Leibniz's and Herder's philosophy of optimism

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Abstract
The author studies Leibniz's views of vindicating God for the existence of evil in the world, as well as the idea of the best of all possible worlds, including the past and present criticism. Following Leibniz, he opted for the presentation of Herder's philosophy of history as one of the most significant forms of philosophical optimism that influenced the first half of the 19th century, including contemporary debates on and critiques of the topic. He defines Herder's concept as the *philosophy of historical progress,* which also significantly influenced Slovak philosophy of the given period. The main goal of the article is to present Leibniz's and Herder's views as a starting point for the Slovak philosophy of optimism and historical progress of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century.

Keywords: theodicy, Leibniz, the best of all possible worlds, Herder, philosophy of history, philosophical optimism, philosophy of historical progress

Introduction

In early Christianity, the question of the existence of evil in the world was dealt with, for example, by St Augustine in his work *The City of God* (*Civitas Dei*), the most famous work of modern times addressing these questions is the work of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) *Theodicy* (1710). The basis of Leibniz's conception of theodicy is the belief that God wants the best. "Now this supreme wisdom, united to goodness that is no less infinite, cannot but have chosen the best. For as a lesser evil is a kind of good, even so a lesser good is a kind of evil if it stands in the way of a greater good; and there would be something to correct in the actions of God if it were possible to do better. As in mathematics, when there is no maximum nor minimum, in short nothing distinguished, everything is done equally, or when that is not possible nothing at all is done: so it may be said likewise in respect of perfect wisdom, which is no less orderly than mathematics, that if there were not the best (*optimum*) among all possible worlds, God would not have produced any" (Leibniz, 2007, p. 131).

The doctrine of theodicy has two integral parts: the first is the justification of God for the existence of evil in the world, the second is the doctrine that the created or existing world is the best possible, which, following Leibniz, is also called the philosophy of optimism. The main goal of the article is to present Leibniz's and Herder's views as a starting point for the Slovak philosophy of optimism and historical progress of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century.

Leibniz's teachings on theodicy and his past criticism

According to Leibniz, it is doubtful that a world without evil and sin would be the best, rather he was inclined to believe that it was only a utopia, because if there was no evil in the world, we would lose many good ones as a result of overcoming evil. On the other hand, he admitted that there is quite a mess in the world. It gives the traditional answer that God does good, but because of the fault of men, they turn to evil, which thus becomes a just punishment for abusing

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God's grace (Leibniz, 2007, p. 193). It follows that God created the best possible world, the highest quality of which, however, does not lie in his perfection, but in giving space for man's development, precisely because he left to man the possibility of free will, including the commission of sin.

> If we knew the city of God just as it is, we should see that it is the most perfect state which can be devised; that virtue and happiness reign there, as far as is possible, in accordance with the laws of the best; that sin and unhappiness (whose entire exclusion from the nature of things reasons of the supreme order did not permit), are well-nigh nothing there in comparison with the good, and even are of service for greater good (Leibniz, 2007, p. 200).

Precisely for God to emphasize the value and significance of good, according to Leibniz, he also allows evil. However, he considers the fact that there is undoubtedly more good than evil in the world and in the whole universe to be the most important. If we sometimes perceive it differently, it is due to the lack of our knowledge, because according to him, God always leads to the true, greatest and absolute good (Leibniz, 2007, p. 322). Thus, Leibniz thought that God created the most perfect possible whole, in which even imperfections serve the greater perfection of the whole (Leibniz, 2007, p. 414). It is a world in which there is the greatest possible order, the greatest possible regularity, as much virtue and happiness as possible. God's infinite goodness has meant that everything he has created is in perfect harmony and wonderful harmony. Leibniz brings to the forefront precisely this universal optics, through which it is easier to explain human evil.

Probably the best-known critique of Leibniz's conception of theodicy and within it the idea of the best possible world in the history of philosophy and literature is Voltaire's satirical novel *Candide*. Servant Pangloss reminded Candide in Leibniz's spirit that

> [A]ll events form a chain in the best of all possible worlds. For in the end, if you had not been given a good kick up the backside and chased out of a beautiful castle for loving Miss Cunégonde, and if you hadn't been subjected to the Inquisition, and if you hadn't wandered about America on foot, and if you hadn't dealt the Baron a good blow with your sword, and if you hadn't lost all your sheep from that fine country of Eldorado, you wouldn't be here now eating candied citron and pistachio nuts (Voltaire, 1759/2006, p. 88).

In the story of Candide and his misfortunes, Voltaire believed that Leibniz was wrong because the existing world was not the best possible because it was full of misery, suffering, injustice, deception, and evil people (Voltaire, 2006, pp. 3–88). Arthur Schopenhauer, who, unlike Leibniz, concluded that the existing world is the worst of all possible worlds, can certainly be included among the strong critical statements on this topic in the 19th century. He pointed to the earthquakes in Lisbon, Haiti, to the buried Pompeii, to the diseases that afflict humanity, to the fact that nine-tenths of humanity is living in poverty, on the brink of perdition fighting for a bare existence. "Actually optimism cuts so strange a figure on this scene of sin, suffering, and death, that we should be forced to regard it as irony […]" (Schopenhauer, 1819/1966, pp. 583–584). Schopenhauer, like Voltaire, pointed out that, according to Christianity, the world is a tearful valley in which man is cleansed by his suffering and Leibniz's optimism is incompatible with Christianity (Schopenhauer, 1819/1966, p. 585).

On the other hand, Immanuel Kant was probably the most important advocate of Leibniz's idea of the best possible world in the 18th century, despite objections to the idea of theodicy as a justification for the existence of evil in the world (Kant 1791/1973, pp. 283–297). In his work *An attempt at some reflections on optimism* (1759) he defended Leibniz's thesis of the best possible world as an attempt at a certain optimism. According to Kant, pure reason says that

there is the best possible world, and God chooses it based on His wisdom and nobility (Kant, 1759/1992, pp. 71–73). Even more than thirty years later, Kant confirmed his previous conclusions:

> That the world created by God is the best of all possible worlds, is clear for the following reason. If a better world than the one willed by God were possible, then a will better than the divine will would also have to be possible. For indisputably, that will is better, which chooses what is better. But if a better will is possible, then so a being who could express this better will. And therefore, this being would be more perfect and better than God. But this is a contradiction; for God is *omnitudo realitatis* (Kant, 1792/1978, p. 137).

Leibniz's philosophical optimism in present debates

Despite the more than three hundred years that have passed since Leibniz's *Theodicy* was published, debates on the existence of evil in the world and the best of all possible worlds have not been silenced. On the contrary, there is a great number of present-day literature on this topic, including analyses, commentaries and assessments of Leibniz's arguments on why there is evil in the world and supporting God's choice of the best world of all (Broad, 1975; Franklin, 2002; Grover, 2003; Hadsell, 2019; Hernandez, 2010; Lougheed, 2014; MacDonald, 2018; Nadler, 2008; Silver, 2018; Steinberg, 2007; Strickland, 2005; Strickland, 2017; Rukgaber, 2019 and many others). In a similar spirit to Voltaire's, many contemporary authors, experts on Leibniz's work, voice their opinions. Ira O. Wade believes that *Candide*, in Pangloss' character, is such a crude satire of Leibniz and his views that there was no one brave enough to defend this German philosopher (Wade, 1969, 655). Concerning Leibniz's idea of the best world of all, Wade points out that, according to Voltaire, Leibniz, in this case, tried to join two contradictory ideas–the idea of ancestral sin and its entering the Divine plan of choosing the best world of all. Voltaire refused such a view as, according to him, human suffering brings no good and cannot be advantageous for God either (Wade, 1969, 689).

"Voltaire made the character of Pangloss in *Candide* look foolish by having him continually aver, in the teeth of all sorts of moral evil, that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds" (MacDonald, 2018, p. 264). Following Voltaire, Lloyd Strickland also stated that Leibniz's theodicy cannot serve as an acceptable explanation of the earthquake in Lisbon. In Strickland's view, the event not only discredited the plausibility of Leibniz's theodicy but also the idea of theodicy as such (Strickland, 2017, p. 259).

Charlie Dunbar Broad expressed a similar idea. In his view, Leibniz based his teachings about the choice of creating the best world of all possible worlds on an error when he believed that the necessary monads with determined characteristics are already in existence (Broad, 1975, p. 152). In his opinion, Leibniz believed every world must contain some metaphysical evil; therefore, every possible world must contain some form of sin and pain. However, in Broad's view, this does not result from the fact that sin and pain are part of metaphysical evil. Unlike Leibniz, he claims that metaphysical evil can exist without any moral or physical evil. He, however, believed Leibniz did not consider such complications (Broad, 1975, p. 160). He claims that Leibniz was more interested in saving God's character than in developing an optimistic view on the existing world (Broad, 1975, pp. 162–163).

On the other hand, Bruce Silver holds the opinion that Voltaire's criticism of Leibniz's optimism in the context of the existing world as the best of all possible worlds was excessive and unjust. In his view, Leibniz's best of all possible worlds is the richest in its opportunities which become reality while simplest in the laws that govern its essence and further development. Such a world is, according to him, much richer, although not perfect. He points out that Leibniz never claimed the best world of all is faultless since the only thing perfect is God and nothing else can come near Divine excellence (Silver, 2018, pp. 45–47). Jesse R.

Steinberg joins the advocates of Leibniz's argumentation in asking the question of whether God could abstain from creation if there was no such thing as the best world of all. He concluded that either the existing world is the best of all or God is not its creator (Steinberg, 2007, pp. 123–133).

One of the best present-day analyses of Leibniz's concept of the best possible world is the work *The best of all possible worlds: A story of philosophers, God, and evil* (2008) by Steven Nadler. This author states that, for Leibniz as a Lutheran, the idea of all human beings being sinful and doing evil, while only Divine mercy allows them to do good deeds, is in full accordance with the teachings of ancestral sin. Taking Divine rationality, wisdom and kindness into consideration, according to Leibniz, God opted to create the existing world rather than an infinite number of possible worlds simply because this world is the best of all. One of the reasons that make it the best possible world is the fact that it has a certain amount and type of evil present. God, in His infinite wisdom, undoubtedly knows which the best world is and, since he also possesses infinite kindness, he creates the one and the best possible world (Nadler, 2008, pp. 93–94). In Nadler's view, Leibniz, unlike Candide, does not believe that, should this be the best possible world, it is what is best for him or another being. According to Leibniz, any other world would be worse than this one regardless of the interests of any individual. Equally, he does not think that, in the best possible world, every being will experience endless happiness and bliss. In his opinion, even in the best world possible, all some know is suffering. Not every evil or a group of them leads to a good result. Sometimes a miserable life ends miserably (Nadler, 2008, pp. 98–99).

Referring to Leibniz, Nadler then points out that the concept of the best possible world includes the existence of a great number of good and beautiful things, but this conception of the world also contains a set amount of evil including the sin of certain beings commit. In the best possible world, created by the wisest, most perfect and best God, there is also sin and suffering, as God can fulfil his will to create the best world possible by allowing the existence of sin and suffering in that world. The best possible world is not the best from the aesthetic viewpoint, nor is it expressed in terms of ethics. Its status lies in its metaphysical merit compared to all other worlds. The existing world is a manifestation of the highest degree of perfection, which is expressed by the maximum level of the created being or reality (Nadler, 2008, pp. 101–102).

Based on an analysis of Leibniz's concept, Nadler came to the cognition that, according to Leibniz, the best possible world does not mean it is the place to maximise man's happiness. He even claimed there might be other possible worlds in which a human being can achieve happiness or even such worlds where no unhappiness exists. God, in Leibniz's view, wants a world with no evil; He wants all people to be happy and protected, but not all things are the same. God wants the world to follow simple universal laws which do not allow for exceptions, even though that could lead to the suffering of virtuous people. God also wants the world to be inhabited by free agents, morally responsible for their actions, i.e. actions that can cause sin, for which they then deserve to be punished (Nadler, 2008, pp. 105–106).

Nadler points out that Malebranche holds a contradictory opinion to that of Leibniz, as he claims that God did not create the best possible world and many other possible worlds are better than the existing one. Nevertheless, Leibniz, contrary to Malebranche, holds the opinion the world created by God is the best possible, despite the amount of sin and suffering, as it contains the maximum amount of perfection and happiness a world can contain (Nadler, 2008, pp. 129–130). According to the same author, if one is to use the terminology of moral philosophy, the difference between Malebranche's and Leibniz's understanding of God can be compared to those agents following deontological ethics, whose values and actions must be realised regardless of the consequences (Malebranche) and such agents that obey the rules of consequentialism and opt for such actions that bring about, if possible, the greatest amount of general good (Leibniz) (Nadler 2008, p. 133). The author also views Leibniz as a soft

determinist or compatibilist, as God is determined to choose the best option, which, however, takes away his freedom. In Nadler's view, Leibniz defined this determination as moral, rather than metaphysical or logical, as necessary reasons to choose the best possible world (Nadler 2008, p. 136).

Herder's philosophy of history as philosophical optimism

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) played a significant role in philosophical optimism formulated as the philosophy of history at the end of the 18th and throughout the first half of the 19th century. The aim of the philosophy of history was humanity, to which all human efforts were subjected, as this historical aim followed the natural laws given by God.

> We have seen, that the end of our present existence is the formation of humanity, to which all the meaner wants of this Earth are subservient, and which they are all contrived to promote. Our reasoning capacity is to be formed to reason, our finer senses to art, our propensities to genuine freedom and beauty, our moving powers to the love of mankind. Either we know nothing of our destination, and the deity deceives us in every internal and external symptom of it, to fay which would be senseless calumny; or we may deem ourselves as certain of this end, as of the being of a god, or our own existence. Yet how seldom is this eternal, this infinite end, attained here! (Herder, 1800, p. 123).

The point of our efforts should be to succeed, in our behaviour and actions, as well as our thought and decision making, in the pursuit of humanity in our own life and the lives of our closest relatives and friends, as well as our community, nation, country, and mankind.

The essence of Herder's concept of humanity is a reason as the result of our intellectual and cognitive potential, which should, however, also be completed through emotions, including aesthetic taste, the desire for freedom and empathy. Despite the fact he expected such potential to be present in every person and mankind as a whole, he still bitterly stated that only rarely is it accomplished. Such a pessimistic remark might have been directed at the rarity of its incidence in the ideal form as part of all the aspects he mentioned in his definition of the term 'humanity'. Based on Herder's definition above, at least two aspects of humanity could be involved: rational and emotional. While the first relates to reason and, following it, also science and art, the other one is connected to our actions and feelings towards other people, our closest relatives. Part of this definition is the desire for freedom and beauty.

Herder considered humanity as the purpose of human nature and believed it was with this end that God placed man's fate in his own hands. Considering mankind as we know it and looking at it through the prism of laws contained in it, one will find out nothing is above the humanity in man. In no situation or society could man have anything else in his mind or develop anything else but humanity, be it understood in any possible way (Herder, 1800, pp. 438–439). Despite Herder's philosophy of history being, primarily, a celebration of man, his abilities, reason, science, and art, true humanity, in his view, can only be achieved when one dies and meets the real divine face of mankind. It is in the search of the truth, good, and beauty and their pursuit that true humanity lies that leads man to God (Herder, 1800, pp. 126–127). Herder made humanity into a means as well as the end of man's efforts directed from God to man and back to God again.

I appreciate Herder's emphasis on the need of man to grow through overcoming external as well as internal obstacles, the struggle with his environment as well as himself, his own mistakes and flaws that prevent him from achieving the truth, good, and beauty, in using reason and justice in his life, and in relationships between people as well as nations. Victories that are a result of conquering oneself might even be rarer and more valuable, since man overpowers his 'enemy' in himself and, thus, the obstacles that obstructed his way to religious and moral

perfection. Disregarding the metaphysical scope of Herder's contemplations, I can fully agree with his views on the expectations and requirements for man's growth, improvement, and cultivation, i.e. his development as viewed by present-day philosophy.

Herder, realistically, realised this was not a linear process of constant moral progress on the way to validate humanity in an individual, nation, or mankind, which is evidenced in the general history of the human race. In spite of the regress mankind regularly comes across throughout its history, he was convinced that the human race is heading towards moral progress, manifested in the pursuit of humanity in one's behaviour and actions (Herder, 1800, pp. 227–228).[2] The laws that, in Herder's opinion, God gave mankind are inalienable and indestructible. From this viewpoint, the entire history of mankind is a race to achieve humanity and human dignity. He asked the following question: Should other nations have achieved such victories, why could we not do the same thing? For them to achieve a better form of mankind is just as possible as it is for us, considering the period circumstances, conscience, and duties. Whatever they achieved, anyone else can. Deity helps us through our industriousness, reason, and powers (Herder, 1800, pp. 441–442).

Herder's philosophy of history in present-day debates and critiques

A great number of authors devoted their works to J. G. Herder's person and work in more than two centuries. At present, Herder's work is still topical in various contexts of study, not only in philosophy, history, political science, but also, for instance, in folklore studies (Anderson-Gold 2009; Barnard 2003; Berlin 1976/2013; Dallmayr 1997; David 2007; Dietze 2008; Eggel, Leibich & Mancini-Griffoli 2007; McCarthy 2002; Palti 1999; Palti 2001; Patten 2010; Sikka 2011; Spencer 2007; Taylor 1995; Wilson 1995; Wilson 2010; Wilson 1963/2006 and many others). Nevertheless, it is not my aim to study the similarities and differences in views and interpretations, as Herder is not the main object of my paper. I only wish to briefly present some of Herder's evaluations of the issue that is in the centre of my attention regarding the study of Slovak philosophy in the first half of the 19th century from the viewpoint of *philosophical optimism*.

William A. Wilson stated that, even though Herder is only known to experts, his philosophy of history is still alive and there would be a long list of nations that have been inspired by his philosophy of history (Wilson, 1963/2006, pp. 122–123). Similarly, Charles Taylor points out that Isaiah Berlin saved Herder from philosophical oblivion. The reason why Herder was ignored was, according to Taylor, the fact he was not a rigorous philosopher; an innovative philosopher, however, does not need to be too rigorous to be able to express important ideas (Taylor, 1995, p. 79).

In the introduction to his voluminous paper, Isaiah Berlin presented a rather negative assessment of Herder regarding his populism. He claimed that even though Herder was, at the beginning, a major advocate of great 18th century Enlightenment ideas, he later slipped to a much more reactionary position, while he subordinated to reason and intellect to nationalism; he was also typical for his Gallophobia, indiscriminate faith in tradition, etc. However, Berlin further states it was also characteristic of many other German intellectuals of the given era, such as Fichte, Novalis, Schleiermacher, the Schlegels and, to some extent, also Schiller (Berlin, 1976/2013, p. 222). Many criticised Herder and his 'Blut-und-Boden nationalism', by which he significantly influenced 19th century racial and racist theories (Donskis, 2002, pp. 184–185); he was even accused of having "prefigured the Hitlerian theory of 'Blut und Boden'" (Palti, 1999, p. 322).

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[2] Sonia Sikka claims that Herder anticipated Hegel's later opinions regarding human development and progressive logic of history (Sikka, 2011, pp. 91–93).

In the context of my paper, I consider Berlin's following statement important that Herder believed the

> [G]eneral purpose to be achieved by human life on earth, which he calls *Humanität*. This is a notoriously vague term, in Herder and the *Aufklärung* generally, connoting harmonious development of all immortal souls towards universally valid goals: reason, freedom, toleration, mutual love and respect between individuals and societies, as well as physical and spiritual health, finer perceptions, dominion over the earth, the harmonious realisation of all that God has implanted in his noblest work and made in his own image. This is a characteristically all inclusive, general and optimistic formula of Weimar humanism, which Herder does, indeed, adopt, particularly in his later works, but which he does not seem to have used (for it has no precise connotation) as a universal criterion either of explanation or of value (Berlin, 1976/2013, p. 270).

Thus, according to Berlin, Herder felt a deep affinity towards the Enlightenment and wrote with optimism about human beings directed towards humanity (Berlin, 1976/2013, p. 291).

Lina Steiner points out that Herder's idea of progressive realisation of the reason is not focused on individual results but rather places to the forefront collective achievements of mankind as a whole. His idea of humanity is a vision of global cultural advancement achieved through cooperation between various individuals and cultures, while an individual is subordinated to the collective (Steiner, 2011, p. 784). Fred Dallmayr claims that Herder did not replace the term 'progress' with the idea of static repetition or chaotic discontinuity; instead, he provided the possibility of human development, including the advancement of the individual as well as collective abilities in their diversity to the highest possible level (Dallmayr, 1997, p. 107). Robert Anchor holds the view that Herder considered the advancement of humanity as guaranteed, unlike Kant who only thought of it as possible (Anchor, 2000, p. 493). The above opinion is also supported by Alan Patten, according to whom Herder thought of the advancement in history as a result of man's ability to learn from his own mistakes (Patten, 2010, p. 678). Similarly, Dominic Eggel, Andre Liebich, and Deborah Mancini-Griffoli emphasise the progressive character of Herder's perception of history as history directed towards humanity (Eggel, Leibich & Mancini-Griffoli, 2007, pp. 56, 76).

According to John A. McCarthy, Herder understood history as a dialectical process between being and becoming, as a progressive pursuit of the divine in the human race through individual cultural epochs and states of national development. The final objective of this effort was the cognition of truth, self-awareness, tolerance and achieving human bliss. For Herder, humanity was the cultivation of the intellectual and moral mission. In his opinion, all individuals possess this potential and are obliged to use it. Herder, in McCarthy's view, included in the term 'humanity' not only tolerance, altruism, affinity but also all specifically human characteristics and potential (McCarthy, 2002, pp. 47–49).

Sonia Sikka also points to Herder's belief in certain advancement in the pursuit of humanity in history and the decrease of violence (Sikka, 2011, p. 21). According to Herder, history contains certain forms of fight for humanity, which is a type of progress (Sikka, 2011, p. 49).

> More broadly, one might challenge the idea that perpetual progress, in the sense of increase, is what truly has value, and seek instead to envision a possible state of affairs that would be good in itself, sustainable, and worth repeating. Herder does believe in the possibility of a certain kind of progress, but at the same time he finds intrinsic value in the unfolding of happy human lives, of many sorts. This position avoids instrumentalizing either nature or human life. It avoids, especially, the sort of extreme teleology that can tempt people to the view that the end is what really matters, and is worth the sacrifice of individual life and happiness along the way. Contempt for

happiness can be ethically dangerous, even when (perhaps especially when) it is motivated by high moral principles (Sikka, 2011, pp. 80–81).

On the other hand, Sikka agrees with Herder refusing simple linear progress, typical for many of his contemporaries, as well as opinions expressing total scepticism of any possible historical advancement (Sikka, 2011, p. 89). In Herder's view, the degree of historical progress was freedom, together with an individual's virtue and happiness as developmental functions of various societies (Sikka, 2011, p. 97). In this author's view, Herder, in his later works, emphasised more and more the progressive aspect of his philosophy of history with humanity as a goal that is to be achieved (Sikka, 2011, p. 116). Catherine Wilson points out that Herder was fascinated by Leibniz's analogy between the divine creation of the world and the artistic creation of an object; a metaphysician is also an artist and he believed Monadology to be a poem (Wilson, 1995, pp. 467–468). She goes on to claim that Herder, in his *Letters on the improvement of humanity*, followed Leibniz in his idea of progress and development of mankind (Wilson, 2010, p. 305).

This brief overview of the opinions of Herder and his philosophy of history can be concluded by stating that the authors appreciate, in his concept of history, the optimistic element of progress aimed at the pursuit of humanity in the history of mankind. On the other hand, they positively view his realisation that historical advancement is not linear but, rather, accompanied by inhumanity and the need to cope with its various forms in individual periods of the historical progress of mankind, which can be used to evidence the claim that Herder's philosophy of history is a *philosophy of historical progress* which followed Leibniz's *philosophical optimism*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be recalled that Slovak ethical thinking of the 18th and 19th centuries also reflected Leibniz's and Herder's conceptions of the philosophy of optimism and the philosophy of historical progress, which significantly influenced some of its representatives. Among the representatives of Slovak ethical thinking of the 18th century, Augustín Doležal (1737–1802) should be mentioned and his work *Pamětná celém světu Tragoedia, anebožto Veršovné vypsánj žalostného Prvnjch Rodičů Pádu* (Doležal, 1791), here in the first place. In addition to his views on the creation of the world, Doležal largely copied Leibniz's views on man. I consider it very important Doležal's confirmation of Leibniz's idea that this world is based on the fact that his good arises from overcoming evil and makes the existing world the best of all possible worlds (Fordinálová, 1993, p. 157; Gluchman, 2011, pp. 209–215; Münz, 1961, pp. 227–228).

In the first half of the 19th century, the development of the ideas of Herder's philosophy of history as a continuation of Leibniz's philosophy of optimism can be found especially in Ján Kollár (1793–1852) and Ján Chalupka (1791–1871). Kollár and Chalupka, in the spirit of Leibniz's philosophy of optimism and Herder's philosophy of history of progress, valued human history mainly as a history of progress in all areas of life and refused to overestimate the past (Kollár, 1823/1831, pp. 57–69; Chalupka, 1847). On the other hand, by recalling their own mistakes and shortcomings, they sought the moral improvement of man, emphasizing the belief in a better future for man and humanity, even based on faith in the power of reason.

Through the work of Augustín Doležal, Ján Kollár, and Ján Chalupka, it is possible to document the connection of Slovak ethical thinking of the 18th and 19th centuries to the European philosophical discourse of the time. This confirms the significant contribution to the development of philosophical and ethical thinking in the Slovak intellectual environment of the end of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century coming from the external environment, mainly through the study of young Slovak intelligence at German universities.

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