

Title: In Defense of Leibniz's Theodicy
Author: Nathan A. Jacobs
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Degree: Ph.D., Calvin Theological Seminary
Supervisor: Richard A. Muller
External Reader: Donald Rutherford
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ABSTRACT

G. W. Leibniz professes a commitment to historical Christian theism, but the depth and orthodoxy of his commitment have been questioned throughout the past three centuries. In this project I defend both the cogency and the orthodoxy of Leibniz's philosophical theology, and, by extension, its application to the Christian task of theodicy. At the heart of this defense is the central claim of this project, namely, that Leibniz's philosophical theology represents a traditional brand of Augustinianism. In short, I argue that Leibniz's theodicy is not his own, but is the tacit claim of a longstanding theological tradition made explicit and brought to bear on the problem of evil as articulated in Leibniz's day. A number of subordinate claims accompany this central claim, the most significant of which center on how we read Leibniz on providence and on free choice. Regarding the former, I argue that Leibniz's understanding of providence has precedence in and is a recapitulation of older Augustinian views of the God-world relationship. As for free choice, I maintain that the Augustinian tradition is not only incompatibilist, or libertarian, but also was recognized as such in Leibniz's day. Hence, in adhering to this tradition, Leibniz is knowingly adhering to a libertarian theology. I show that his adherence to this tradition and its views of freedom has significant textual support.

My method of defense is both historical and constructive. On the historical side I focus primarily on contextual and textual analysis. However, insofar as this defense includes the viability of Leibniz's theodicy for Christian theology and theodicy today, constructive engagement with Leibniz's contemporary objectors and the current literature on the problem of evil is also required. Therefore, I devote the latter part of this defense to fingering objections and interlocution with current approaches to the problem of evil. In the end, I conclude that Leibniz's theodicy, when read in the light of the Augustinian tradition, is not only orthodox, cogent, and defensible but is perhaps the most viable response to the problem of evil for traditional Christian theology, if not the inevitable response for a traditional Augustinian.