

Leibniz on the Grounds for the PSR in the Correspondence with Clarke

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This paper is a close analysis of the correspondence with Clarke in light of the question of what justifies the PSR. I approach the issue at hand by turning to the correspondence as a whole, but pay particular attention to the last six sections of Leibniz's final letter, which contain an extended discussion of precisely this issue. Whilst I don't assume that this should be taken as Leibniz's definitive view on the status of his principle there is surely some particular merit in focusing on this most apposite of swan songs, especially on the 300th anniversary of its composition.

My aim in the talk is somewhat limited. I begin by clarifying how Leibniz characterizes the PSR in the Clarke correspondence. Next I organize pertinent remarks scattered among Leibniz's five letters into seven different justifications for the principle. Finally, I offer some critical comments and a speculative attempt at elaborating on the content of the final justification. Here the most novel and controversial aspect of my reading comes into play, for the suggestion is that there is some evidence that, while Leibniz regarded the employment of the principle as constitutive of the practice of discursive thinking, his justification for employing it was grounded in a more general commitment to the way in which discursive thinking might enable the acquisition of virtue.