

**I)** Consider a computer scientist P who likes to write computer programs. According to Leibniz, P has free will if P can act or choose between alternatives based on reason. For instance, suppose P has the option to use the language Python or the language Java to write her program. For Leibniz, having free will amounts to having a reason for choosing Java over Python (or vice versa), and then making the choice accordingly. In contrast, Clarke thinks that P has free will if P has the ability to choose between alternatives without necessarily having a reason to one option over another. He calls this the “principle of action” [Clarke L5 S1-20]. If P chose Java over Python without a reason, Clarke would say that this is P’s expression of her free will, while Leibniz would say that it isn’t an expression of her free will, but instead an example of *chance*.

**II)** There appears to be a tension between the following Leibniz’s two claims: 1) God is omnipotent 2) God cannot will something without reason. For if God is omnipotent, he would have the power to do anything, and so he would have the power to will something without a reason.

Suppose God has to make a choice between 2 alternatives: option A and option B. And suppose God’s wisdom yields sufficient reason for him to choose A over B. Leibniz would say that God’s omnipotence implies that that it would not be a contradiction for him to choose B over A. B is indeed a *possible* option. However, God’s wisdom would never let him “operate without acting by reason” (Leibniz L3 S7). Since God’s wisdom deems option A to be superior to option B, he cannot will to choose B. In summary, it is possible for God to choose option B, but he cannot will to do so.

**III)** Clarke criticizes Leibniz’s view that God must have a sufficient reason (beyond just “mere will”) to act or make a decision. Suppose A and B are now options that are equal. That is, God could not have a reason to choose one over the other. According to Leibniz’s view of the divine will, God could not choose either A or B and therefore would not act at all. Clarke argues that this implies God is determined by “extrinsic things” and does not have any “principle or power of beginning to act” (Clarke L3 S8). This would mean that God is “not an active but a passive being” (Clarke L5 S1-20) and so does not have the principle of action, which is Clarke’s definition of free will. This is a criticism of Leibniz’s view because it was unusual to conceive God to be a “passive” being.

A particular instantiation of this critique involves the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles (PII). Leibniz affirms the PII by stating that God cannot make two qualitatively identical things, for it would contradict his version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason: there would be no reason for God to place the two qualitatively identical objects in their respective places as opposed to switching their places. Clarke, on the other hand, rejects the PII on the grounds that two points of time are “exactly alike”, but they are “not the same point of time, nor are they two names of the same point of time” (Clarke L4 S5&6).

Moreover, he argues that even if the PII were true, it would undermine God’s free will in the following way. Making two identical things is logically possible, and since God’s

omnipotence guarantees that he should be able to do anything that is logically possible, God should be able to make two identical things. The PII denies this possibility, which is a source of tension in Leibniz's view.

In summary, Leibniz's view of the divine will requires the PII, which, Clarke argues, creates a tension with the view that God is omnipotent, and should be rejected on those grounds.

**IV)** I think Leibniz's overall conception of the will is more compelling than Clarke's.

Let's return to our programmer P. After having a horrific experience with Java on her previous project— featuring sleepless nights debugging— she reasons that Python is a better language for her next project. But right before she begins, she comes across another programming language called Clython (Clarke's Python) that has the exact same source code as Python. In other words, Clython is identical to Python in terms of syntax and efficiency. She now has to make a choice about whether she is going to use Python or Clython for her project! How can she make this decision?

From our experience, it does not seem feasible to doubt that P can make a decision— as humans we make decisions like this (i.e. choosing between equivalent alternatives) all the time. In fact, Clarke would argue that P can make this decision precisely because she has free will, that is, the "principle of action". Whether or not she has a reason to do so is irrelevant to the discussion of will according to him.

Leibniz might claim that there is no choice to be made at all. Since Python and Clython are functionally equivalent, there is no effect of choosing one over the other. He might question the identity of the languages— does copying a programming language into a different folder and renaming it mean that you've created a new programming language? Probably not. He would regard the decision of using Python instead of Clython (or vice versa) as merely one of chance, rather than that of will.

The important difference is that Clarke's view would have P's decision as one of free will, while Leibniz's would not. My intuition for free will corresponds more closely with Leibniz's for the following reason:

Suppose that P asks her friend Q to determine which programming to use. In this case, the decision of which programming language to use is determined by an external event and so Clarke's view would tell us that P did not will to choose one language over the other. Consequentially, it does not matter whether P made the decision by simply picking one or by asking Q to choose, but Clarke's view on the will makes a distinction between them. Since it does not matter whether it is P's will or Q's will which decides which language P uses, it seems like we have the wrong conception of the will. It seems to create distinctions that do not intuitively correspond to an increase or decrease in freedom.

Thus, I find Leibniz's view more compelling.

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## References

1. Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, and Samuel Clarke. *Leibniz and Clarke: Correspondence*. Edited and with an introduction by Roger Ariew, Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.