

“Leibniz’s Cosmological Argument”

In this paper, I discuss Leibniz’s interpretation of the cosmological argument for the existence of God (hereafter CA.) I will focus on Leibniz’s comments from 1678 on Spinoza’s *Ethics*, and in particular his comment on *Ethics* I, prop. 7, i.e. the proposition where Spinoza shows, that if substance exists, it exists necessarily, since it is self-caused. In his comment, Leibniz develops a version of the CA that he qualifies as both “entirely new” and “infallible.” Part of this argument relies on an attempt to revise Spinoza’s proposition and convert it into an axiom which concerns the nature of God’s necessary existence. Taking departure from this attempt, I argue that Leibniz developed this CA in deliberate opposition to Spinoza’s conception of God as the self-caused ground of all causes or things. Hence, in this new argument, God figures as an *ens a se*, that is to say, an uncaused being existing by its essence or concept alone. God’s necessary existence is thus for Leibniz grounded in a non-causal conceptual relation alone. It is not, however, only in relation to the necessary or independent existence of God that Leibniz stresses conceptual relations over causal relations, but also when formulating the dependence relation between God and created things. Thus, I show, the “entirely new” CA that he proposes is based entirely on the consideration of conceptual relations, and depicts God as an uncaused being conceived through itself which is the condition of conceivability of all things. Next I will consider in some detail exactly why Leibniz believes that his argument is both new and infallible. I will here take recourse to passages in the *Introductio ad encyclopaediam arcanam* (1683-85), the *Meditationes cognitione, veritate et ideis* (1684) and the *Discours de métaphysique* (1686) in order to show how Leibniz, in his new CA, does not infer the existence of God from the existence of created things as in more traditional versions of the CA, but only relies on experience only in order to establish the possibility or conceivability of things, i.e. the possibility of their concepts. From this possibility or conceivability of things, he infers the possibility of the concept of God and, consequently, also God’s existence. Finally, I show how Leibniz continued to state and refine this argument from the *De organo sive arte magna cogitandi* (1679) all the way to a relatively late text such as *De rerum originatione radicali* (1697).