Part IV: Grounding existents

1. Sufficient reason

Leibniz’s theory of monads is ultimately designed to provide a sufficient reason for the existence of the world. Other theories have great difficulties with this demand. Jews, Muslims and Christians accept that God created the world, but this implies that God created matter and imbued some of it with spirit. Philosophically this is a very defective idea. For although we are then in a position to make a claim on reason, it is by no means sufficient. So we had better attend to what Leibniz says about the distinctive qualification ‘sufficient’.

His whole philosophy, he says, rests on the two fundamental principles of contradiction (or axiom of identity) and sufficient reason. Thus he writes in the Monadology:

All our reasonings are based on two great principles: the principle of contradiction, by virtue of which we judge to be false that which involves contradiction, and true that which is opposed or contradictory to the false; and the principle of sufficient reason, by virtue of which we consider that no fact can be real or existing and no proposition can be true unless there is a sufficient reason why it should be thus and not otherwise, even though in most cases these reasons cannot be known to us.¹

Let us pin-point what this communicates to us: The principle of contradiction concerns what is possible and the principle of sufficient reason that which is actual. Accordingly the former serves for the determination or exclusion from possibility of proposed existents, but includes no claim or provision that any of them actually exist; whereas the latter serves for the examination of existents and seeks to account (give a comprehensive grounding) for their actuality. If we now consider these two principles under the aegis of the primordial existential question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”, we can see at once how they dovetail into each other. For it is the office of the principle of contradiction to determine the contradiction-free possibility of any contingent fact; while the principle of sufficient reason seeks to ground actual facts (objects, properties, relations, events) in an ulterior principle of identity. The necessity for grounding is, evidently, that contingent existents could conceivably not exist, or, being actual, could be other than they are. Herewith Leibniz contends against Descartes’ and Spinoza’s erroneous claim that whatever is possible must necessarily exist (even if not all together): but, writes Leibniz, one may easily think of possibles that, being contingently possible, could have been, but never were nor ever will be – for example the fictions surrounding King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Moreover he also asserts that the very constitution of the universe is such that some possibles are incompossible and must therefore remain ‘unfulfilled’. It seems that Leibniz is correct in branding this an altogether surprising oversight by Descartes and Spinoza.²

Therefore the principle of sufficient reason does not ask for what may be possible; it offers neither support to nor withholds it from theoretical entities; and it has no truck with a priori certainties. It is concerned solely with actuals, for only of them can a reason be demanded why they exist, or a cause for why they are and how they are, when they might be different or not be at all.

¹ Mon. §31-2
² On Freedom, P 106.
Thus the notion of ‘contingent truths’ arises, as opposed to those truths which are necessary. “Truths of reasoning are necessary,” writes Leibniz, “and their opposite is impossible.” Examples are the truths of mathematics, whose theorems may be reduced to the principle of identity by analysis down to their ‘raw’ definitions, axioms and postulates; and then there are primitive principles which need no proof, because they are identical propositions (e.g. a ‘bachelor’ is an ‘unmarried man’). On the other hand, truths of fact are contingent truths pertaining to the created order; and in respect of these the desire for grounding them encounters special problems. For contingent facts are members of a series of contingent facts and the effort of analysing them into identical propositions must fail on account of the infinite causal regress associated with contingency. Accordingly the special difficulty of grounding them lies in the need for ascertaining an ultimate cause outside of this series – that is, an ultimate necessary truth which is a substance and “which exists eminently as their source.”

Necessary truths which lie outside the series of contingent facts need no grounding; they are so to speak ‘eternal’. They would hold in any possible alternative world (e.g. all angles of a triangle in Euclidian space add up to 180°), because they are creatures of reason; their eternity appealing to reason to recognise them as self-grounding.

This implies, of course, that there must be some necessary truths. Without them, we would not be in a position to offer any final explanations whatever. But the appeal to reason gives something away on its own accord: namely, that reason itself has to be the agent of that grounding. If every contingent truth needs a sufficient reason to explain it, and every necessary truth exists a priori in reason, then clearly sufficient reason stands aside – as it were the arbiter of what is and what is not.

This being the case, the question occurs to what extent the principle of sufficient reason serves as a secure grounding. Leibniz has no doubt that it serves; for no proof can be given of the principle and on logical criteria alone it would be absurd to ask for one, since “it is a necessary consequence [of these principles] that whatever cannot be shown to have sufficient reason for existence, cannot exist. And in this respect one might say that both principles are included in the definitions of truth and falsity.” In other words, the principles in question rest at the foundation of our conception of truth.

Behind it lies the recognition that existents on the whole communicate their being to us through sensory impressions. The work of the senses is not, however, a secure mediator of certainty. Impressionability relies greatly on the percipient’s judgement (intellect) to decipher the actual meaning of sensory impressions; but in any case, as we saw amply in the preceding sections, we are hampered not only by our senses when seeking to establish the actual existence of many features of our world, where they may suggest one thing when in fact some other condition prevails, but also by our languages, which perform the same delusionary work in respect of many phenomena. In all these instances the principle of sufficient reason is our only secure anchor amid the confusing welter of appearances.

The manner in which Leibniz grounds existents is well known: he proves that a necessary being (an ultimate substance, as mentioned above) is needed to ground those contingent facts whose series tapers off into an infinite causal regress; a substance or being we call ‘God’ which “is a sufficient reason of all this differentiation [and] is itself likewise all connected.” Since moreover this God is self-caused, and

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3 Mon. §33-4.
4 Mon. §36-8.
since it would be logically contradictory for there to be more than one such omniscient and omnipotent God, “there is only one God, and this God is enough.”

Thus God executing the decision to create a universe in the manner described in Part II of this study is deemed to furnish a sufficient reason for the existence of all contingent truths, and the phrase “God is enough” indicates that no other nor additional reason could avail to the same degree of sufficiency.

2. Ontological arguments

However, this is one of those instances where many intelligent but sceptical people speak derogatively about “the philosophers’ God”, implying that such a God is a product of religious beliefs and therefore a heavy-handed influence on philosophical enquiry. Accordingly ontological ‘proofs’ were and remain the subject of unavoidable contention.

Leibniz himself conceded that no amount of logic and sound argument can prove something to exist which is not in any way objectively verifiable. In this he evades the critique of Kant, who was moved to exclaim, in his examination of the Leibnizian Gottsebeweise, that the best logic cannot confer existence. For Leibniz left no doubt in his readers’ minds that the ontological arguments, as he framed them, are compelling, but not compulsory. But if this is so, does it not mean that we have in fact no means at all of grounding existence in some principle which may serve us as an immovable and self-verifying concept?

To examine this in its proper light, we need to recall firstly that, as far as Leibniz is concerned, the existence of God, as a necessary being to ground all other existents, is logically indispensable. Deny it, and all other existents turn into victims of explanatory nullity. For Leibniz, therefore, the initial task of logic is to rid the conception of God’s being of its logical objections, i.e. to secure his arguments against the objection that such a being may not be possible. Accordingly his construction comprises the tripartite sequence (a) that a necessary being is by definition a being that necessarily exists, (b) hence a being that necessarily exists, exists, and (c) therefore a necessary being exists. Leibniz goes on to show that 'necessary' in this context perforce includes the essence of perfection, and this essence in turn would be a mere word unless it denotes actual existence, the latter being evidently essential to perfection. The conclusion from this is that if, logically, the possibility of such a being does not contradict the principle of existence, the necessary being (God) must exist necessarily.

But this, as Leibniz discovered, is not enough, for it leaves the door open to the objections just noted. Some of his notes for his meeting with Spinoza are of value in tracing out this train of thought:

Descartes’ reasoning about the existence of a most perfect being assumed that such a being can be conceived and is possible. If it is granted that there is such a concept, it follows at once that this being exists, because we set up this very concept in such a way that it at once contains existence. But … opponents will say that such a concept … is a chimera. Nor does it suffice for Descartes to appeal to experience and allege that he experiences

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6 Mon. §39.
8 Crit. Thoughts, I, 386.
10 Italics added.
this concept within himself, clearly and distinctly. This is not to complete the demonstration but to break it off …

Accordingly Leibniz turns the argument around, seeking to buttress it by the contention that the possibility of existence must be regarded as a default condition, since we (among many other existents) demonstrably exist: which means that it is not the possibility, but the impossibility of existence that has to be proved to validate the ontological argument. This was in fact the linchpin of his emendation of the earlier ontological proofs from Anselm to Descartes, that they failed to note that both of the propositions given below are logically acceptable:

a: If it is possible that God exists, then God exists.

b: If it is possible that God does not exist, then God does not exist.

This evident contradiction must be resolved by recourse to the aforesaid ‘impossibility proof’. It is not reasonable to assume that we can prove anything whatever to have existence, as conversely it is impossible to prove its non-existence; but logically it is possible to prove that a certain presumed fact does not, or even cannot, exist in the specification given for it. If therefore this proof fails, if – as in the present case concerning God’s existence – the argument against existence is not conclusive, then we seem at least to have a watertight case that logically that being can exist. We can then go back to the beginning and assert, on the basis of having secured ourselves against proof of the impossibility of a necessary being’s existence, to proceed to a (logical) proof of that being’s existence.

It might seem that, nonetheless, Kant’s point, although evaded, is not thereby voided. Leibniz would probably disagree with any claim that his ontological demonstrations are ultimately identity principles, i.e. that he may have succeeded with demonstrating that no contradiction is involved in this proof of God’s existence and that, to this extent, God’s existence is possible. But the argument from God’s essence is more difficult to sustain, perhaps impossible, and he has the additional problem of not being able to employ the principle of sufficient reason (although he does) to support his claim, since evidently that principle is itself anchored in the necessary existence of God. Hence Kynell’s point that

Leibniz was that paradox, a rationalist who believed in God, another name for First Cause. Applying logic to the projected image of God, it is apparent that while existence or extinction, or change, can occur with contingent beings, that probability, implying eventual non-existence of God, is logically impossible. With no source, there are no results.

However, apart from the objections which proliferate in the literature against the ultimate acceptability of logical arguments of this kind, there is the more basic problem which Leibniz by means of all these arguments seeks to break down, which is that the series rerum exceeds by far our capacity to penetrate its (infinite) regression. In the final analysis, therefore, all arguments relating to the sufficient reason of individual existents face the problem that for us, as animate and thinking beings placed into this

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  \item \textit{Two Notations}, G VII 261-2, L 167-8. – The same argument, albeit abridged, is repeated in \textit{Mon.}, §45. – Going back one step, we can see from a slightly earlier paper of his that Leibniz was well aware of the defect of the earlier demonstrations before he contrived his own solution, viz. “This, then, is the privilege of the most perfect being; that granted that it is possible, it at once exists. ... But if this demonstration is to be rigorous, the possibility must be demonstrated beforehand.” [italics added]. \textit{Universal Synthesis and Analysis}, P 13.
\end{itemize}

world, all its facts are contingent. To derive from these by logical deduction the need for an a priori grounding principle is therefore ultimately a philosophical-metaphysical issue in which the human thinker is the central character.

We can see this for example in Leibniz’s specification of the individual monad as a ‘mirror’ of the whole world. Taken to its ultimate consequence, this specification would yield a series of concepts (each bearing the predicate-in-notion specification) all with identical contents, albeit arranged in a different order. This is apt to suggest that the totality of monads is indistinguishable from God himself. On this criterion rest those suggestions that Leibniz did not in fact ever overcome Spinozism, but contrived merely to adapt certain idiosyncratic scholastic doctrines to ensure a multiplicity of substances instead of one. And indeed, it cannot be gainsaid that the mirror argument looks like a circle whose closure, as in all systematic exposeés, requires the (arbitrary) separation of one principle that must be left beyond questioning. There is no doubting that this is precisely what Descartes and Spinoza did, but Leibniz laid a claim to circumventing their fundamental problem. We have seen how he attacks the problem, but the question is, in the end, whether a coherent structure arises from his doctrine of necessity and contingency, identity and sufficient reason.

The somewhat surprising answer is that his doctrine of reductio ad identicas provides the desired grounding, not in virtue of itself, but rather on account of its trend to indeterminacy. Initially we saw Leibniz following the example of Spinoza of endeavouring to ground the world in the identity principle, but with the proviso that the variation principle of his multiple substances does not self-cancel in the reduction to a single all-embracing substance. This is accomplished by the criterion of the irreducibility of phenomena – whose fundamental principle is activity – to identical propositions. The latter are in fact possible only with truths of reason, but not with truths of fact. Phenomena being infinite in number, and their laws of the series engendering infinitely progressing ‘states’, precludes their reduction. So the mirror image is a metaphor that cannot be stated in a finite proposition. There is a total structure; but it is not one comprising individuals. Hence their logical entanglement is virtual, not actual – and the attainment of reduction to identity thus entirely the prerogative of God’s power. Accordingly the presumption inherent in the doctrines of his predecessors, that it is possible ‘in principle’ to speak of necessity in relation to the facts of the world, cannot be sustained. Leibniz emphasises the point that comes out of this: that only on the basis of our innate reasoning capacity are we enabled to pursue any series to its virtual origins, back to the principle of sufficient reason; but this of course implies that reason is that principle in which all truths, whether of fact or of reason itself, are grounded. The point of this must be, then, that the cosmos does not present itself to us in its logical entailment because we as subjects are structured to comprehend it as a logical structure (as Kant was to insist), but because the logical entanglement of the world is such that therefore human reason is part of this overall logical structuring.

Accordingly (and this is our conclusion) every individual, every fact and every series of these, cannot do either of these two things: it cannot resolve its infinity into a finite proposition of entity; and it cannot for the same reason permit us to grasp it as a whole. What is possible to us, however, is to treat each individual, fact or series as a window on infinity, as a partial view or aspect, and to the extent that any such window

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13 Recalling the important principle adumbrated in Part III that members of the continuum enable the foundation of real things, but do not comprise them; cf. especially the context of the assignment of points, which is a necessary adjunct of this foundational aspect of extrema.
we chose contains the same laws of nature (etc), then *per analogiam*, we are entitled to propose that any such infinite series must reflect its foundation in the extrema which this partial view brings into the light.

This brings us to a final confrontation with the Spinozist claim. If in all metaphysical stringency the world is to be shown as one, then we have fundamentally two choices. Spinoza took one, and Leibniz the other – it is because of this that we know we have two choices: it cannot spontaneously be envisaged that these are in fact the only alternatives. Spinoza’s choice was to posit the sole necessary being as a logical subject and the sum of all possible predicates. Leibniz took the option of an *unum extramundanum*, but to vest this notion with all desired metaphysical rigour it cannot simply be assumed to be a being apart from or outside the world: rather, as Leibniz indicates (see below) this divine entelechy is the constituting and organising principle whose activity (*emanations*) brings this world into being as *one world*.\(^\text{14}\)

In short, in Leibniz we find the pretension dismissed that the world may be represented in its totality from a single perspective – which cannot be a perspective, for it is a global view and there can be no other. In its place Leibniz puts a model which may be deductively derived from any of its segments, for each of these represents a unique point of view on the whole, though this again involves an infinite regress which can be resolved only in God. But sufficient reason can be given for this perspectival kaleidoscope, as Leibniz himself documented in his *Résumé of Metaphysics*:

1. There is a reason in nature why something should exist rather than nothing. ...
2. This reason must be in some real entity, or cause. For a *cause* is simply a real reason, and truths about possibilities and *necessities* (that is, where the possibility of the opposite has been denied) would not produce anything unless those possibilities were founded on a thing which actually exists. ...
4. There is, therefore, a cause for the prevalence of existence over non-existence; or the *necessary being is existence-creating* (*existentificare*).
5. But the cause which brings it about that something exists, or that possibility demands existence, also brings it about that everything possible has an urge to existence; for a reason for restricting this to certain possible things in the universe cannot be found.\(^\text{15}\) ...
7. But it does not follow from this that all possibles exist; though this would follow if all possibles were compossible.
8. But since some things are incompatible with others, it follows that certain possibles do not arrive at existence. ...
9. Meanwhile from the conflict of all possibles demanding existence this at any rate follows, that there exists that series of things through which the greatest amount exists, or the greatest of possible series.
10. ... [and] so in the nature of the universe the most capacious series exists.
11. There exists, therefore, that which is the most perfect, since *perfection* is simply quantity of reality. ...
14. It follows also that that series has prevailed through which there arises the greatest amount of what is distinctly thinkable.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\) This is an extremely interesting passus in relation the discussion in Part II, Sect. D §3 and Sect. F §5 on the notion of a 'self-constructing universe': for here we have it black on white that 'all possibles strive for *Dasein*' and the lack of any mention of God as creator urges on us the conclusion that God is the agent who selects and concedes to those possibles an actual existence by his act of creation. Moreover the mention of "a reason for restricting" tells us that the urge or striving is fundamental, so that the creative act is to be interpreted as God’s concession of existence, rather than actual creation (see commentary *infra*).
This resumé is fraught with difficulties in several respects. Most strikingly, it offers the clue that this *unicum ens necessarium* is “existence-creating” by way of ‘emanation’; which suggests the conclusion that this being shares as a fundamental attribute with the monads.\(^\text{17}\) It cannot help but bring forth a world, and particularly so as all the possibles are defined as entities clamouring for actualisation – which in turn suggests that creation does not consist in the ‘manufacture’ of existents, but in *emanation* with ensuing *constraint* on selected monadic collectives to actualise themselves.\(^\text{18}\) The necessary being does exist, of course; but it does not comprise a world. Rather it exists *sole ipso* in contrast to those possibles which demand to be actualised as a *collective*. We also note Leibniz’s explicit equivalence of ‘perfection’ with ‘quantity of reality’. This presents some difficulty to a modern reader; but if we recall that ‘perfect’ in that era was used synonymously with ‘complete’, we can assume that this means nothing other than God’s fullness of perfection compared with the lesser degree of perfection of the monads. In §13 of the same piece Leibniz confirms this by his observation that unless such disparity in perfection is granted, phenomena could not arise – meaning *inter alia* that matter has the least amount of perfection. In view of the diversity required for a universe of maximal richness, many varieties of matter are, however, granted existence despite their low degree of reality.\(^\text{19}\)

For Leibniz, richness of forms and phenomena is an indispensable aesthetic desideratum of reason; as he writes, “it follows in general that the world is a cosmos, full of ornament; that is, made in such a way that it gives the greatest satisfaction to an intelligent being.”\(^\text{20}\) This notion is reinforced in subsequent sections as follows:

An intelligent being’s *pleasure* is simply the perception of beauty, order and perfection. All pain contains something disordered, though only relative to the percipient; for in the absolute sense all things are ordered. So when something in the series displeases us, that arises from a defect of our understanding. For it is not possible that every mind should understand everything distinctly; and to those who observe only some parts rather than others, the harmony in the whole cannot appear.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^\text{16}\) *Resumé*, P 145-46.

\(^\text{17}\) One problem to be mentioned at this point is that any argument for the existence of God cannot yet be said to have demonstrated that God is also the creator of the universe. This would seem to require a second pass. Now Leibniz performs such a further demonstrations here, in the *Monadology*, the *Summa Rerum* and elsewhere. It may be asked, however, if this demonstrations might not allow the collapse of the notion of God’s will into the specifications offered for the infinite substance. In a word, it would seem permissible to speak of God’s will not as a separate ‘deliberative faculty’, but simply as the infinite appetition which then becomes the monads’ individuated endowment (cf. *Mon.* §48). But this must remain a speculative point which cannot be followed up in this place.

\(^\text{18}\) Another suggestion hovers over this: namely that the creation of monads involved a colossal *overproduction* for the explicit purpose of exhausting all combinatorial possibilities prior to the selection of those congregations which are eventually to be released into an actual world.

\(^\text{19}\) An interesting remark by a contemporary physicist on the Big Bang theory may find its place in this context. Victor Weisskopf (*The Privilege of being a Physicist*, Freeman, New York 1988, pp. 141-53) insists that explosion is entirely a mistaken conception: the right one is *decompression* from an originally infinitely minute ‘false vacuum’. This offers a useful Leibnizian analogy if we take decompression as synonymous with emanation, i.e. the simultaneous release into actuality of both force and space-creating matter, the latter reflecting the *eikritis* of unstable particles clinging to stable force fields.

\(^\text{20}\) *Resumé*, §17.

\(^\text{21}\) Ibid, §§18-19.
On the differentiation noted above in our footnote on the principle of the best, the principle of sufficient reason therefore functions as the “principle of covenance”. We see in it the reason why force, in the form of autonomously acting monads, must be the ultimate principle of emergence. Without independent agency ‘creating’ scenarios for possible worlds, there would not have been a basis for choice. Hence Leibniz’s aforementioned insistence that God created monads and nothing else. For if God had created the world in toto, as per religious tradition, it would defeat the raison d’être of creation as Leibniz sees it, which is to create a world of which the freedom of agents is the grounding condition. Thus we must recur to the combat in God’s mind to which reference was made: material creation arose not from an act deliberately engaged in by God, but from his concession of actuality to one of an innumerable cluster of possible world series ‘proposed’ by the spontaneous aggregation of monads in form of a cosmos.

That this has the most radical consequences for Leibniz’s ontology we have already observed; but it is useful to take note of another aspect which contrasts not ably with the aristotelian-scholastic tradition. As Rombach points out, the medieval doctrine understood existents as immediately given, and distinguished them from essences, which can only be revealed in their nature (per abstractionem) by contemplating the said existents. In Leibniz’s doctrine, on the contrary, existents reveal themselves in their being grounded in the principle of sufficient reason (of both kinds), and this is the only avenue by which to differentiate between what is possible and what is actual. Accordingly it is rational understanding which is involved here: an understanding by the mind that the senses give us merely the material ‘contents’ of reality, without the concomitant guarantee that these in fact reflect whether they have the form of actuality. In other words, the epistemic relation is insufficient, on its own, to establish the character of the experience of reality: for although Hegel could write that the real is actual, and the actual real, yet even in his philosophy this is grounded in das Geistige, not in the material virtues of existents.

In the final analysis, this leads to an appreciation of existence as a proposition, inviting its actualisation – possible existents striving to become a world; for existence is not constituted by the ‘factuality’ of its objects and processes. Epistemological principles do not ‘reveal’ existence, but supply us with the contents of such ‘moral necessity’ as is required for us to see the design of sufficient reason in them. “At bottom, there are no truths about existence; existence is itself the truth about the world”.

3. The Idea of ‘grounding’

What then does it mean to ‘ground’ philosophy? – Suppose we are engaged in a scientific (natural philosophy) research into the constitution of things and this requires to be anchored in some principle on which the whole structure of the theory is expected to be raised. If we are dealing with physics, then, from the nature of this type of enquiry, an appropriate methodology seems to offer itself more or less of its own accord. Assume therefore that we choose the notion of a fundamental unit of existence, e.g. an atom. We would then assume that, as a particle of matter, it should in principle be discoverable. This indeed is a search that has been taken seriously in Western culture and it has been crowned with a certain measure of success. But it is plainly
a very different conception from the idea of grounding research in a principle as indeterminate as 'sufficient reason'? For on one side, we can observe a whole world arising from principles, on the other – perhaps nothing?

Now evidently the issue is not as clear cut as this. The very success of science, one might say, has left us after 300-odd years of effort with a sense of the unreality of its purportedly objective criteria, so that from a philosophical perspective a great deal remains unsaid. After the splitting of the atom and the emergence of a plethora of subnuclear particles, we are less certain now than ever before that the notion of a fundamental particle is truly intelligible. Today's conceptions of the matter/energy carousel tend rather to put a seal of negativity on it. Nevertheless, we persevere with it as a default proposition and continue to invest enormous research funds in its pursuit. But this may be evidence, rather, of a popular misconception than strictly scientific persistence. There are significant collateral benefits, irrespective of any 'truth' of the basic argument.

Thus a problem has surfaced that was not suspected, prior to the burgeoning of contemporary science, to seriously afflict the corpuscularian point of view, especially in its manifestation as materialistic monism. For the criterion of the ultimate particularness of the universe deems all existence to be reducible to matter; moreover it comprises a closed explanatory system of substances and qualities from which non-matter existents are excluded as either ‘not there’ or as existents that are possible only in the cloistered (logical) space of the mind. But while the system of scientific principles has the obvious advantage of an in-principle closure of the causal chain as well as the ready intelligibility of its substances, its truth-seeking continues to suffer from gaps, or missing links, in this chain. To the extent, then, that the system cannot ground the closure of this chain – meaning that it requires a first link, a causa sui or a cause in partibus infidelium – it can be discerned from the nature of these predicaments that giving a reason for the existence of anything remains a conspicuous problem.

If we now turn to reason, we do of course perceive an immediate difficulty. With materialistic theories we at least have something to hold in our hands as evidence of existence. From this evidence, whether by fair means or foul, we can work our way back, via a presumptive reductionism, to origins and essences. But where does a belief in the virtues of sufficient reason leave us? Can it put a universe on its feet? Evidently it cannot. But in any case, this is not a criterion that would lead us anywhere. For sufficient reason might very well have confirmed corpuscularianism and bestowed its blessing upon it. It might have nodded approval to the big bang and black holes or any other theory or hypothesis. That ultimately it does not bless them with eternal truth is not a fault of reason. The point is, rather, that sufficient reason is not an explanatory device. Nor is it a theory, doctrine or statement of purpose. It is nothing else than the question of being. It asks after the 'why?' and the degree of necessity in that 'why?' So the point about reason is not its 'applicability'. Rather, it is the principle to test all other principles for their explanatory adequacy. Sufficient reason requires to be satisfied in respect of every possible 'why?'

Therefore sufficient reason is independent of all theories. On the contrary, theories of all and any kind are bound to exhibit sufficient reason as their warrant for truth, as their grounding in being – or retire from sight. We have no other way of guarding ourselves against the self-deceptions which wait around every corner on the road of our philosophical endeavours.

Manifestly it cannot be grounded in any other principle or notion, for it grounds them. Leibniz, despite his unflagging religiosity, had the courage to show that not even
theology is exempt from this dictum: for humans are fallible and apt to misinterpret God as much as any fact in the world. Accordingly to ask God to ground being is nothing other than to ask the supreme intellect to vouchsafe it — which is nothing other than to ground being in sufficient reason.

What we have been at pains to elucidate in these remarks is a crucial distinction that needs to be observed in the idea of grounding. It may very well be possible to ground being, the world of facts, even a materialistic universe in principles commensurate each to their nature. This is after all the exploration on which we are engaged when we pronounce ourselves to be ‘philosophers’. But behind all these ‘ultimate quests’ lurks another. In the final analysis all concepts are propositions for existence — of them may be said what Leibniz said of his monads, that they exhibit Daseinstreben. As propositions, theories announce possibilities. But for these to become actual, and thus to have Dasein, they need to satisfy the condition of sufficient reason, for –

if existence were something others than the striving of possibles, then it would follow that existence itself must possess an essence and contribute the same to things; and then one would have to ask again if this thing exists or not, and why it exists in preference to some other thing.25

4. PSR anguish

It remains to add that the PSR has been attacked from a variety of angles in recent times. The most dangerous foe is quantum mechanics on account of the indeterminacy principle which lies at its heart. The problem we encounter here is that changes in the energy state of an atom depend on factors which are dispositions, but only one factor is known with certainty, namely that this state will change. We cannot ascertain when or why it will eventuate. For the disposition to become effective requires the incidence of conditions whose sources remain opaque; we have no clear-cut explanatory pathway to it. The PSR seems therefore to be suspended inssofar as its demand for giving an account of these conditions cannot be met — and furthermore this inability is ‘in principle’ in the sense that a state vector collapse is a mechanism in which all instants of realisation are equipollent.

Beneath these and a plethora of complex affiliated technical arguments, however, rests a relatively simple philosophical point. It is precisely this point which steered Leibniz away from the ultra-determinism of his ‘complete concept’ theory. It is the question why we humans must pretend that we can have a complete and seamless account of every possible fact of the universe. We saw that Leibniz came around to the point of view that even God himself need not be in possession of such an absolute analytical view; it being fully sufficient for his ‘intellectual intuition’ to perceive contingent series and converging series in a global view. In this conception the fine detail is incidental.26 Indeterminacy is not therefore a deficit. Any occasion of ‘random causation’ in quantum mechanics could then in principle be replaced by the notion of a ‘free choice’ of the observer in the act of collapsing the wave front.27

25 De veritatibus primis, HH, p. 176.
26 Cf. Part II, Sect. F.
27 Pruss, p. 168. This argument is based on Bohr’s dictum that no quantum theoretical experiment may be considered closed until registration of the observed event has been accomplished by “an irreversible act of amplification”. (Quoted from John Wheeler, At Home in the Universe (1992), p. 306). In short, the existence of a fact in quantum science, as much as in Leibniz’s philosophy, rests with its apprehension on the part of a sensing subject: cf. “Existence is the
The gist of this is that in any quantum experiment the observer has no choice but to interfere with the object of observation – the very act of observation is already an intrusion into the autonomy of the event being observed. Thereby equipollence itself is disturbed and a bias into the setup introduced. A close analogy would be to think of the observation of a perfectly invisible cannon ball in flight which can be studied only by firing other cannon balls into its flight path. We then acquire indirect knowledge of the object by examining the deflection our own cannon ball when it collides with it.28

Thereby the fear of equipollence is tamed. The philosophical point in behest of the principle of sufficient reason remains valid. The human agent himself breaks the indeterminacy mould in the act of observation and supplies the missing causal link. To some extent this is a fascinatingly enigmatic confirmation of the principles dealt with in the *Pacidius* commentary of Part III Sect. G, to which readers are referred with the invitation to draw their own conclusions.

But whatever this may come to, it cannot retrace its steps to any stage prior to reason. It is often said that the question for time before time is based in a nonsensical assumption; and the same holds for reason. Leibniz could be accused of making reason overreach itself in his efforts to prove that God is ineluctably necessary. But what the aforesaid quotation (at the end of §3) may be taken to insinuate is also this: that reason cannot pre-exist creation. Accordingly the creation of reason and of the cosmos (via monads) coincide; and thus to say that sufficient reason must be given for any contingent fact to exist is the same as saying that contingent facts exist because there is sufficient reason – that *Dasein*, i.e. conscious existence, and sufficient reason, are co-existential. The ‘primordial existential question’ cannot therefore be a question after the material origin of the world, but only after the origin of consciousness – which is the ineluctable concomitant of the origin of reason.

quality of the subject which brings it about that we have coherent sensations." *On Mind, Universe and God, DSR* p. 9.

28 It is well-known that this suffices only to indicate 'position', but not 'momentum'. The latter can be ascertained by spraying the flight path with marbles instead of cannon balls and observing multiple collisions, although this is then accomplished by sacrificing knowledge of instantaneous position.