviations widely used in Leibniz-scholarship. They are as follows: A refers to the so-called Academy-Edition of Leibniz's works, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Reihe I–VIII (Leibniz, 1923–), which is still incomplete, but remains the most prestigious edition of Leibniz's works. We refer to this edition whenever possible, mentioning first the series or *Reihe*, then volume (*Band*) and page number (for example, A 6, 6, p. 321 refers to page 321 of the sixth volume of the sixth series of *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*). Other editions include *Opera omnia* (edited by Louis Dutens, Leibniz, 1768/1990, abbreviation D) and *Die philosophischen Schriften* I–VII (edited by C. I. Gerhardt, Leibniz 1875–1890/1965, abbreviation GP). When citing Leibniz's text, we use available English translations of which we use the following standard abbreviations: AG refers to *Philosophical Essays* (edited and translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Leibniz 1989), CP to *Confessio philosophi* (edited and translated by Robert C. Sleigh, Leibniz 2005), H to *Theodicy* (edited by Austin Farrer and translated by E. M. Huggard, Leibniz 1951/1996), L to *Philosophical Papers and Letters* (edited and translated by Leroy E. Loemker, Leibniz 1969), R to *Political Writings* (edited and translated by Patrick Riley, Leibniz 1988), and RB to *New Essays on Human Understanding* (edited and translated by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Leibniz 1996). We give a (abbreviated) reference to the original text after the reference to the English translation. If no English translation is available, the translation is our own. In some cases, we have modified the English translation, which is mentioned after the references.

[4] GP, 6, p. 622. On the problem of evil and theodicy, see Paul Rateau (2019); Lloyd Strickland (2009).

[5] See *Discours de métaphysique* (1686; §36, A 6, 4, pp. 1586–1587); Riley (1996, Chapter 1).

[6] We will refer here to the most complete version of the text in A 4, 1, pp. 459–465.

[7] See *Nouveaux essais* I, ii, §12: "There can be natural rewards and punishments without a lawmaker; intemperance, for instance, is punished with illness. However, since it does not always do its damage straight away, I admit that there is hardly any rule which would be unavoidably binding if there were not a God who leaves no crimes unpunished, no good action unrewarded" (RB & A 6, 6, p. 96). See also Brown (2018, pp. 629–631); and Leibniz's *Sur la notion commune de la justice*, in Wenchao Li (2015, p. 172).

[8] On this topic, see *Monadologie,* §88–89 (GP 6, p. 622); Laurence Carlin (2002); Strickland (2009, pp. 314–315).

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From the point of view of the inner experiences of moral agents, Leibniz argues that we are instinctively disposed toward pleasure. Joy and sorrow can only be known by experience through confused cognitions. In *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (henceforth *Nouveaux essais*) (1704, I, ii, §1), he says:

> (Theophilus) Although it is correct to say that morality has indemonstrable principles, of which one of the first and most practical is that we should pursue joy and avoid sorrow, it must be added that that is not a truth which is known solely from reason, since it is based on inner experience — on confused knowledge; for one only senses what joy and sorrow are. (RB & A 6, 6, p. 88)

Leibniz acknowledges that, although moral principles are innate truths, moral agents "are not very quick to read the *characters* of the natural law" (*Nouveaux essais* I, ii, §9; RB & A 6, 6, p. 92, our emphasis). Leibniz contrasts the distinct cognition of moral principles through characters or signs[9] to the confused feelings of joy and sorrow involved in the moral principles, but explains that these natural feelings can be related to innate truths, despite the fact that they are perceived confusedly:

> That natural feeling is the perception of an innate truth, though very often a confused one as are the experiences of the outer senses. Thus innate truths can be distinguished from the natural light (which contains only what is distinctly knowable) as a genus should be distinguished from its species, since innate truths comprise instincts as well as the natural light. (*Nouveaux essais* I, ii, §9; RB & A 6, 6, p. 94)

In our view, this moral instinct or natural feeling is a sort of aid to reason. More importantly, while representing the future concerns reason, and happiness is durable joy, feeling joy concerns the present moment. Our moral life takes place between our momentary feelings, leading us to act to gain joy or avoid pain here and now, but our representation of the future involves the understanding, including a distinct representation of the moral rules through characters or distinct cognitions. Moral instinct or natural feeling leads not only to affection but also to science and reasoning as one finds future pleasures in them (*Nouveaux essais* I, ii, §3). Both instinct and deliberated volitions are directed to the apparent good of the individual and consequently, they are both instances of the moral agent's appetite or *conatus* — that is, the will functioning at the level of distinct cognition and instinct at the level of confused cognition.[10]

Humans have an instinctive affection toward other people. In *Nouveaux essais* I, ii, §9, Leibniz says that "Nature instils in man and even in most of the animals an affection toward the members of their own species."[11] Perhaps an even more revealing

[9] On symbolic knowledge in moral judgement, see Section 3.1.

[10] See Markku Roinila (2019).

[11] (RB & A 6, 6, p. 93). In addition, there are further instincts that have to do with social relations, such as affection between male and female, the love of fathers and mothers for their offspring, and others. These, says Leibniz, make up the natural law, or rather that semblance of law, which the Roman jurists say that

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passage on sociability can be found in Leibniz's remarks on Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury's (1737–1738/2001) *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. He says that Shaftesbury presents

> very sound opinions on the nature of virtue and of felicity, showing that the affections which nature has given us bring us, not only to seek our own good but also to achieve that of our relations and even of society; and that one is happy when he acts according to his natural affections. It seems to me that I could reconcile this quite easily with my language and opinions. In fact, our natural affections produce our contentment; and the more natural one is, the more he is led to find pleasure in the good of others, which is the foundation of universal benevolence, of charity, of justice. (R, p, 198; D, 5, p. 44)

But, as we will discuss in the following section, Leibniz considers cases where this laudable instinct for virtue is not effective. However, in *Elementa juris naturalis,* which we consider an important text on Leibniz's moral psychology, he argues that "the *sciences* of the just and the useful, that is, of the public good and of their own private good, are mutually tied up in each other" (L, p. 132; A 6, 1, p. 460, our emphasis). He also identifies the right reason for our actions with prudence:

> Prudence […] cannot be separated from our own good, and any statement which contradicts this is empty and foreign to the actual practice of those who utter it, whatever they may say against it. There is no one who deliberately does anything except for the sake of his own good, for we seek the good also of those whom we love for the sake of the pleasure which we ourselves get from their happiness. (L, p. 134; A 6, 1, p. 461)

This passage shows clearly that Leibniz thinks that we act for our own good. However, we saw above that he holds that human beings are also sociable. Explaining this conflict between selfish and altruistic moral motivations with respect to Leibniz's concept of pure or disinterested love is a controversial topic that goes beyond the scope of this article.[12] In what follows, we subscribe to the currently well-established view that Leibniz supports a form of psychological egoism.

nature has taught to animals. For discussion of these remarks, see Jérémie Griard (2007, pp. 514–515). On Leibniz's social thought, see R, pp. 19–22.

[12] On the topic, see, for example, Brown (2011); Nicholas Jolley (2005, pp. 180–181). In short, Jolley argues that selfish motives are always present in deliberation and can be unconscious, while Brown argues that the correct interpretation of moral motivation in *Elementa juris naturalis* is that we desire the good of others because it is for our own good or because it is *as if* it was our good (Brown, 2011, p. 275). While Jolley allows various motives and sources of pleasure in deliberation but sees the selfish motives as most important because one's appetite always leads to one's own good, Brown thinks that there can be only motives that are related to one's own pleasure, which follows from pleasant things either directly or indirectly (Brown, 2011, pp. 281, 283). The view that Leibniz was a psychological egoist has been criticized by Frey, but to our minds, she fails to grasp the complex nature of pleasure as a motive for disinterested action in *Elementa juris naturalis* and considers it as an early, immature text whereas in later texts his position is not that of an egoist (Frey, 2016, pp. 622–623).

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Leibniz says repeatedly that virtuous human beings should imitate divinity as far as possible.[13] When one succeeds in this task, one feels pleasure, which is a sense of perfection (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §42). This happens also when we practice disinterested love toward others, which should be understood as our pleasure, which follows from perceiving an increase in perfection in others. Disinterested love is in this way related to prudential action, as pleasure is an appetite toward perfection. Disinterested love and virtuous action — unlike self-interested, calculating motivation to gain immediate pleasure from a pleasant thing — produces lasting pleasure, which is happiness (*Nouveaux essais* II, xx, §3). Therefore, a wise person strives to practice disinterested love toward the perfection of others and her volitions are directed to find the good in other people rather than to things that produce immediate pleasure, such as sensual pleasures.[14]

In this introduction to Leibniz's moral philosophy and moral agency, we have discussed the goals of virtuous, God-loving persons from the point of view of metaphysics, theology, and natural law. We have considered the principles of Leibniz's moral thought and the inner experience of Leibnizian moral agents. Unlike the virtuous wise, the evil agent misrepresents the good by failing to see how her reasons to act are related to those moral truths centred on what it is to be a virtuous person. In what follows, we will analyze moral agency from the point of view of deliberation and judgement in order to account for the dynamics of affection and practical norms that govern our moral life, according to Leibniz, and its implications for moral failure.

3. Moral Failure as Epistemic Error

3.1. Evil and Judgement

The possibility of genuine evil choices and actions seems problematic within Leibniz's practical philosophy. Genuine evil decisions require that the agent be fully responsible for her choices, that is, that she wants X even though she *knows or believes* that X is bad. In other words, the evil action must be freely chosen. Even more, she may find pleasure in her choice. Texts written during his philosophical career attest that Leibniz endorses the intellectualist traditional view, according to which the intellect or understanding determines the will; more precisely, volitions follow the judgement of the intellect. In addition, he also holds that moral agents choose *sub specie boni*, that is, an agent chooses X only if she regards X as good, even when X is actually bad, and correspondingly, these views may imply that evil acts and choices could only be the result of some ignorance[15] or epistemic mistake regarding the judgement of the understanding.[16]

[13] See, for example, *Principes de la nature et de la grace, fondés en raison*, §14 (GP 6, pp 604–605).

[14] As we will argue in Section 5, this process can be also conceived toward an opposite direction: a sinner adopts a habit of doing evil, which eventually leads to eternal damnation.

[15] Note that the type of ignorance involved does not concern the moral truth itself, since what the evil choice supposes is that the agent knows what is right, and then Leibniz's view is different from the view traditionally ascribed to Plato, according to whom no one does evil knowingly.

[16] Jorati argues that Leibniz in his late writings denied the thesis that moral agents can only do what seems to be best to them; that is, agents sometimes act against their better judgement (Jorati, 2021,

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Furthermore, the idea that a truly evil person can find pleasure in the suffering of another person seems to be in conflict with Leibniz's ethics, as discussed above. The dynamics of affection in our moral life favours disinterested love and lasting joy as the motivation for our actions. While, according to the traditional conception, moral failure is seen as a conflict between the cognitive (or intellectual) and the conative aspects of our mental life (so that it may be the case that an agent has the true judgement that X is bad and simultaneously wants X, as our ordinary experience seems to support it), it is hard to see how Leibniz could account for this common view. Alternatively, it may be the case that this is an inaccurate description of our moral experience.[17] For Leibniz, it is a fact that we follow what we believe to be good or better than the other available options (*Essais de Theodicée sur la bonte de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*; henceforth *Theodicée*, 1710, 309[18]; *Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §31).[19] And, of course, while malevolent choices are such that the agent is responsible for her evil intentions, Leibniz's moral views rule out the type of radical evil involving self-conscious malevolent choices, that is, choosing evil for the sake of evil.

These remarks seem to conceive of evil choices as involving a discrepancy between some mental state — such as a belief or judgement of the agent on the moral merits of an action — and an action that is freely and intentionally contrary to that mental state. This view, however, seems to be against Leibniz's commitment to the doctrine of practical judgements as determining volitions. In an oft-cited passage from the *Theodicée*, Leibniz seems to endorse the view, according to which our passions oppose the practical intellect, so that they can interfere with the decision-making process in the sense that the will of an evil moral agent may not follow the true judgement of her intellect. He writes: "Thus the connexion between judgement and will is not so necessary as one might think" (*Theodicée*, 311; H, p. 318; GP 6, p. 301).

But, as we shall contend, this reading of the decision-making process described by Leibniz is inadequate. It is important to notice that Leibniz does not reject the view

p. 4). Moral agents would choose what they are mostly inclined to do but what appears best is not what they would like to do. However, Jorati introduces a distinction between what agents are strongly inclined to do and what seems to be best to these agents that depends on a conception of judgement broadly understood. As we hope to show in this section, Leibniz's concept of judgement is crucial to understanding his view. What matters in moral deliberation is forming a practical judgement in the Leibnizian technical sense, which we will explain below.

[17] Interestingly, Robert Imlay explains Leibniz's view in terms of delusion, since what Leibniz explains is, in fact, our common-sense belief in weakness of will as a case of self-deception. In other words, according to Imlay's reading, it is only the appearance that one has fallen "prey to the temptations of the flesh" as an attempt to "assuage" one's feeling of guilt that explains why sinners come to believe what they want to believe, that is, that the will did not obey the constatations of the intellect in a particular situation. For Imlay, Leibniz denies weakness of will, as commonly understood (Imlay, 2002).

[18] When a number follows immediately after the abbreviation "*Theodicée*," we refer to the points of the work. When we cite *Theodicée*, we provide the page numbers to the English translation (H) and to the original text in GP 6.

[19] "generality of men, and as unprejudiced people always have reasoned" (*Remarques sur le livre d'origine du mal, publié depuis peu en Angleterre* 1710; H, p. 407; GP 6, p. 407). Of course, this fact is not the only reason in favour of this moral truth since it follows from the principle of sufficient reason (see, for example, *Discours de métaphysique*, §13; § 30, A 6, 4, p. 1546–1549; 1575–1578; *Abregé de la controverse reduite à des argumens en forme*, 1710; GP 6, p. 386; *Causa Dei*, 1710; GP 6, p. 441).

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that the connection between the judgement of understanding and volition is necessary, but only that this necessary connection is the highest of which we can conceive. From the point of view of the intellect, a free will is one that results from the required deliberation; the act of the will is contingent (the agent might have chosen otherwise based on a different judgement), but the will is determined by the understanding, since it follows "the prevalence of perceptions and reasons" presented by the understanding (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §8).

The correct interpretation of this prevalence that combines perception and reason is not obvious. The power of the understanding over the will must be conceived of in terms of the connection between the judgement of the understanding and the corresponding volition toward what we judge as good or bad. This tendency or endeavour is volition proper, and the resulting action is voluntary action proper (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §5). But not every tendency to action results from explicit judgement since they may follow "insensible" perceptions of which we are not aware (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §5). These unconscious inclinations seem to interfere with the judgement of the intellect. He writes:

> As for us, in addition to the judgement of the understanding, of which we have an express knowledge, it is mingled therewith confused perceptions of the senses, and these beget passions and even imperceptible inclinations, of which we are not always aware. These movements often thwart the judgement of the practical understanding. (*Theodicée,* 310; H, p. 317; GP 6, p. 300, translation modified)

So, confused perceptions, insofar as they are the origin of passions and inclinations, may interfere with deliberation and prevent us from forming the judgement. Volitions must be distinguished from our awareness of the good of a particular decision:

> But whatever perception one may have of the good, the effort to act in accordance with the judgement, which in my opinion forms the essence of the will, is distinct from it. Thus, since there is need of time to raise this effort to its climax, it may be suspended, and even changed, by a new perception or inclination which passes athwart it, which diverts the mind from it, and which even causes it sometimes to make a contrary judgement. (*Theodicée*, 311; H, p. 314; GP 6, pp. 300–301)

Again, the passage suggests that even when the judgement of the understanding presents something as good (i.e., the truth we already know), the will may not be moved by the judgement. Indeed, Leibniz identifies volition with the endeavour to act in accordance with our judgement.

Our volition as the endeavour to action may be suspended or even deflected and modified by other perceptions and inclinations that can lead us to the opposite judgement. If this mechanism interferes with the right judgement we already know, this opposite judgement is a false judgement. These two cases — suspending or changing one's volitions — may be seen as cases where the connection between the practical

judgement and the volition is broken in the sense required by the common-sense view. However, Leibniz also says that these are means by which our mind can resist "the truth which it knows" (H, p. 314; GP 6, p. 301). One way of resistance may be such that it presupposes deliberation, and therefore suspension of judgement, as the source of the suspension of the volition, and the second case involves new perceptions and inclinations that may result in the judgement that opposes the moral truth the agent knows, and therefore is false.

Resisting the moral truth the agent knows is then equivalent to not making explicit that truth in a judgement. Knowledge is a dispositional state, or in Leibniz's terminology, a habit of the understanding, while judging is an act of the understanding (*De totae cogitabilium varietatis complexione*, 1685?; A 6, 4, p. 602). So, he can say in the *Theodicée* that what determines the will is a clear perception of the best, and a clear *and distinct* perception of some truth involves affirming this truth (310, GP 6, p. 300). Judgement then involves a clear and distinct perception of its representational content, which implies asserting or endorsing that content.

But even when confused perceptions that result in unconscious inclinations can become obstacles to true judgement and corresponding volition, they are only a part of the explanation. Leibniz adds that the understanding has less influence on us than our passions and does not move us as much as our passions because discursive thinking mostly involves "*pensées sourdes*," or, as he often calls them, *cogitationes caecae* or blind cognitions:

> Hence it comes that our soul has so many means of resisting the truth which it knows, and that the passage from mind to heart is so long. Especially is this so when the understanding to a great extent proceeds only by faint thoughts [*pensées sourdes*], which have only slight power to affect, as I have explained elsewhere. (*Theodicée*, 311; H, p. 314, GP 6, p. 301)

According to the passages quoted above, then, practical judgement must be distinguished from volitions; while the former asserts the amount of goodness or badness of something (and therefore it can be true or false), the latter consists of an endeavour to act in accordance with that content. Moral truths we know can be resisted because volitions can be suspended while deliberating or changed by new perceptions or inclinations, which sometimes can lead to new judgements. Genuine evil choices require this false judgement since they must be free choices in the sense defined above.

These perceptions and inclinations can be obstacles to the true judgement of the understanding only because its content is represented in blind thoughts, and therefore they do not result in a judgement. The false judgement is not resisted, and the true judgement is not formed. Leibniz also identifies the judgement with a *perception* we have of the good, and then the moral dilemma cannot be identified with an opposition between perceptions and the intellect. When practical deliberation is involved, we suspend our judgement and its corresponding volition until we reach a decision expressed in a judgement.[20] Since moral failure requires explicit judgement as to

[20] Note that Leibniz, unlike the ancient pyrrhonists, identifies suspension of judgement with a state of doubt. See *De affectibus*, A 6, 4, p. 1412.

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the good of an action or decision, it is necessary to account for the nature of practical judgement and the role of the will in judgement, on the one hand, but also the nature of confused and blind cognitions involved in moral deliberation, on the other hand. If a judgement is thought in a perception (i.e., I represent or perceive that something is such and such), one may consider whether an explicit or actual judgement can be moving. Whether true practical judgements can be resisted in the sense that we do not actually endorse the propositional content of the judgement (that is, we do not form the judgement by actualizing the disposition of believing or knowing that propositional content) or whether judgements can be moving are questions that depend on the nature of judgement and the role that confused and distinct cognitions play in deliberation.

3.2. Practical Judgement

Before we can answer those questions, it is important to see whether Leibniz's considered view can account for a conceptual distinction between practical judgement and volition, that is, between judging that X is good and willing X in the sense that the former refers to certain representational content as its object and the latter has X as its goal. Judgement has a goal as well, and that is truth (*Theodicée*, 309); judgement can have a goal, since it is something we do, and therefore we can say that it exemplifies epistemic agency. Practical deliberation must give rise to actions, or at least, intentions, based on practical judgement. An important concern in this regard is whether or to what extent practical deliberation regarding what to do can be contrasted to reflecting on what we ought to believe since both are responsive to reasons.

In his early writings, Leibniz seems to identify thinking that something is good and willing it (preliminary work for *Elementa de mente et corpore*, 1669–1670?; A 6, 2, p. 284), but this is a conception that he revises in a later edition of the text. In the following decade, he identifies practical thinking with deciding or being persuaded that p (preliminary work for universal characteristics (1671–1672?; A 6, 2, p. 493)). *Elementa verae pietatis,* written between 1677 and 1678, may be seen as a transitional text since although he defines will (*voluntas*) as the practical thought (*sententia*) concerning the good and the bad, he also explains that he does not oppose the view that the endeavour to act follows the practical judgement perhaps because a rational decision (*voluntas*) requires that the will be determined by the practical judgement (A 6, 4, p. 1361).[21] By the end of the decade, in his definitions for *De affectibus* (1679), he clearly distinguishes the practical judgement or decision (*sententia*) from the endeavour to act in accordance with the practical judgement (*conatus agendi*), defining the former as the intellection (A 6, 4, p. 1412) or thought from which the endeavour to act follows (A 6, 4, p. 1410).[22] But, in the next decade, Leibniz will hold that every judgement (*judicium*) is followed by an endeavour to

[21] See also *De postulationibus* (1678–1679?; A 6, 4, p. 2820), where Leibniz explains that his definition of will as opinion and as *conatus* coincide because the endeavour to act follows the opinion concerning the good or bad in beings endowed with an intellect.

[22] "*Sententia*" is the noun for the verb "*sentire,*" which Leibniz defines as deciding (*statuere*) or thinking accompanied by will (*Elementa juris naturalis*, A 6, 1, p. 484). It is a practical thought or thought with an

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act so that the distinction between practical and other types of judgement is blurred except for the type of representation involved; practical judgements concern what is good or bad.

In his *Enumeratio terminorum simpliciorum* (1680–1684/1685?), Leibniz explains that willing X is tantamount to striving or acting "according to an opinion" (*ob sententiam*), which in turn means "because we assert something" (A 6, 4, p. 396). The mind is never idle (*otiosa*) in the sense that our thoughts are always united to some endeavour to act (A 6, 4, p. 395). He also explains that this endeavour may be greater or lesser the more or less lively or clear the conceptions involved are and the more efficient the images impeding it are (A 6, 4, p. 395). This account then is in accordance with his later view, since the endeavour to act is determined by the conceptual content of the judgement, but, more importantly, this conceptual content may have different degrees of clearness *or* liveliness (A 6, 4, p. 395). He also leaves room for images to play a role in interfering with the endeavour. This is an account of judgement more generally, and then every judgement that A is B asserts that A is B, and we are ready to act in accordance with A being B (for example, if we judge that the stove is hot, we take every precaution not to burn ourselves).[23] As he writes more explicitly in his criticism of Nicolas Malebranche's conception of judgement:

> It seems that every judgement is a perception with some endeavour to act which, when it is broken by another endeavour to act, judgement is suspended, unless we have learned the perceptions must be distinguished from each other, we give credence to every perception. (1686–1699?; A 6, 4, p. 1809)

Leibniz holds that we give credence to every perception and then, since a judgement is some kind of perception, we are persuaded by the content represented in the perception or we suspend our judgement because a different endeavour interferes with our endorsement. This new endeavour results from a different perception. Again, this is in accordance with his later view concerning practical judgement. But even if this account of the evolution of the concept of practical judgement were inaccurate, it is clear that, for Leibniz, there is not a sharp distinction between practical and other types of judgement; both are acts of the intellect and both give rise to some intention.

3.3. Blind Cognitions

Judgements are thought in clear and distinct representations to which we give credence unless new distinct thoughts put them into question. What distinguishes judging that A is B from simply entertaining the proposition that A is B is that we endorse that propositional content, as Leibniz explains, which also implies that we are ready to act in accordance with that content. In his account of moral failure, Leibniz holds that the moral truth, according to which the choice or action is morally reprehensible, can

endeavour to act (*Elementa verae pietatis*; A 6, 4, p. 1361). Also, a *sententia* is an intellection from which volition follows (*De affectibus*; A 6, 4, p. 1412).

[23] This is how empirical consecutions or associative connections are formed.

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be resisted because it is only thought in blind representations. So, these blind representations are not acts of judgement, while at the same time, the moral truth can be known or believed, since beliefs and knowledge are habits of the intellect.

As was the case with the notion of practical judgement, blind cognitions involved in moral failure can (and must) be accounted for within Leibniz's epistemological doctrines more generally. Blind representations consist in the use of signs (for example, words), but without thinking of their meaning, and can be used to put aside the reasons that could justify our judgement (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §36). Endorsing the propositional content in a judgement involves understanding the meaning of the concepts involved, while blind thought consists precisely in ignoring the meaning of the signs it represents.

The notion of blind cognition (also called symbolic) is a fundamental notion of Leibnizian epistemology that Leibniz mentions in his *Dissertatio de arte combinatoria* (1666; A 6, 1, p. 170) and develops in his early mathematical investigations.[24] For Leibniz, symbolic cognition is a kind of distinct cognition. His doctrine of cognition introduces a classification of the degrees of cognition, that is, of the knowledge of notions (*Meditationes de cognitione, veritate, et ideis* (henceforth *Meditationes*), 1684; A 6, 4, p. 586). Distinct cognition is one of the forms of clear cognition, and we have a distinct notion when we can enumerate the marks that are sufficient to distinguish its object (A 6, 4, p. 586); otherwise, the cognition is confused. But distinct cognition also has degrees, and it can be classified by combining two criteria, that is, one, whether it is intuitive or blind, and two, adequate or inadequate. Intuitive cognition is only adequate; blind cognition, however, can be adequate or inadequate. One has an inadequate blind cognition when the distinguishing marks are known but only confusedly. Adequate distinct knowledge is achieved when the elements of a notion are also known distinctly or when one arrives at the end of the analysis. So, a distinct cognition is adequate

> when the possibility of the thing is immediately evident […] that is, without assuming any experience or the demonstration of the possibility of some other thing, that is, when the thing is solved in mere primitive notions intelligible in themselves. I usually call this cognition adequate or intuitive. (*De synthesi et analysi universali*, 1683–1685?; A 6, 4, p. 543)

Moral failure, then, involves inadequate blind cognition. Moral failure can be explained precisely because moral truth is only thought through blind cognitions since the notions it is composed of are not represented distinctly, and therefore it can be opposed. However, it is also important to remember that for Leibniz we are unable to have pure intellections, that is, thinking without using images or representations of the imagination:

> I do not think there is pure intellection, without anything corresponding to the body. It seems to me that every perception is confused or distinct; and distinct perception is composed of distinct perceptions or not, and then it is resoluble. (Comment on Malebranche's *De la recherche de la vérité*; A 6, 4, p. 1815)

[24] See, for example, *De quadratura arithmetica circuli ellipseos et hyperbolaea* (1676, A 7, 6, pp. 520–676).

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This feature of human cognition — that we can only represent our objects through images or characters, and therefore cognition depends on signs — seems to exculpate moral agents to a certain degree if they can only represent the action and its moral value through signs. However, it is necessary to take into account another aspect of blind cognition. In the *Nouveaux essais*, Leibniz characterizes blind thoughts as lacking perception and feeling. Leibniz introduced the notion of blind cognition to account for the knowledge of the ideal objects of mathematics, or more precisely, "to abbreviate the expressions" (*Numeri infiniti*, 1676; A 6, 3, p. 498). In a mathematical symbolization, a complex meaning is comprehended within an appropriate sign (for example, an equation can represent a geometrical figure and its properties). The sign, then, has a substitutive role regarding the notions forming the complex meaning, so that we can reason by manipulating those signs without invoking the corresponding notions. Blind cognition makes reasoning easier by dispensing us from the demanding attention involved in constantly appealing to memory.

However, Leibniz also emphasizes that we can omit the explanation of every element of the meaning of the sign or character because *we know or we believe we know* its explanation (see *Meditationes*; A 6, 4, p. 586). In other words, cognition through signs or characters is reliable only because it is based on the right analysis of the notions they represent since "I judge that the explanation [of their meanings] is not necessary at this moment" (*Meditationes*; AG, p. 25; A 6, 4, p. 587, translation modified).

But precisely what constitutes an advantage in the realm of ideal objects becomes an obstacle for the understanding of the true good. Despite the fact that all characters are sensible, they lack an emotional import.[25] A resolution or decision is a practical judgement as well as a rational affection that moves our thinking from one cognition to another (*De totae cogitabilium varietatis complexione*, A 6, 4, p. 602). Practical deliberation must be motivationally effective, and therefore a judgement must be concluded.

The role of blind cognition in deliberations toward forming our practical judgements does not explain moral failure per se. As we have seen, given that judgements determine volitions, morally reprehensible volitions depend on *false* practical judgement. The inclinations that arise from confused perceptions may prevail because blind cognitions expressing the propositional content of the true practical belief do not move us. So, flagrant akrasia must be rejected, that is, the view that an agent can assent to an explicit practical judgement while understanding its meaning, and nonetheless perform the action the judgement does not recommend.

Some recent scholarship on Leibniz's moral views agree that Leibniz cannot explain our common-sense belief or experience that we can decide or do things against our considered judgement, asserting that they are morally reprehensible. A common feature of these readings is that they understand this moral failure as a direct confrontation between our passions, represented in confused thoughts, and the intellect. For example, Jack Davidson finds Leibniz's conception implausible because

[25] Therefore, Leibniz proposes a remedy: take a firm resolution to contemplate the true good and the true evil in order to follow or avoid them (*Nouveaux essais* I, ii, §11). As such, it involves some conceptual content expressed in the judgement and the corresponding endeavour to act. See the next section.

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passion disrupts the intellect by interfering with deliberation; they truncate theoretical completeness because the moral agent fails to consider all the information relevant to her rational decision (Davidson, 2005, p. 244). But his account depends on regarding passions as non-cognitive states, and then, they cannot be candidates for judgement (Davidson, 2005, p. 244). In this view, sin is simply irrational. Passions arise from confused perceptions, so they can be traced back to them, and therefore to their representational content. More importantly, as we have emphasized, true evil requires judgement, and therefore the sinner has her reasons.[26]

4. Moral Deliberation and Certainty

Another feature of the moral situation regarding what makes the false judgement possible concerns its certainty. Even when the moral judgement of an agent must be responsive to moral truths, they are not simply derived from them because assessing the reasons in favour or against an action is a complex process. As Theophilus explains to his Lockean counterpart in the *Nouveaux essais*, there are two kinds of false judgements concerning the good or evil consequences of a choice. Sometimes the magnitude of the consequence is misrepresented in the imagination. According to Theophilus:

> If by the importance of the "consequence" you mean that of the result [*conséquent*], i.e. the amount of good or evil which may ensue, then this must be the kind of false judgment, discussed earlier, in which future good or evil is badly represented. (II, xxi, §66, RB & A 6, 6, p. 205)

This erroneous conception of the consequences of an action is qualified as a weak representation.[27] But the agent may also question, or even deny, the consequences of the action (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §62, §66). In this type of false practical judgement, the bad consequences of an action are neglected:

> (Theophilus) So all that remains, that concerns us at present, is the second kind of false judgment, namely the one where it is doubted that the result will ensue. (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §66; RB & A 6, 6, p. 205)

We can illustrate these two types of false practical judgement by considering an agent that accepts that being healthy is good; if the agent misrepresents the consequences in a particular situation that certain behaviour (such as smoking) will be pernicious for her health in the long run, the agent will commit the first type of epistemic mistake. If, however, the agent neglects or denies the unhealthy consequences of the habit

[26] Consider, for example, the case of the war criminal who tries to exculpate himself by saying that he was just following orders and does not admit that he endorses the perverse rule that destroying the enemy at any cost is the right thing to do; by introducing this judgement as his true justification, we can see that this cannot be a simple case of opposition between passion and reason.

[27] "the error which reduces to nothing the sense of the future is just the same as the false judgment […] the one which results from having too weak a representation of the future and paying little attention to it or none whatsoever (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §63; RB & A 6, 6, p. 203).

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(smoking), she would commit the second type of mistake. More precisely, we human beings act following our present perceptions, and in representing the future at the moment of deliberating, we have an image of the future, or we simply act following an acquired habit, that is, without deliberating (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §64). And when the mind is dominated by prejudice, the agent may not arrive at the right conclusion (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §63). In these cases, the motivation of the actions operates at the unreflective level.

Leibniz explains the two cases of wrong deliberation as involving a weak representation of the future in our imagination.[28] Moreover, Leibniz points out that representing the magnitude of the consequences of an action is grounded in its verisimilitude or probability, that is, its estimation is only conjectural (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §66). Leibniz explicitly accounts for those representations of the imagination by appealing to his conception of blind thought. He writes in *Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §31:

> (Theophilus) The neglect of things that are truly good arises largely from the fact that, on topics and in circumstances where our senses are not much engaged, our thoughts are for the most part what we might call "blind" — in Latin I call them *cogitationes caecae*. I mean that they are empty of perception and sensibility and consist in the wholly unaided use of symbols, as happens with those who calculate algebraically with only intermittent attention to the geometrical figures which are being dealt with. Words ordinarily do the same thing, in this respect, as do the symbols of arithmetic and algebra. (RB & A 6, 6, pp. 185–186)

As we have seen, judgements are acts of understanding (*De totae cogitabilium varietatis complexione*; A 6, 4, p. 602), and consist "in the examination of propositions following reason" (*Nouveaux essais* II, xi, §2; RB & A 6, 6, p. 141, translation modified), whereas opinion is a habit of the understanding or intellect (*De totae cogitabilium varietatis complexione*; A 6, 4, p. 602).

But even when an opinion as a habit can be actualized in a judgement, it has another distinctive character regarding its certainty. Opinion is uncertain but may be plausible (*verisimile*).[29] Leibniz writes:

> Perhaps opinion, based on likelihood, also deserves the name of knowledge; otherwise nearly all historical knowledge will collapse, and a good deal more. (*Nouveaux essais* IV, ii, §14; RB & A 6, 6, p. 372)

It is remarkable that Leibniz acknowledges — against John Locke and the traditional conception of knowledge as *scientia* — that plausible opinion must be accepted as a kind of knowledge, anticipating the fallibilist conception. But another aspect is especially relevant for our present purposes, and that is that opinion may ground some

[28] Leibniz opposes the representations of the imagination to belief and judgement, as the former does not involve an endeavour to action through his philosophical career. See, for example, A 6, 4, pp. 393, 1361, 1410.

[29] See Evelyn Vargas (2016).

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kind of practical judgement or *sententia*, that is, of thought leading to action.[30] This is so because opinion involves affection or *conatus agendi*. Consequently, we can say that, for Leibniz, the practical judgement actualizes an opinion concerning what is good to do. And given that it involves the reasons to believe, a judgement makes explicit or expresses a responsible or justified belief, since, in order to assent to the content of an opinion, the agent must consider the reasons to assert it (*Nouveaux essais* II, xi, §2).

But this may be problematic since responsible belief seems to require doxastic control, while at the same time, according to the phenomenology of judgement and belief, we do not have such control over our doxastic attitudes.[31] Leibniz is a doxastic involuntarist insofar as he holds that someone who asserts something is aware of a certain sensible or intellectual content since it is an involuntary response to the reasons considered, but such awareness does not depend on our will (*Animadversiones in partem generalem principiorum Cartesianorum,* 1692; GP 4, pp. 356–357). In other words, the content of those doxastic attitudes is not under our control.[32]

What is presented to the mind cannot be modified at will. In an epistemically relevant sense, we cannot choose what to believe. However, if judgement is an act we exercise, forming a judgement involves acting, since deliberating or arriving at a conclusion is something we do, and therefore even when the mental state is not under our control regarding its content, we exercise epistemic agency regarding those steps or conditions to reach the state in question.

Leibniz is an indirect doxastic voluntarist insofar as he thinks that we can exercise control over the conditions to form such epistemic states (*Elementa juris civilis*, 1670–1672?; A 2, 2, p. 91). Even when we cannot choose what to believe, we can choose from doing or refrain to do things that determine what to believe (for example, collecting evidence or analyzing the notions involved in our judgement concerning the goodness of an action). Our epistemic obligations, then, concern those factors we can control and are influential over the belief.

Leibniz holds, against René Descartes, that the will can only lead our attention and interest (*Animadversiones in partem generalem principiorum Cartesianorum*; GP 4, pp. 356–357), and consequently, it can only influence opinion and judgement indirectly (GP 4, p. 361). For example, the will can contribute indirectly to make something please us or not (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §25). Someone who doesn't assess the consequences of her actions adequately does not form her judgement in a responsible way. For example, someone who represents through symbolic cognition that it is good to protect the environment since she fixed that belief sometime before but does not connect the consequences of her actions with the impact they have on the planet, not only forms false judgements concerning those consequences, but she is also

[30] See the previous section for the conceptual connections between practical judgements or decisions (*sententiae*), and judgement (*judicio*) in his mature thought; that is, they all involve propositional content and a *conatus agendi.*

[31] For the notion of doxastic control (that is, whether we have voluntary control over our epistemic attitudes such as beliefs and judgements), for an affirmative answer, see Conor McHugh (2013); Matthias Steup (2000, 2008); Brian Wetherston (2008). Doxastic voluntarism has been rejected by William P. Alston (1988); Pamela Hieronymi (2006); Kieran Setiya (2013), among others.

[32] See Vargas (2015).

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accountable for her judgement that is formed in an irresponsible way. And given that opinions only attain verisimilitude or probability, estimating the reasons in favour of an opinion is the epistemic agent's responsibility. In this way, we can also see how moral agency is connected to epistemic agency, that is, by being responsible for the judgements we form.

Another influential interpretation of Leibniz's moral views conceives of moral failure as the result of the opposition between lively and "dull" information (Vailati, 1990, p. 220); the weak-willed moral agent is insufficiently sensitive to the greater good involved in action since it is represented in blind thoughts, conceived of as dull information that fails to move us. Then, Leibniz's position is based on a distinction between what Ezio Vailati calls the epistemological and the psychological dimensions of belief; while the former concerns the degree of probability the agent attributes to it, the latter is a function of its liveliness. Vailati concludes that in moral failure "the epistemological dimension is adequate, but the psychological dimension is not" (Vailati, 1990, p. 221). The content of the belief regarding the goodness of an action is not modified by the passage from dull to a lively representation of its content (Vailati, 1990, p. 221).

However, since moral deliberation involves explicit judgement, rather than mere belief, it is hard to see whether this passage can only involve some psychological change. Judgement requires justified belief, and justification or reasons produces the endorsement of its propositional content. Opinions move us. Propositional content does not constitute a doxastic attitude by itself. Also, in an epistemologically relevant sense, the false moral judgement is inadequately justified. The moral agent fails to perform her epistemological duties of collecting the evidence justifying her judgement.

As an extreme example of this process of moral deliberation, Leibniz considers the case of the mortal sinner. In the *Confessio philosophi* (1672–1673), he compares the mortal sinner with those who love God. The mortal sinner wrongly believes that God could have done better; more precisely, she is convinced that the world could be improved. Those who love God *presume* that certain events may be amended in the future, that is, insofar as their belief is not proved wrong. Presumptions are only probable because they are taken to be true provisionally until another proof shows they are false.[33] In jurisprudence, they determine the burden of proof, so that an act is just unless proven unjust (*De systemate jurisprudentiae condendo*, 1686; A 6, 4, p. 2900).

The virtuous believer accepts certain propositions in order to act accordingly, but she is not certain, given the evidence available to her. For this reason, those who love God will not be frustrated when their efforts to change things fail.[34] The damned obstinately assume the apparent truth that seems to put into question God's goodness and justice and do not consider things more carefully, in the light of reason:

> The foolish, the mistaken, the evildoers use their reason in a sane way but not with an eye on the most important things; they deliberate about everything

[33] See, for example, *Nouveaux essais* IV, xiv.

[34] See also *Theodicée*, 58.

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> but happiness. A sickness and a matter harmful to the nerves and animal spirits, along with a certain insomnia, so to speak, disturb the insane. In the case of fools and evildoers reason is perverted by reason of another kind, a lesser reason perverts the greater reason, a certain particular reason, fixed in the mind by temperament, education, and use perverts universal reason. (CP, p. 75; A 6, 3, p. 136; see also *Theodicée*, 31–33)

The mortal sinner is not insane or irrational but continuously condemns herself by persisting in her present mental state, that is, hating God. Her opinion involves some endeavour to act but her emotional disposition is not opposed by another contrary opinion since the sinner's confidence in her own intellectual powers is not questioned. The virtuous believer is open to accepting that she is wrong, but the mortal sinner does not consider additional reasons that could undermine her opinion. In other words, the mortal sinner is condemned for not fulfilling her epistemic duties.

So, even in this early dialogue, Leibniz appeals to some distorted representation of the future that plays a role in deliberation and opposes it to the lively present state of the mind. In his later view, these emotional dispositions are opposed to the weaker distinct representations of the understanding. In practical deliberation, discursive thinking requires that clear distinct perception (i.e., judgement) can overturn clear but confused perceptions and once a judgement is formed, volition follows. Leibniz also points out that imaginary representation can be associated with volition by training (see *Enumeratio terminorum simpliciorum*; A 6, 4, p. 395). If we as moral agents prefer the worse, it is because we feel the good it involves but without feeling the evil it involves or the good involved in the opposite choice (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §35). These ideas are "*très faibles*" (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §35) since, as we have seen, they are represented in blind thoughts. The false judgement is not resisted.

It is important to notice that, according to the reading we are proposing, passions do not oppose and overcome practical judgements, but judgements are the result of inclinations (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §40; §42) so that we do not act against our judgement. More specifically, blind thoughts are not judgements. As Leibniz explains in the *Meditationes*, we use signs in place of the ideas that we know or believe that we have (A 6, 4, p. 588); signs can conceal impossible notions, so their correct use depends on having in advance the right analysis of the notions represented by the characters. Judgement involves considering the reasons to believe. The sinner fails to discern the true good because her previous commitments are not revised, and this becomes an obstacle to practical reasoning.

5. The Habits of an Evil Person

However, under certain circumstances, we cannot exercise this evaluative control over our practical judgements, for instance, when we must act immediately. Volitions follow our practical judgements but a firm resolution to follow certain behaviour can lead us to those that constitute virtuous intellectual habits. In this way, Leibniz insists that the indirect power of the will over our judgements is not only the source of our errors in judgement, but it can also be trained to induce good habits.

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As we have seen in Section 2, a virtuous person's moral goal is to perfect oneself and in this way promote metaphysical goodness or perfection, imitating God's actions as far as one can conceive of them in nature or through the Scriptures. A central part of this action is to develop one's cognition and strength of will. A moral agent must cultivate her epistemic virtues. According to Leibniz, in the process, the person may find the real goods by reason and strive to advance them, gaining pleasure (which is a sense of universal perfection) and eventually happiness as a result. In *Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §36, Leibniz emphasizes the importance of this continuous process:

> As I said earlier, nature's accumulation of continual little triumphs, in which it puts itself more and more at ease — drawing closer to the good and enjoying the *image* of it or reducing the feeling of suffering — is itself a considerable pleasure, often better than the actual enjoyment of the good. (RB & A 6, 6, p. 189, our emphasis)

But the self-perfection process is difficult, and temporary setbacks are to be accepted as part of it:

> We must also hold that afflictions, especially those the good have, only lead to their greater good. This is true not only in theology, but in nature as well. (*De rerum originatione radicali*, 1697; AG, p. 154; GP 7, p. 307)

And, although Leibniz is optimistic that this process produces good outcomes, there may also be cases where the result is evil or mental pain instead of pleasure. Sometimes this result is unintentional. As he describes the case to Louis Bourguet, it is a consequence of a conflict of incompatible goods:

> The co-operative action of all tendencies toward the good has produced the best, but since there are goods which are not compatible together, this co-operation and this result can bring about the destruction of some good, and consequently some evil. (GP 3, p. 558)

This can also be the case when pleasure and pain are mixed. It may be a small difference between joy and sorrow, depending upon which component prevails in the mixture. This difference is often due to the individual temperaments of different persons (*Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §64).

But, more importantly, for our present purposes, Leibniz also considers a case where a person turns intentionally to less and less virtuous actions. Sometimes an agent chooses the wrong course of action, and it may develop into a habit so that the real goods are continually ignored: the moral agent can manipulate her mind to believe that an apparent, false good is, in fact, a real good by one of the deliberating processes leading to a false practical judgement we described above.[35] In a similar way, decisions may be manipulated, and volitions may be produced on a regular

[35] For example, I learned from my doctor that chocolate is bad for my health but I make myself believe that eating chocolate is healthy because I read in a journal that eating chocolate promotes well-being. So, I

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basis. Each volition counts in forming a pattern of behaviour because, according to Leibniz, "we must recognize that by our voluntary actions we often indirectly prepare the way for other voluntary actions" (*Nouveaux essais* II, xx, §23; RB & A 6, 6, p. 182; see also *Theodicée,* 51). The mortal sinner is dominated by the habit of forming more and more false judgements (*Theodicée*, 270).

Leibniz argues that we only will what we think good, and the more developed the faculty of the understanding is, the better are the choices of the will. So, those persons who are swept away by passions are not very enlightened persons, and as their volitions pave the way to consequent volitions, they may continue to make more and more severe mistakes (whether or not intentional) concerning the real goods, leading to worse and worse moral actions. We are very good at deceiving ourselves, as Leibniz describes in *Nouveaux essais* II, xxi, §23:

> We attach ourselves to people, material and ways of thinking which are favourable to a certain party and we *do not pay attention* to whatever comes from the opposite faction; and by means of these and countless other devices, which we usually employ and without set purpose, we succeed in deceiving ourselves or at least in changing our minds, and so we achieve our own conversion or perversion depending on what our experience has been. (RB & A 6, 6, p. 182, our emphasis)

But the repeated vicious actions lead to our punishment in either a natural way (for example, suffering a disease caused by harmful eating habits) or via damnation in a theological sense (as a result of systematic sinning against God). Moreover, it brings pain and sorrow to the person in question and eventually the person is corrupted more and more and finds displeasure and imperfection as her goal *sub specie boni*. As Leibniz writes in the *Theodicée*, for the sinner "the pleasure he finds in evil is the bait that hooks him" (278, H, p. 297; GP 6, p. 282). He also describes the process of corruption by which the sinner finds pleasure. In *Theodicée*, Leibniz quotes at length a description of this kind of person that Pierre Bayle (1704) discusses in his *Reponse aux questions d'un provincial*:

> The ungodly will have so accustomed their mind to wrong judgements that they will henceforth never make any other kind and will perpetually pass from one error into another. They will not be able to refrain from desiring perpetually things whose enjoyment will be denied to them, and being deprived of which, they will fall into inconceivable despair, while experience can never make them wiser for the future. For by their own fault, they will have altogether corrupted their understanding and will have rendered it incapable of passing a sound judgement on any matter. (270, H, p. 293; GP 6, p. 278)

While Bayle is actually presenting the point of view of William King in *De origine mali* (King, 1702), Leibniz is making his case that the impious mortal sinner is rightly

neglect the specific recommendation from my doctor, that is, I minimize the unhealthy consequences and end up eating a lot of chocolate.

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condemned to eternal punishment since she is eternally accountable for her sin insofar as she continuously and voluntarily chooses to reject God. From the point of view of the mortal sinner, however, present perceptions determine her judgement. Sinners actively choose to sin by voluntarily conducting their attention in ways that the evil consequences of their choices are neglected or misrepresented. However, inclinations do not oppose judgement in practical matters, as the traditional view suggests, since true judgements move us because we endorse their propositional content when we understand the concepts involved. Our practical deliberations are moved by our present inclinations, which may be composed of confused perceptions as well as distinct cognitions. Leibniz combines the traditional view of virtue (and vice) as habit and the modern conception of a moral agent as fully responsible for her decisions based on deliberation.

6. Conclusion

Leibniz's moral psychology of the evil person can shed light on his conception of the practical intellect. His account of practical deliberation is original because the agent's capacity to determine what to do is grounded on a conception of judgement as an act of the understanding that gives rise to inclinations so that there is a conceptual link between the practical judgement of an agent and the agent's intention to act. At the same time, practical judgements can be true or false, and then they involve epistemic agency. In this article, we have analyzed the thesis, according to which, for Leibniz, moral failure is some kind of epistemic error insofar as it involves some false practical judgement. We have examined Leibniz's contention that moral failure is the result of the kind of cognition by which we represent our moral maxims, but given the nature of these cognitions, a moral agent can misrepresent the evil consequences of her behaviour. Also, the process by which an agent forms her practical judgements can account for the type of doxastic involuntarism that Leibniz advocates, but only insofar as this view is complemented with his idea that we have indirect control over our doxastic attitudes, and, therefore that they are susceptible to normative evaluation. More importantly, the right kind of intellectual habits can motivate our moral judgements, which give rise to new motivations. Our volitions depend on our practical judgements and our practical judgements, in turn, express opinions for which we can give reasons. We are responsible for our judgements, although we do not have control over their content since we are responsible for their justification. For Leibniz, practical judgements should be the result of virtuous intellectual habits.

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