

Correspondence

Dear Editors:

I found Ross Wolfe's article on Spinoza and Leibniz ["Substance, Causation and Free Will in Spinoza and Leibniz," *Arché*, II:1, 2008] somewhat misled in rejecting Spinoza's rejection of free will. I disagree with Wolfe's implication that Leibniz is necessary to complete or correct Spinoza's system, as I believe Spinoza is not in need of correction, and that Leibniz does not offer a more compelling account of free will.

The fatalistic interpretation of the *Ethics* focuses on the fact that there is a chain of causes preceding any human involvement in an event. There is something that inevitably causes a given human action, and that cause has its own cause, and so on. Fixating on the causes that precede one's actions does seem to emphasize a certain futility in acting. Even so, Spinoza does not intend to belittle man with his theory. On the contrary, man is of equal importance in the causal system as every other cause within it.

Nowhere in the *Ethics* does Spinoza attempt to argue that man does not cause anything. He does argue, of course, that man cannot be the ultimate cause of an event, but this does not demote man in any way. He is on equal footing with all the other causes in the series; like each of them, he has a cause that precedes him, and like all of them, he has an event following him of which he is the cause. By picking out particular passages, it is easy to reach unpleasant conclusions from the *Ethics*, but a fair treatment of the work as a whole reveals that man has no cause for dissatisfaction with his role.

In IP32, Spinoza states that "The will cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary one... even if the will be supposed to be infinite, it must still be determined to exist and produce an effect by God..."²¹ From the fatalist perspective, this claim makes man out to be impotent. This proposition does appear in the text, but the context in which it occurs should not be overlooked. Just before this, in IP29, Spinoza argues that "In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way."²² With this in mind, it is clear that man should not be humiliated by his necessity. Yes, he is determined, but so is everything else, including the causes that determine him. A negative reaction to this argument amounts to the absurd expectation that man should be an exception to the laws arising from the infinite, divine nature of God.

Furthermore, the fatalistic complaints of impotence are unfounded as well. Man is just as capable of acting as a cause as anything else. In fact, it is equally necessary that he cause some effect as it is that he be caused himself, by IP36:

Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow.

Dem: Whatever exists, expresses the nature, or essence of God in a certain and determinate way (by P25C), that is (by P34), whatever ex-

ists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God, which is the cause of all things. So (by P16), from [NS: everything which exists] some effect must follow, q.e.d.³

By this argument, man should by all rights be satisfied with his abilities. Not only is he capable of causing an effect, he is incapable of not doing so. If Spinoza were to say, “Whatever exists, with the exception of man, etc.,” then perhaps there would be cause for concern and dejection. Instead, man comprises a crucial, necessary part of Spinoza’s causal system. If he were absent, the effects determined to occur by God would not come to pass; the link in the causal chain that is man would be missing, the effect he produces would not occur and the system would come to an abrupt halt.

From this perspective, man is misled in despairing of his inefficacy. Spinoza is only arguing that there are many causes and many effects, all of which play a part in the unfolding of the universe, and man is one of them. In light of his equal inclusion, it now seems petty and egotistical for man to bemoan the fact that there are other causes in the system. Man is a part of God’s essence and as such expresses his power, by which he produces an effect that is likewise crucial to the structure of the universe. Rather than attempt to situate himself above God, beyond infinity and outside of causality, man would be best served by rejoicing in his inclusion in the intricate, crystalline grandeur of the universe that Spinoza describes.

Leibniz attempts to craft an account in which man’s free will and autonomy is preserved while still preserving the importance of God and causality. In so doing, he needlessly fractures the unified system offered by Spinoza. By arguing for autonomous monads, Leibniz commits himself to a multiplicity of individuals that he admits cannot influence one another. At the same time, he cannot deny our “continual dependence” on God. At this point, he owes us an explanation of how causality can take place between these individuals at all and what relationship these supposedly autonomous monads have to God. He attempts to reconcile these issues by crediting God with a vague superiority over the other monads, but Spinoza’s explanation is still more coherent and convincing. Spinoza would likely charge Leibniz with creating loopholes in an attempt to preserve the very illusion that the *Ethics* tries to dispel. As Spinoza’s work demonstrates, reinforcing this deeply ingrained myth is to the detriment both of man’s understanding and of his lifestyle.

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NOTES

1: Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*. Trans. Edwin Curley. New York: Penguin Putnam Books, 1996, 21.

2: *Ibid.*, 20.

3: *Ibid.*, 25.

Dear Editors,

Juliet Johnson's essay ["The Sound of Nietzsche's 'Long Bright Silence': The Interpretation of *Zarathustra* as an End in Itself," *Arché*, II:1, 2008] seems to me a flawed philosophical project. Johnson's paper is threatened by that which many "holistic" accounts of Nietzsche's work fail to avoid: we cannot, by claiming that Nietzsche championed a doctrine of non-adherence to doctrine, eliminate that first degree of systematization. We cannot attempt to escape the commitment to non-interpretive experience of his writing by simply shifting the focus of our readings to a personal critique; this is functionally equivalent to a philosophical program of analysis.

Allow me to illustrate my point with a famous koan: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" How, I ask you, can one hand clap? Leaving aside the question of whether my response is correct according to the Zen tradition, pointlessness is the point. Johnson's discussion is an attempt to systematize a non-system, and it doesn't work. *Zarathustra* is self-contradictory, both within and between its poetic and philosophical elements; why must we force them together? Is not the very act of dividing poetry and philosophy, for the purposes of their later reunion, the sort of project Nietzsche would reject? Are we not, in other words, bound to evoke the laughter of Zarathustra when we strain to hear the musicality of what he has already revealed as silence?

One of Nietzsche's major campaigns was waged against what he called "other-worldliness." The "dogmatic morals" which Johnson makes reference to were reviled by Nietzsche because they separated man from the immediacy of his own being for the sake of a false "other-world." One passage in this paper is a particularly hermeneutical and philosophical, and therefore other-worldly, approach to *Zarathustra*:

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is un-hearable, incomprehensible nonsense, until one separates oneself far enough from analytic tradition and lifts oneself high enough above modern divisions to see the whole. (26)

One needn't lift oneself anywhere to understand *Zarathustra*, for understanding is already present in its incomprehensible wholeness.

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