

ἀρχή

Substance, Causation and Free Will in Spinoza and Leibniz

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In Western monotheism, it is believed that God possesses all of man's moral features in their perfection—that indeed man was created in His¹ (spiritual) image. It follows from this doctrine that He possesses a perfect will, which guides the fates of men and the material flow of reality. This divine attribute is usually referred to as Providence. Much energy has been devoted through the ages to reconciling our own claim to free will as humans with this transcendent will of God. But a more fundamental question remains to be asked, if one considers the logical intricacies this notion. For how can it be logically consistent that God's determinations are freely chosen, if every one of these choices can be traced back to prior causes that themselves demand that certain necessary effects result? If one were to pursue the logic of this proposition back to its strictest foundation (the *causa sui*), he would be forced to conclude that there was never any point at which a deviation could have occurred, where different possibilities might have emerged. The conception of God as acting freely according to His will would thus seem fundamentally flawed in this system of causation.

This apparent contradiction was the occasion of a major controversy at the close of the seventeenth century. The iconic philosophers Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz stood at opposite poles in this debate. The former's final treatise, *The Ethics*, lays forth the provocative assertion that God lacks free will. Spinoza contends that the order and relation of God's modal (i.e., existential) emanations follow with necessity from the logic of His essence, in much the same way that the sum of the interior angles in a triangle (180°) proceeds from its own immanent logic. Constrained by geometric necessity, the creative activity of God could no more be said to be freely willed than this

angular relation is freely willed by the triangle.² Thus, while God is still considered *autonomous* within Spinozism (since there is nothing extrinsic to Him, there can be no heteronomy), contingency is nevertheless ruled out completely. Anticipating the public backlash his claims might incur, Spinoza refrained from publishing this work in his lifetime, only allowing for it to appear in a posthumous printing (1677). The coherence of his argument was beyond dispute, however, holding its own against the criticism directed at it.

Yet the claims of *The Ethics* were vigorously challenged by the leading minds of the day. Among them, Leibniz proposed to outflank its formidable reasoning by rethinking the divine economy of Providence. This would involve an expansion of Spinoza's definition of Substance, by which Spinoza had arrived at his famous dictum that God, and God alone, is Substance.³ Leibniz's system additionally promised to restore the metaphysical category of possibility to the privileged preeminence it had enjoyed over actuality prior to Spinoza's necessitarian determinism. Leibniz attempted to demonstrate this by arguing that the multitude of factual contingencies which present themselves empirically are merely guided by an overarching rationale, or a sufficient reason; in every contingent case, other possibilities exist.⁴ Leibniz claimed that the result of any sequence of events is a foregone conclusion *only after* God freely determines to actualize that which will bring about the highest possible good. As Leibniz would explain it to the perplexed Catholic theologian Antoine Arnaud, the actual outcome is only necessary when it is considered outside of the real series of hypothetical possibilities. It is important, he reminds Arnaud, not to "confuse *necessitatem ex hypothesi* with absolute necessity."⁵ By emphasizing this distinction Leibniz purports to unravel the seeming inconsistency of God's free will with the pervasive necessity of the universe.

This paper will reexamine these competing views of freedom, and will attempt to determine the extent to which Leibniz provides a satisfactory alternative to Spinozism. In so doing, it will focus on the two factors most central to this dispute: the philosophical idea of Substance, and the twin categories of contingency and necessity (the latter of which is required for the notion of causation). These are the concepts on which the notion of free will hinges. Free will is to be taken in the strict sense that something's choices are not actually determined by anything other than itself; an entity presumes that there are a number of essential possibilities available to it which are actually contingent upon its decisions. Possibility means that something *can be willed otherwise*. Sketching the results of our inquiry in advance, if one accepts the allegedly Cartesian definitions of Spinoza's system and the geometric rules by which his argument proceeds, Free will in the above sense is impossible. No solution immanent to Spinoza's system can be construed. Leibniz's proposed solution, while highly innovative and logically feasible, involves a crucial revision of the term "Substance." His rehabilitation of possibility also presumes a method differing from Spinoza's, though it is justifiable on its own terms. If God's act of self-creation is to be called free, it must logically be an act of affirmation, which would obviously belong to an original (and originating) volitional act. This con-

clusion, while never explicitly arrived at by Leibniz, is all the same suggested by the stated goals of his philosophy. This is the answer later provided by Schelling, the great synthesizer of Spinozist and Leibnizian metaphysics.

We shall begin by outlining the main points of Spinoza's argument in *The Ethics*. Modeling his exposition after the apodictic genre of geometrical proof, Spinoza argues that God is indeed bound by the blind causal necessity which governs all existence. When reading this work, one must divorce oneself from the prevailing Judeo-Christian understanding of God. As it turns out, Spinoza's conception is quite removed from the personal deity of traditional monotheism. For Spinoza, God is roughly equivalent to Nature (*deus sive natura*). It is the sole substance upon which the rest of existence is built. Substance is here to be circumscribed to its narrow philosophical sense, as *that upon which existence and existents subsist*. Spinoza offers another formulation of this idea: Substance is "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed..."⁶ This view of the world might be properly characterized as *panentheism*, which holds that all things exist *in* God. As per the definition provided at the outset of *The Ethics*, Substance must be regarded as unitary and absolutely infinite. By this, Spinoza means that the modifications of God's substantial attributes proceed in an absolutely infinite series of emanations. Here we need only regard God's attributes as demarcated between extension (*res extensa*) and cognition (*res cogitans*), which respectively preside over the finite material and ideal domains of existence.⁷

What must be regarded as essential is the *manner* in which these emanations proceed. Spinoza presupposes the classic metaphysical category of efficient causation as determining their consecutive modulations. Of course, this form of causation can be seen to have two distinct spheres of application. In one sense, its consequence is atemporal (logical); in the other, temporal (ætiological). The former covers rational necessity, in which certain results are required by an object's internal logic. Geometrical proofs adhere to this form of causation. The latter sense of causation allows for mechanical necessity, in which objects are compelled to definite outcomes by external forces. In both cases, however, causation can be formulated as follows:

ANTECEDENT/CAUSE: Because something (*A*) is,

CONSEQUENT/EFFECT: something else (*B*), which is distinct from *A*, must also (necessarily) be. Therefore,

CONDITIONAL CORRELATE: $A \supset B$

Abiding by this axiom, each successive state of affairs necessarily produces the one that follows it. One cause begets a necessary effect, which in turn becomes a cause which begets another necessary effect, and so on *ad infinitum*. If the mechanics (perhaps the

geometrics) of God's emanations are purely causal, contingency as such is thus completely abolished. The idea that a number of potential outcomes might surface from any of these given states likewise collapses, since each necessarily determines the precise state of affairs that will become actualized thereafter. The only results which are ever possible are those which will eventually become actual, derived from those actual states which preceded it. Spinoza thereby arrives at the conclusion which has since (by Schelling, among others) become simplified in the maxim "All possibility *is* actuality."⁸

If this insight is so incontrovertibly true, then whence arose this common conception of God as an intentional being? Spinoza famously contends in the Appendix to Part I of *The Ethics* that the idea of God's attribute of free will is the inheritance of the human proclivity to assign to nature qualities that we find in ourselves. The notion that God acts in such a manner as would be judged similar to our own (whether perfected or not) is a product of our vestigial superstitions, which have in the past tended to anthropomorphize objects of our experience. The ascription of a free will to God therefore rests upon a baseless analogy.

However, the root of this mistake can be more specifically located. Spinoza asserts that we project onto nature our notion of final causation, a special category of metaphysical causation peculiar to humans. This Aristotelian idea is meant to describe the teleological nature of human activity, since we knowingly perform certain actions as means with ends in mind. Because men are "conscious of their volitions and desires," they are able to perform purposive acts.⁹ The same intentionality cannot be applied to God. The chain of events provoked by God's infinity of modal emanations has no final goal or purpose in mind. Every outcome proceeds with absolute necessity, and is finally attributable to God's sheer power—not to anything we might think of as Providence. As such, that faculty we call God's volition is conceptually indistinct from His substantial attribute of Cognition. Even this is misleading, as God's "knowledge" is limited to that which actually results from the causal matrix of His issuing-forth. *God cannot "imagine" possibilities which are not simultaneously actualized in reality.* In other words, God's epistemic capacity is at the same time *really* ontogenetic.¹⁰

If God—our divine likeness—lacks this volitional faculty, the chance that mankind would possess this feature apart from Him would seem negligible. Indeed, Spinoza finally concludes that our self-conception as freely acting agents is also an illusion, founded on misapprehension and vanity. What we consider will or volition is conditioned by the same necessity as that of all causation. In Spinoza's words: "In the mind [human or otherwise] there is no absolute, or free, will. The mind is determined to this or that volition by a cause, which is likewise determined by another cause, and this again by another, and so on *ad infinitum*."¹¹ When we are aware of our desires or appetitions, and come to understand their causal source ("I desire to eat *because* I am hungry, or *because* I haven't eaten in a while"), we understand more thoroughly the mechanism that compels us to act upon those desires. Even what we take to be our free choice in abstaining from things we desire can be linked to opposing desires (with causal origins)

which compel our actions with equal force. For example, “Though I desire to eat, I choose not to eat now *because* I desire to save my appetite for dinner *because* I promised my friend I would wait and therefore desire to keep it...” and so on. Since our “choices” are in fact causally compelled, our idea of the free will can be accredited to our mere ignorance of the causes compelling us to act one way or another.¹² When it comes to propositions in which one’s desires are not the primary issue, that which is known to be true necessarily overrides that which is desired.¹³ For instance, one can try as he might to convince himself that “ $2 + 2 = 5$,” desiring it more than anything in the world, and yet fail against the insurmountable body of experience that tells him otherwise.

Hence for Spinoza, the possibility of free will was ruled out unconditionally. The only freedom he thought feasible for mankind was freedom from the ignorance of its illusions.¹⁴ Spinoza’s philosophy laid bare many of the categories which had hitherto animated Western metaphysics, removing altogether the venerable notions of possibility and contingency. Their negative ancillaries, actuality and necessity, could hardly have much meaning if they could not be contrasted with their opposites. Only metaphysical causation remained unscathed, insofar as it presumed necessity and annihilated possibility. Substance was reduced to a singularity (albeit one that encompassed *everything* infinitely), from which all existence followed necessarily.

Many who found Spinoza’s conclusions unpalatable set to work trying to overcome his postulates. G.W. Leibniz’s proposed solution was deemed one of the most adequate and novel of these attempts. The concrete beginnings of Leibniz’s defense of free will can be seen in his brief “Discourse on Metaphysics,” which appeared in 1686. Another treatment of the problem is offered in his later (1714) opuscule, *Monadology*. Leibniz’s approach in the latter of these works, like the one used by Spinoza, begins from a discussion of Substance, while in the former he attempts to deduce the possibility of human agency from an analysis of God’s freedom. In this endeavor, he is perhaps unable to rid himself of the fatalism inherent to systems involving a notion of divine Providence, but he does offer a convincing refutation (provided one accepts his premises) of the absolute causal necessity of Spinoza’s philosophy.

Leibniz, in his *Monadology*, defines “monads”¹⁵ as “simple substances” that have an atomic structure. They contain “neither extension, nor form, nor divisibility,” and for this reason cannot be conceived of as plain physical entities; instead, they belong to the realm of metaphysics.¹⁶ Succinctly put, monads are immaterial (ideal). Their irreducibility constitutes their simplicity. Leibniz’s basic definition of Substance is identical to the one used by Spinoza, as that upon which existence subsists. To this, however, he introduces a twist: individual monads (roughly synonymous with “awarenesses”) are the substantial grounds for existence. Essential to note here is Leibniz’s fundamental idealism. Thinking things (*res cogitans*, a paradigm borrowed from Cartesian philosophy) are, by dint of subjective self-reference, the only proper substances in the world. All existence subsists only by virtue of being thought. In other words, objective existence is predicated “virtually” (if not “expressly”) *in* the thinking subject (Substance).¹⁷

The term “monad” might be somewhat demystified by observing that Leibniz takes it to refer to the pneumatic or “entelechial” component of organic nature. With certain objects, it can be used to express what in humans is called a spirit and what in animals is called a soul, insofar as monads comprise thinking awarenesses. Leibniz prefers to “reserve the term Soul for those whose perception is more distinct and is accompanied by memory,” or those monads which possess at least a rudimentary degree of intelligence (i.e., animals).¹⁸ A yet higher order is set aside for “*spirits* or rational souls”—that is, humans. As concerns our present discussion of freedom, we will restrict our investigation to this last (spiritual) species of monad, whose members qualify as reflective or rational. For this is the sort of substance which belongs to humans, as apperceptive consciousnesses whose freedom makes them capable of moral action.

Following Spinoza’s proposal that unique substances which “have nothing in common” cannot causally interact with one another, monads cannot be externally motivated to action by one another—no other substance can have any bearing upon its activity.¹⁹ Monads can therefore rightly be called autonomous, in that their actions and desires answer to no outside influences. According to Leibniz, every spirit is capable of self-recognition in the Cartesian sense of “*cogito, ergo sum*.” That is to say, they cannot deny their own thought, and therefore must exist insofar as they think. The continuity and endurance of the spirit’s identity makes it accountable for its freely-chosen actions:

...the intelligent soul [spirit], knowing that it is and having the ability to say that word ‘I’ so full of meaning, not only continues and exists...but it remains the same from the moral standpoint, and constitutes the same personality, for it is its memory or knowledge of this ego which renders it open to punishment and reward.²⁰

This “I” for Leibniz refers to the concrete “unity” of the monad’s conscious identity which contains its “multiplicity” or variety of distinct thoughts.²¹ The unity of these variegated thoughts also comprises the monad’s inaccessibility, in that no other simple substance can inhabit or alter its awareness. Its ideas are its own.²² Each monad is thus the proper author of his own destiny, arbitrating its actions freely by use of its volitional capacity. Reality appears to us as a domain fraught with contingency, which presents us with numerous possibilities (“options”) from which we can choose. Reflective acts (those which contemplate experience from our faculty of memory) bestow upon us an understanding of necessary truths, providing us with a range of objects which we can distinguish from one another. Even these allegedly necessary truths depend on ideal relations interior to the spirit’s moral sovereignty. The human spirit is capable of and responsible for purposive action by which it freely decides which ends it would like to achieve. As such, the locus of final causation (which for Leibniz is concretely real) is to be found in the intentional activity of the spirit.²³

Recalling the objective Leibniz first set out to achieve, one might fairly ask what

part God, or more specifically God's will (Providence), plays in relation to monads. After all, how would it follow that God could causally intervene in the destinies of these supposedly simple substances? For Leibniz, the answer is simple: "created substances depend upon God who preserves them and can produce them continually by a kind of emanation just as we produce our thoughts..."²⁴ However, this clearly contradicts Spinoza's definition that substances cannot be conceived through anything else. Leibniz's monads, substances though he might claim them to be, are independent only of one another. They are not self-generating, in the way that God as Substance was for Spinoza (however unfree this generation was); rather, they are substances *created* by God. God stands with regard to spirits in terms of a grounding relationship: the ground (God) is unconditioned while the grounded (individual monads) are at least partially conditioned. This raises an apparent problem for Leibniz's system. If God alone is truly self-sufficient, can any simple substances (which necessarily depend on God) be said to subsist in themselves? However, Leibniz does not seem bothered by this discrepancy. He seems comfortable in his distinction, inasmuch as God grants these monads a high degree of independence in their actions apart from His gracious dispensations. Despite this attitude, the implications of his redefinition can scarcely be exaggerated. Here can be found one of the precise points which separate Leibnizian metaphysics from its Spinozistic counterpart.

Furthermore, Leibniz's God is able to exceed the normative constraints imposed on monads (such that they cannot know or act upon one another). Leibniz writes: "In the strict metaphysical sense, no external cause acts upon us excepting God alone, and he is in immediate relationship with us only by virtue of our continual dependence on him."²⁵ It follows from this statement that God is a sort of transcendent Substance ("supreme substance"), as opposed to the limited substance of monads. He is able to inhabit the awareness of every consciousness through his limitless omniscience, intimating the ideal contents of each of these windowless monads with perfect clarity. This is indicated more obviously by Leibniz's brief description that "...each substance is a world by itself, independent of everything else excepting God."²⁶

To delve deeper into our discussion of will, we will briefly regress to a more basic question: what is God *in-Himself*? How is He substantially related to the universe in general? Leibniz answers this in his *Monadology*: "...[T]he ultimate reason of things must be in a necessary substance in which the detail of the changes is present only eminently, as in its source. It is this we call *God*."²⁷ Examining this closely, we may notice several clues this gives as to the nature of God. First of all, Leibniz here clearly establishes God as a teleological agent, and a necessary one at that. God is the "ultimate reason of things," or that which orders and arranges reality according to His intentional will. He is the reason for-Himself and in-Himself, and from His infinity the universe is granted purpose. Secondly, God is a necessary substance, from which all contingent existences and subsidiary substances flow (a sort of "fountainhead"). This point allows us to characterize His nature much more explicitly. In an even wider sense—one that distinguishes God's

essence more plainly—God can be conceived as a sort of met substance (perhaps a “hyposubstance”), or the infinite Substance upon which all other finite substances depend (though these substances infinitely represent the world, they are limited by the finitude of their spheres). By way of analogy, Leibniz lends weight to this interpretation:

...it appears clearly that all other substances depend upon God just as our thoughts emanate from our own substances; that God is all in all and that he is intimately united to all created things...²⁸

All of existence is a predicate to His absolute subjectivity, a modular expression of His infinite power, knowledge, and will.

So it seems that if we are to find a source for our own free volitional nature, we must begin with God in His interaction with the universe. We must see to what extent God exercises His will freely. And so we ask: what is the correlation between God’s supreme substantiality and the metaphysical antinomies of possibility and actuality, contingency and necessity?

Leibniz begins by asserting that there is *essentially* an infinite number of possible worlds which might become actualized by the free choice of God. Each one is distinct from the other, even if these differences would comprise only the most trivial details. God is at all times aware of the subtle nuances contained in each, and the potential consequences that might result from the actualization of any of them. Leibniz, having already defined God as an intentional being, remarks upon the purposiveness of His choices:

Now, as there is an infinity of possible universes in the ideas of God, and as only one of them can exist, there must be a sufficient reason for God’s choice, which determines him to one rather than another.²⁹

What would incline God to choose one rather than another? For Leibniz, the answer lies in God’s eternal resolution to bring things about in such a way that would ensure their greatest real perfection.

The succession of God’s choices here manifests itself as Providence. The sequence of temporal events would not be caused by blind material efficiency, but rather by sublime spiritual finality. God rules over the universe with a mind to the perfect ends He will achieve, according to Aristotle’s principle of final causation, which Spinoza had so ridiculed. The logic of this argument is sound. God, under no causal compulsion which might necessitate His activities, determines or resolves *from eternity to eternity* to bring about only those possibilities which He (intellectually) knows will guarantee the greatest harmony in actuality. Each of these possible worlds *could* exist; it is simply fatal (as per the will of God) that they *will not* exist. Though one might protest by contending that things destined to happen are for all intents and purposes necessitated to happen, in

truth, Leibniz would respond, it is only thanks to the continued good will of God (as opposed to a more capricious will) that they will be ordered in this way. We can have no sure knowledge of the future such as God's, unless, by gracious dispensation, he delivers us with prophesy. Only in the divine concept of each monad, which we can never know, is there the fatal code by which its destiny (and thereby the destiny of the universe) will unfold. Our souls reflect and represent the infinity of the universe in our finitude, anticipating and accommodating the appetitions³⁰ of all existence. God is the sole architect in this cosmogony—our free actions are but footnotes to His providential schema.³¹

This brings us to our final point of consideration. It is a familiar theological problem, one which has no easy answer. Leibniz, however, believed his system could account for it. One might chastise God and His advocates, asking: how can we say a spirit is free in its actions when God has perfect foreknowledge of its fate, the sins and good deeds it would perform, and has decided to create it with all this in mind? Why would God create Judas, knowing beforehand that he would betray his Messiah? Could Judas have acted otherwise? Leibniz parries these questions with solid reasoning. He responds that God inclines men's souls without necessitating them to one particular action or another. It was indeed possible that Judas might have acted differently—other possibilities presented themselves—but as a result of his free choices only one of these possibilities actually ascended into reality. God's decisions are surely infallible, but this is not because he forced Judas' spirit to act in a certain way; he simply knew in advance the way in which Judas *would* freely act. The question as to why God, knowing that Judas would act thus, nevertheless elected to create him seems clear to Leibniz. He suspects that God knew that a greater good would result from this particular Judas' evil actions than would otherwise have been possible (since this is, after all, the best of all possible worlds).³² There is no absolute necessity to which we must answer; instead, we freely act according to our volitional faculty. God merely knows which possibilities will be actualized as a result of our free actions.

In summation, we might concisely appraise the extent to which Leibniz provided an acceptable counterargument to Spinoza's necessitarian determinism. Spinoza's system is, taken on its own terms, theoretically impregnable. If one agrees to his definitions and axioms, it is difficult to see any other way of construing things. One quickly sees that his system is based principally upon the notion of a single, all-encompassing Substance constrained by an efficient species of causation. Conversely, Leibniz's system takes for its point of departure the notion of a plurality of simple substances (monads) which ultimately obey a teleological or final order of causation. Commonalities surely exist between the two philosophers' conceptions of Substance. But Spinoza's definition in *The Ethics* permits of no diversity; Leibniz's claim to the contrary in his *Monadology* indicates a significant redefinition of the term. Leibniz himself, in one of his more obscure essays, notes both the similarities and differences his view of Substance bears with Spinoza's, writing that the latter's assertion of the indivisibility of Substance "is not to be

wondered at, in his system, because he [Spinoza] only admits one substance; but in mine, it is equally true, although I admit an infinity of substances; for in my system, all substances are indivisible, or atoms."³³ While both hold that substances must be metaphysically simple (thus indissoluble), Leibniz does not share the notion that they must be *conceivable* only through itself. Monads (*qua* simple created substances) are *inconceivable* without their *conception* in God, the so-called "Supreme substance."

Whether or not the human spirit (as the highest order of monad) is therefore determined in its actions by God remains ambiguous; Leibniz, for his part, contends that it can only be "inclined." Spinoza might counter that this is a dubious distinction, but the same might perhaps be said of his own definition of Substance. Indeed, Leibniz's alternative to Spinoza's view of human freedom seems a hazy one at best. Lessing and Jacobi, two of the most influential eighteenth-century German philosophers, famously agreed that both Leibniz and Spinoza "have fundamentally the same doctrine of freedom... and only an illusion distinguishes their theories."³⁴ They may in some measure be correct in this judgment. But Leibniz's protestations to the contrary must not be ignored. He writes: "As to what Spinoza says...that God is, by the same necessity, cause of himself and of all things, and...that the power of all things is the power of God, I do not admit it." Leibniz clarifies that "God necessarily exists, but He produces things by his own free will; the power of all things is also produced by God; but this power is distinct from the Divine, and things themselves work, although they have received the power of action."³⁵ In other words, God only imparts power (including the power of free will) to His creations. Their actions are thus not God's. In fashioning the universe in its highest possible perfection, God intellectually surveys the infinity of potential personalities and creates those whose free choices He knows will produce the greatest good. The difference might still seem slight, but its conceptual basis is nevertheless valid.

All this is metaphysically well and good, but what of Spinoza's charge that man's attribution of intellectual and volitional characteristics to God stems from his penchant to anthropomorphize nature? Though this line of argument is not founded on strictly rational grounds, its explanatory power is nonetheless convincing. It is a damning criticism for any system that seeks to preserve the notion of a personal deity. Leibniz does not address it with an elaborate deduction, however. To do so might be inappropriate in any case, since Spinoza intended through this argument to provide a persuasive empirical account for why humans would so delude themselves as to the impersonality of nature. The rational side of his contention, which he was attempting to bolster by this appeal to human experience, "asserts that the intelligence and will of God agree with ours only in name, because ours is posterior, and His, anterior to all things." Leibniz questions the tenability of this inference, however, remarking that "it by no means follows from this, that they agree only in name."³⁶ Despite Spinoza's allegations that he would be guilty of anthropomorphizing nature, Leibniz defiantly reaffirms his triune designation of God's attributes as consisting in His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence.

In the last analysis, however, if Leibniz were to accept the causal necessity, it seems he would have to concede the debate to Spinoza. For following the traditional line that God is the first, self-causing cause (*causa sui*) all effects, including His own subsequent actions, would proceed with absolute necessity. God would immediately become actuality, and every reality thereafter would simply extend that actuality. Leibniz for the most part shies away from directly confronting this issue, preferring to stress his reasonably plausible thesis of God's eternal resolution to (actually) bring about the most perfect possible world. Though God's three essential aspects according to Leibniz (potency, intellect, and volition) might be considered effectively simultaneous—since they converge in eternity—one of them must hold logical primacy over the other two. Spinoza, of course, declared God's power to be supreme, and as a result God's intellect and will were wholly subsumed by it, rendered epiphenomenal by its determinations. Were Leibniz to adopt the Thomistic position that God's intellect is primary, he could little avoid Spinoza's insight that God's existence would follow from his essence with absolute logical necessity. One recalls Spinoza's analogy of this with the relationship of a triangle's existence with its essence.

The only remaining response to this predicament seems implicitly workable through Leibniz's system, however. If God's self-creative act was itself an act of His eternal free will, which thence issued forth all of possibility and actuality, then free will as such could be preserved. This is the conclusion which Schelling would later arrive at in conceiving of God's subjective existence (*natura naturans*) as a perpetually positive act of "self-affirmation."³⁷ For Leibniz, the free volition of God would provide us with a similar faculty, whereby we would be self-actualizing substances. The necessity of this (logically) "first" act would itself fall under the category of final causation. Such a willful determination cannot be conceived as responding to a desire, since desire implies a privation and a perfect (i.e., complete) being cannot be thought to be lacking in any way.

It must be noted, however, that this solution requires a step which Leibniz never explicitly makes. Laid down synoptically, our conclusions can be briefly recapitulated. First of all, for Spinoza the origin (if we can call it such) of God is geometrically self-causal. By contrast, Leibniz (along with Schelling) would have to view God's existence as itself a free act of His will. It would still be true to say that God is necessary, if Leibniz only means by this that God is necessary for possibility and actuality to exist at all. In other words, Spinoza's God *is* perfect and (involuntarily) *produces* perfection; Leibniz's God *is* perfect and (voluntarily) *wills* perfection. Both systems are sound according to their own concepts, and are similar in more ways than either would probably like to admit. A satisfying philosophical explanation of freedom's relation to necessity might reside only in a blending of the two, in the synthetic vein of perhaps Schelling or Hegel.

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NOTES

- 1: For the purposes of this essay, “man” and masculine pronouns will be used to more generally designate humanity (its male and female members alike). Likewise, in keeping with the standard appellations of Judaism and Christianity, pronoun references to God will be male-gendered, with the first letter capitalized (He, His, etc.).
- 2: Spinoza, Baruch. *The Ethics*. From *The Ethics and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley, edited and with an introduction by Seymour Feldman. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1982. Part I, Proposition xvii, Scholium, p. 45.
- 3: *Ibid.*, Part I, Proposition xiv, p. 39
- 4: Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Monadology*. Translated by Nicholas Rescher. From *G.W. Leibniz’s Monadology*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991. §36, p. 21.
- 5: Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Correspondence with Arnauld*. From *Baron Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz: Basic Writings—Discourse on Metaphysics, Correspondence with Arnauld, Monadology*. Translated by George R. Montgomery. La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1968, p. 77.
- 6: *Ibid.*, Part I, Definition iii, p. 31.
- 7: The world of ideas and the world of things are not so unrelated in Spinoza’s system as they are in the dualism of Cartesian philosophy. However, they are still considered separate attributes. Though the use of “material” and “ideal” as domainial categories to Spinoza’s philosophy might seem a bit anachronistic, they fit quite nicely to the task of describing the substantial attributes as Extension and Cognition.
- 8: To use Spinoza’s own words: “All things have necessarily followed from the nature of God (Pr. 16) and have been determined to exist and to act in a definite way from the necessity of God’s nature (Pr. 29). Therefore if things could have been of a different nature or been determined to act in a different way so that the order of Nature would have been different, then God’s nature, too, could have been other than it now is, and therefore (Pr. 11) this different nature, too, would have had to exist, and consequently there would have been two or more God’s, which (Cr., Pr. 14) is absurd. Therefore things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than is the case.” Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Part I, Proposition xxxiii, Scholium, p. 54.
- 9: *Ibid.*, Part I, Appendix, pp. 57-58.
- 10: *Ibid.*, Part I, Proposition xxxii, Scholium and Corollaries 1 and 2, pp. 53-54.
- 11: *Ibid.*, Part II, Proposition xlvi, p. 95.
- 12: *Ibid.*, Part II, Proposition xxxv, Scholium, p. 86.
- 13: Spinoza counters the Cartesian idea that we may freely assent to one conclusion or another based on our volition by pointing out that our assent or dissent on the issue

- is beholden to our comprehension or understanding of the issues involved, determining our choice by necessity. The pertinent passages can be found in *Ibid.*, Part II, Proposition xlix, p 96.
- 14: *Ibid.*, Part IV, Proposition lxviii, Scholium, p. 193.
 - 15: I shall use the term “monad” throughout interchangeably with the Leibniz’s alternative “entelechy.” As he explains it: “One could give the name entelechies to all simple substances or created monads. For they all have in them a certain perfection (echousi to enteles); there is a certain self-sufficiency (autarkeia) that makes them sources of their own internal actions and, so to speak, incorporeal automata.”
 - 16: Leibniz, *Monadology*, p. 17.
 - 17: Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Discourse on Metaphysics*. From Baron Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz: *Basic Writings – Discourse on Metaphysics, Correspondence with Arnauld, Monadology*. Translated by George R. Montgomery. La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1968. §VIII, p. 13.
 - 18: Leibniz, *Monadology*, §19, p. 19.
 - 19: *Ibid.*, §7, p. 17.
 - 20: Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*. §XXXIV, p. 58.
 - 21: Leibniz, *Monadology*. §12-14, p. 18.
 - 22: Leibniz, *Discourse on Method*. §XXIX, p.48.
 - 23: Leibniz, *Monadology*. §30, pp. 20-21.
 - 24: Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*. §XIV, pp. 23-24.
 - 25: *Ibid.*, §XXVIII, pp. 46-47.
 - 26: *Ibid.*, §XIV, p. 24.
 - 27: Leibniz, *Monadology*. §38, p. 22.
 - 28: Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*. §XXXII, p. 54.
 - 29: Leibniz, *Monadology*. §53, p. 23.
 - 30: “The action of the internal principle which brings about the change or the passage from one perception to another may be called appetite.” *Ibid.*, §15, p. 18.
 - 31: *Ibid.*, §78, p. 27.
 - 32: Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*. §XXX, pp. 48-54.
 - 33: Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. “Critical Remarks of Leibniz from the Original Manuscript in the Royal Library at Hanover.” Translated, prefaced, and introduced by Count A. Foucher de Careil. From *A Refutation Recently Discovered of Spinoza by Leibnitz*. Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co, p. 133.
 - 34: Jacobi, Freidrich Heinrich. From *On the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn*. From Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph’s *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. Translated, introduced, and annotated by Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, p. 111.
 - 35: Leibniz, “Critical Remarks,” p. 136.
 - 36: *Ibid.*, p. 144.
 - 37: It is important not to conflate Schelling’s idea of God with Leibniz’s. Specifically, it

would seem that Schelling's idea of the subjective element of God's unity (*natura naturans*) which affirms is close to Leibniz's God, while the objective element (*natura naturata*) which is affirmed is much more akin to Spinoza's God. In this light, Schelling might be seen as offering a synthesis between the two thinkers.