Leibniz And Spinoza As Applied To Baseball Essay, Research Paper

Essay 2

First we will consider the assigned baseball scenario under Leibniz?s system of metaphysics. In the baseball scenario, the aggregate of the player, bat, pitch, swing and all the other substances in the universe are one and all contingent. There are other possible things, to be sure; but there are also other possible universes that could have existed but did not. The totality of contingent things, the bat, the player, etc., themselves do not explain themselves. Here Leibniz involves the principle of reason; ?there can be found no fact that is true or existent, or any true proposition, without there being a sufficient reason for its being so and not otherwise.? There must be, Leibniz insists, something outside the totality of contingent things (baseball games) which explains them, something which is itself necessary and therefore requires no explanation other than itself.

This forms Leibniz?s proof for the existence of God; a version of Aquinas?s cosmological arguments. God, then, is the necessary being which constitutes the explanation of contingent being, why the universe is this way rather than any other. Not only is God the explanation of the baseball scenario but he is also the source of the intelligibility of such concepts as bat, swing and pitch. Leibniz goes further to prove the omniscience of God. If God is the explanation of the intelligibility of the universe, then God must have ?access? to that intelligibility, such that God could be said to know what it is that being allowed to exist—that is, God must have the ability to grasp complete concepts. Not only does God constitute the contingent baseball game but he also knows what will take place before it happens. The pitch, swing and hit all take place not because God creates them but because he allows them. There is only one constraint on what God allows to happen, it must not violate Leibniz?s other basic principle—non-contradiction. God could not allow it to happen that the batter hit the ball and the pitcher got a strike. God chooses the universe that is most perfect, therefore the hitter hitting the ball out of he park was the most perfect of all possibilities.

Leibniz uses the word ?Monad? to mean that which is one, has no parts and is therefore indivisible. These are the fundamental existing things. A monad contains within itself all the predicates that are true of the subject of which it is the concept, and these predicates are related by sufficient reason into a vast single network of explanation. So the monad must not only exhibit properties, but contain within itself ?virtually? or ?potentially? all the properties it will exhibit in the future, and also contain the ?trace? of all properties it did exhibit in the past. Take for example the ball in the baseball game scenario. The ball monad contains all the properties of the ball, roundness, hardness, whiteness, etc. It also contains a trace of the ball?s past, pop-ups, inside a glove and ground balls. In addition to this it contains the potential to be hit out, have the leather knocked off or be thrown away. All these properties are ?folded- up within the Monad and they unfold when they have sufficient reason to do so (at the most perfect moment).

Not only does the Monad contain all of its own properties but it also contains all of it relational properties to all the other Monads in the universe. Each and every Monad is self-sufficient. They do not ?need? to be related to other Monads and neither are they influenced by other Monads. All of what appears to be cause and effect is a mere illusion. The relation of cause and effect is, according to Leibniz, merely a cognitive tool that human beings use to understand Monads and their relational properties. In the baseball scenario it appears that the hitter causes the ball to leave the park but in actuality he did not cause it per se. What really causes the ball to leave the park is the ?pre-established harmony? On Leibniz?s view, every Monad is like a clock, behaving spontaneously in the way that it does, independently of other Monads, but nevertheless tied into the others through the common reason: God and his vast conception of the perfect universe. It was to be before the baseball game took place that the pitcher would leave a slider over the plate, that the hitter would make contact right on the label, and that the ball would soar out of the park.

Also, it is important to point out the number of Monads involved in the scenario. The bat, gloves, etc. are composed of an infinite number of Monads. We tend to refer to such things as a single Monad because they all act as one. However, the soul of the pitcher, batter, fans, and the rest of the players is only one monad which controls the composite of infinite body Monads.

All Monads possess an active power that originates from what is actual striving to finish or perfect their potential. This activity is not only a property of the soul Monad but also a property of all Monads. This inner activity of Monads must mean not only being the source of action, but also being affected and resisting. Change in a Monad is the intelligible, constantly and continuously unfolding being of a thing, from itself, to itself. The change seen in the baseball game is the unfolding of the Monads of the players and the numerous Monads of the material used to play the game.

Now for Spinoza?s metaphysical take on the baseball game scenario. Spinoza?s philosophy is based upon Pantheism. ?Besides God,? says Spinoza, ?no other substance can be conceived.? In other words, God is identical to the universe as a whole. Here is Spinoza?s argument for his Pantheism briefly:

1. There cannot exist in the universe two or more substances having the same

nature or attribute.

2. God (substance containing infinite attributes) necessarily exists.

3. Therefore, besides God, no substance can be granted or conceived.

Since no two substances can possess the same attribute and God contains all possible attributes, then no other substance can exist. In the baseball scenario everything, the ball, the pitcher, the batter, the fans, the grass, the stadium, everything, is an aspect of God. The only way to distinguish between two substances is by noting differences in their attributes or differences in their modes. A substance has its own identity before it is modified. Thus, the only properties which truly distinguish one substance from another are broad attributes, not narrow modes. Thus, if two universes have precisely the same attributes, then they are the same universe. The key to Spinoza?s argument for substances is that existence belongs to the nature of substance. Even if we can imagine scenarios in which there were not baseballs or baseball games, scenarios in which these things just stopped being, this does not mean that existence is not a part of a substance. Spinoza argues that we would not make this confusion if we kept in mind the difference between modes and substances. Modes, such as properties of baseball bats, do indeed come and go out of existence. We can conceive of non-existent modes, e.g. unicorns, but we cannot conceive of a non-existent substance.

If all things are part of God then it would seem that our baseball scenario would be a part of God, and that it would be part of ?God?s? body so to speak. However, Spinoza criticizes those who anthropomorphize the nature of God?s ?body?. This is not possible says Spinoza because 1) God is infinite and 2) God is active while divided matter is passive. The two are incompatible.

Although everything in the universe is a part of God, God does not willfully direct the course of nature. First of all, Spinoza argues, there is no such thing as human free will. The pitcher did not will to throw the pitch and the hitter did not will to swing at the ball. Humans are ignorant of the true causes of thing and are only aware of our own desire to pursue what is useful to us. Given this tendency to see human behavior as willful and purposeful, we continue by imposing willful purposes on events outside of us. We conclude that God willingly guides external events for our benefit. The hitter believes that God caused the ball to be left out over the plate when this is simply not the case.

Spinoza continues that God does not act form a purpose and the concept of a perfect final goal is flawed. For Spinoza, the most perfect of God?s acts are those closest to him. Succeeding events further down the chain of perfection are increasingly less perfect. If the hitter?s swing is near to God then it is more perfect but if it is far from God then it is less perfect. Belief in final causes, that God meant the home run to be hit so that a certain team would win, compromises God?s perfection since it implies that he desires something which he lacks. For Spinoza, the theologian?s contention that God willfully directs all natural events amounts to a reduction to ignorance. The baseball game may be a part of God, but God did not cause it to happen in a certain way.