

Josiah Kim

Professor Abaci

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Homework Assignment #2

The problem of freedom in Leibniz starts with the fact that God, in all ways, is perfect. To Leibniz, God is perfect in the sense that “power and knowledge are perfections, and, insofar as they belong to God, they do not have limits” (Discourse 412). If God has unlimited access to knowledge that means that all of our actions are known by God. Leibniz acknowledges this saying “that there would be no place for human freedom, and that an absolute fatalism would rule all our actions as well as all the other events of the world” (Discourse 421). Since God foresees all of our choices, the problem arises as to whether our actions are truly our own.

Leibniz addresses this problem of freedom by first differentiating between certain and necessary truths. In hindsight, this is the reason as to why the problem of freedom exists. This differentiation is vital to his argument because “[e]veryone grants that future contingents are certain, since God foresees them, but we do not concede that they are necessary on that account” (Discourse 421). In other words, just because some event is certain to happen does not mean that it is necessary for the event to occur.

Leibniz goes on to differentiate the certain and necessary truths. A necessary truth is one in which the “contrary implies a contradiction” (Discourse 422). On the other hand, a certain truth is one in which the contrary does not imply a contradiction. In the example of Julius Caesar, it is certain that he will overthrow the freedom of the Romans; however, it is not

necessary for him to do so since the contrary does not imply a contradiction. It can be said that doing something else than what is foreseen by God is not a logical contradiction.

To delve further into Leibniz's solution to the problem of freedom, we must speak upon the subject of substances. Leibniz claims that substances are causally independent. By this, Leibniz means that substances do not interact with each other and their changes are caused by itself "through a perfect spontaneity relative to itself" (A New System 474). Furthermore, a substance is contained within itself. It "contains all its predicates or events and expressed the whole universe" (Discourse 424). The notion of a substance is everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen to it.

Once accepting of the fact that substances are causally independent and contained within itself, it is hard to deny Leibniz's solution to the problem of freedom. Since everything has a substance according to Leibniz, a human can be characterized as a substance that is causally independent and contained within itself. Changes from one state of the human to another state are spontaneous and caused by itself and itself only. God can foresee these changes in state; however, it is logically possible that the human substance can enter another state.

Since a substance is contained within itself and within itself is a world, it is not outrageous to say that the human substance is able to perceive all of its choices. God predetermines the state of substances but does not impede on changes within substances. The human substance is given the freedom to choose its state from all possible states. Leibniz's solution to the problem of freedom is plausible both logically and through substance causal independence.

Works Cited

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