

Reply to Ohad Nachtomy's Review of *Real Alternatives*

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Leibniz maintained that even though God knows absolutely for certain that an individual will actually act in a certain way, the individual could act otherwise. In my book I argue that Leibniz meant both that God consistently conceives of actual individuals acting otherwise and that God has the efficient power, even if not, in the end, the will power, to execute those conceptions. I also argue that the seemingly intractable *feeling* philosophers such as Nachtomy have that Leibniz's doctrine of complete concepts precludes this "real alternative" conception of divine creative freedom is due to their misrepresenting or distorting that doctrine.

Nachtomy seems to misrepresent Leibniz's doctrine in an avoidable way. Nachtomy writes that the complete concept of an individual "logically includes all its future activities." He also claims that I, too, acknowledge that it does. He is to some extent right. I acknowledge that Leibniz, *for a time*, appears to have construed complete concepts as logically including the future activities of individuals. However, I argue in Chapter 6 of my book that Leibniz construed them differently after his correspondence with Arnauld.

In brief, Leibniz eventually came to hold, with his so-called "infinite analysis" account of contingency, that the histories of individuals are continuous, heterogeneous and therefore non-logical sequences. By "non-logical" I mean that the principle of contradiction cannot be used to show that a particular future "activity" *must* belong to an historical sequence. According to Leibniz, the future activities of individuals follow *causally*, not logically, from their antecedent states. Future activities are causally, not logically, connected, to antecedent activities and the connections are causally, not logically, necessary. Leibniz's infinite analysis account of contingency thus distances him from Spinoza who virtually identified causal connections with logical connections. Again, even as late as his correspondence with Arnauld, Leibniz seemed to endorse Spinoza's identification.

Nachtomy's discussion of my interpretation of Leibniz's distinction between individual subjects and persons is generally accurate. However, he shows he does not fully understand the significance of the distinction when he writes:

There is [a] serious weakness in [Savage's] argument, namely that Leibniz's notion of a world seems not to be independent of the set of individuals which constitute it. Varying the initial state of the world only means placing an individual together with a different set of individuals. Hence, the career of one

individual is partially determined by the histories of others. For this reason, one cannot rely on an independent initial state to provide for a variety of complete concepts of individuals.

Obviously, *if* the initial state of an individual depends on other individuals it does not depend *only* on its being “placed” with them. It also depends on the initial relations it has with them, or how it is placed with them. Different complete concepts of an individual X are obtained by varying the initial relations, if it is possible to vary them, just as different complete concepts of X are obtained by varying what individuals coexist with X.

At any rate, Nachtomy merely restates a point I make many times over in my book. I maintain that actual individuals have infinitely many different possible initial states *because* God either conceives of them as coexisting with individuals other than those with which they actually exist or because he conceives of them related differently to individuals with which they actually exist. Nachtomy’s remark that “one cannot rely on an independent initial state to provide for a variety of complete concepts of individuals” is *generally* true, but trivially so. *Generally*, if an individual exists in a world of other individuals, concepts of the initial states of those other individuals are constitutive of the concept of its initial state. Hence, the notion of “an independent initial state” is *generally* senseless. But, as is well known, Leibniz asserts that it is possible for an individual to exist without other creatures and also possible for it to exist perceptually independently of other creatures even if other creatures exist. That is, according to Leibniz, an individual’s being in a perceptual state does not have to depend on its perceiving other creatures. Strictly speaking, then, one *can* rely on independent initial states to provide for a variety of complete concepts. Leibniz’s God is metaphysically (though not morally) free to impose any initial state he pleases on an individual subject when he creates it.

Nachtomy also appears to miss the systematic point of Leibniz’s distinction between ultimate individual subjects and persons or complete individual substances when he writes:

Even if we considered Adam* as a different person or a different-individual-in-a-world*, all truths about this Adam* would be fixed and predetermined in the possible world*. Hence counterfactual claims with respect to Adam [i.e., Our Adam] are about Adam* (say the one who married Lilith). So presumably we can now make a claim that Adam can act differently based on the truth of this claim in another possible world...this comes too close to the claim that, in a different possible world another possible individual (make

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him as similar to Adam as you like) would act differently than our Adam. Nachtomy assumes that, for Leibniz, counterfactual claims are about persons or complete individual substances. This assumption is suspect, at least with regard to *true* counterfactual propositions. For Leibniz, true counterfactual propositions *cannot* be about complete individual substances or persons. In Leibniz's system counterfactual propositions are about what Nachtomy aptly calls "basic" subjects. Thus the proposition "Adam could have married Lilith" is about the basic subject Adam not about the person *of* this basic subject Adam who is *our* Adam. The basic subject Adam could have married Lilith, not our Adam. Our Adam could not be otherwise than as he is.

Consider the unordered set of objects $A = \{a, b, c\}$. One could actually order A as $A\# = \langle a, b, c \rangle$. Even so, one could have ordered A as $A^* = \langle c, b, a \rangle$. Persons are to basic subjects as ordered sets are to unordered sets. Thus, Leibniz did not hold that a person, e.g. Our Adam, could have acted otherwise. Indeed, strictly speaking, our Adam does not act. Persons do not act, they are merely characteristic ways in which subjects/agents act. Persons are, as it were, modes of subjects. That is, they are ways in which subjects act or exist. It therefore is unnecessary to inquire, as Nachtomy does, in what sense of 'can' our Adam can act differently.

I take Leibniz seriously when he, discussing the problem of freedom, writes that the philosophers who came after the Schoolmen have:

Confused a problem which, properly speaking, is the easiest problem in the world. After that it is no wonder that there are very many doubts, which the human mind cannot abandon. The truth is that people love to lose themselves, and this is a kind of ramble of the mind, which is unwilling to subject itself to attention, to order, to rules. It seems as though we are so accustomed to games and jesting that we play the fool even in the most serious occupations, and when we least think we do. [*Theodicy* Article 57]

Leibniz was hopeful that his readers would see that his doctrine of complete concepts was an easy solution to the problem of divine freedom. It therefore is ironic that many of his interpreters imagine that that doctrine makes the problem of divine freedom difficult. The doctrine of complete concepts does appear to be problematic with respect to human freedom but Leibniz effectively dissolves that appearance with his infinite analysis account of contingency. Nachtomy does not note the significance of Leibniz's infinite analysis account of contingency. He also seems not to see how this account relates to the labyrinth of the composition of the continuum which Leibniz thought was much more challenging than the labyrinth of freedom.

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I have three comments to make in closing. First, Nachtomy writes in a note that “The distinction between metaphysical necessity and moral necessity is strikingly absent from Savage’s discussion.” But I address that in Chapter Two of my book. Second, with regard to the closing paragraph of Nachtomy’s interesting review, my use of passages from “different contexts” and my “juxtaposing citations” is “free” only to a reader not familiar with those contexts. It seemed to me that, if a reader is familiar with the original contexts, as he or she ought to be, it makes little difference that “the passages are far removed from their original contexts.” Finally, in my book, I discuss the well-worn topics Nachtomy focuses on in his review only in order to prepare the reader for (what I consider to be) more interesting subsequent chapters on deliberation, compossibility, and infinite analysis. These later chapters clarify and develop many of the topics discussed in the earlier ones.

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