Was Clarke a Voluntarist?

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ABSTRACT

The distinction between voluntarism and intellectualism has recently been criticized for inaccurately characterising early modern theories of divine freedom. In response, defenders of the distinction have argued that these labels are needed in order to account for the famous correspondence between Leibniz (intellectualist) and Clarke (voluntarist). In this paper, I argue that the voluntarism/intellectualism distinction is unable to account for the opposition between Leibniz and Clarke. In the first part, I provide an analysis of Clarke's theory of divine freedom, and show how he employs the distinction between activity and passivity in order to account for the separation between God's will and intellect, which ultimately safeguards God's freedom. I also analyse Clarke's correspondence with Leibniz, and show how Clarke deals with choice among equals, the principle of sufficient reason, and the principle of the best. In the second part, I argue on the basis of this analysis that Clarke is not a voluntarist, but should instead be interpreted as an intellectualist (if one wants to keep the labels). Therefore, the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence cannot be explained as a clash between voluntarism and intellectualism.

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INTRODUCTION

Early modern philosophy had a problem: How can we reconcile God's freedom with his infinite wisdom? If an infinitely wise being always does what is best and most reasonable, wouldn't his choice for the best be necessitated by pre-existing notions of goodness and rationality? This age-old conundrum shows a difficult balancing act philosophers had to perform in order to safeguard God's goodness while avoiding the dangers of necessitarianism.[1] Historians have identified two main solutions to this problem: voluntarism and intellectualism. Briefly put, voluntarists believe goodness and/or rationality are the result of God's free will, and that therefore whatever God (freely) chooses is by definition the best and most reasonable. Intellectualists, on the other hand, believe that reason and goodness do not depend on God's will; God's will infallibly aligns itself with these laws of goodness and rationality. Moreover, both intellectualism and voluntarism attempt to avoid necessitarianism by providing some account of contingency in God's actions.[2]

As an explanatory mechanism, this voluntarism/intellectualism distinction has been very influential among historians of science. This is in large part thanks to the work of Michael Foster (Foster 1934; 1935; 1936), who famously argued that the development of modern science crucially depended on a specific voluntarist doctrine of creation. Briefly summarized, Foster believed that the Christian doctrine of an arbitrary divine will meant that it was impossible to reason *a priori* about the constitution of the world as the scholastics had done, and that therefore some early modern philosophers were forced to rely on observation instead of reason, and turn to an empirical investigation of nature in order to make sense of the world (Foster 1936: 5). Through the subsequent work of influential authors such as Francis Oakley, Reyer Hooykaas, Stanley Jaki, Eugene Klaaren, and Margaret Osler, this so-called 'voluntarism thesis' has become a well-established belief among historians of science.[3]

But while these labels are now deeply embedded in the historiography of science, their precise meanings have come under fire. In an influential article, Peter Harrison argued that the voluntarism thesis should in fact be abandoned by historians, since closer inspection of purported voluntarists shows that most of them were not voluntarists in any significant sense of the word. Furthermore, key concepts in these debates have either been misunderstood or used too imprecisely and vaguely to be of much use (Harrison 2002). Harrison's claims soon led to a debate between him and John Henry (a defender of the voluntarism thesis). This debate is still ongoing, with recent contributions by Henry, Mcguire, Oakley and Sangiacomo (Oakley 2019; Henry and McGuire 2018; Sangiacomo 2018).

From this debate, it has become clear that the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence functions as one of the key conflicts for which the voluntarism-intellectualism distinction is considered by some to be still indispensable:

> As I began to read it [Harrison's paper], I was eager to learn how Harrison would interpret the differences between, say, Leibniz and Clarke (the obvious example to choose), without recourse to the theological differences represented by intellectualism and voluntarism. (Henry 2009: 83)

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1   We can define necessitarianism as 'the thesis that every proposition necessarily has the truth value it actually has' (Nelson 2009; McDonough 2018). According to necessitarianism there are no contingencies whatsoever in the world. This view was considered a great threat to religion by both Leibniz and Clarke, who attempted to refute necessitarianism in their writings on divine freedom by trying to make room for genuine contingency in God's creative act. For an overview of Spinoza's necessitarianism, see Garrett (2018). For Leibniz' engagement with Spinoza's necessitarianism, See Lin (2012). For Clarke's argument against Spinoza, see Yenter (2014), Schliesser (2012).

2   Intellectualism *attempts* to avoid strict necessitarianism, typically by postulating a different kind of necessity, namely moral necessity. This is a risky strategy, and intellectualists have frequently been accused of necessitarianism. Leibniz's philosophy in particular has been read as falling into to some form of necessitarianism (Griffin 2013), and even Clarke was accused in his time of endorsing a Spinozistic doctrine of necessity. Though we may question to what extent they succeeded, the intention was usually to avoid (and counteract) necessitarianism.

3   For the history of Foster's thesis, see Davis (1999).

In the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence, the two philosophers discuss the question of divine will at length. The crux of their disagreement lies in the problem of choice among equals: Can God choose among multiple options, without any reason to prefer one over the other? Leibniz argued that God could not do so, since everything requires a sufficient reason. Clarke, on the other hand, maintained that this would be a dangerous limitation of God's will, and that God could indeed choose arbitrarily in these cases. Hence we find Clarke defending the following position against Leibniz:

> 'Tis very true, that nothing *is*, without a sufficient reason *why* it *is*, and why it is *thus* rather than *otherwise*. [...] But this *sufficient reason* is oftentimes no other, than the *mere will* of God. (Cl 2.1, W IV, 596)[4]

His disagreement with Leibniz and his alliance with Newton[5] are without a doubt the main reasons why Clarke has traditionally been considered a voluntarist. However, in this paper I will argue that a more careful examination of Clarke's theory of divine freedom makes a voluntarist interpretation untenable, and that he should instead be read as an intellectualist (if one wants to keep the labels). As a result, the voluntarism-intellectualism distinction fails to account for the adversarial nature of the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence. In the first part, I will provide a reconstruction of the key ingredients of Clarke's theory of divine liberty, namely 1) the relation between will and intellect, 2) the relation between will and choice, and 3) the problem of choice among equals. This reconstruction is badly needed, I think, because the details of Clarke's account of divine freedom have not received adequate attention in this debate.[6] In the second part, I will show that Clarke is not a voluntarist regarding divine freedom. Instead, I will argue that the main strategies for distinguishing between voluntarism and intellectualism should lead us to conclude that Clarke is an intellectualist regarding divine freedom. I will conclude by arguing that we therefore need to critically reassess the explanatory power of this distinction for the polarization of positions in the early modern period.

1. DIVINE FREEDOM IN CLARKE'S PHILOSOPHY

The liberty of moral agents (human and divine) is one of the most pressing concerns of Clarke's philosophical project. It was considered the main contribution of Clarke to the philosophy of his day, and it takes up a central role in his philosophical system; the difference between liberty and necessity (or activity and passivity) comes up again and again in his work. The title page of the first edition of his 1704 Boyle Lectures is enough to show that, indeed, 'Liberty [...] was a darling point to him' (Hoadley, preface to Clarke's Works). The full title runs as follows: 'A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God: More Particularly in Answer to Mr. Hobbs, Spinoza, And their Followers. **Wherein the Notion of Liberty is Stated**, and the Possibility and Certainty of it Proved, **in Opposition to Necessity and Fate**.'[7] Given the scope of his *Demonstration*, and his explicit response to Spinoza, it is further evident that he was especially concerned about the liberty of God. Aside from his Boyle lectures, Clarke's key works concerning liberty are his responses to Anthony Collins, his correspondence with Leibniz, and his correspondence with Bulkeley.

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4   References to Clarke's collected works are as follows: 'W', following by the volume number (I–IV), followed by the page number of the 1738 edition. References to the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence are as follows: 'Cl' for a letter by Clarke ,or 'Lz' for a letter by Leibniz, followed by the number of the letter (1–5) and the number of the paragraph, followed by its place in Clarke's *Works*. Throughout this paper, I have preserved Clarke's own use of italics.

5   Most scholars believe Newton to have been a voluntarist. Harrison (2004), however, has argued otherwise. In this paper I will not consider the possible influence or overlap between Clarke and Newton's views, and discuss Clarke on his own terms. While Newton was evidently involved in some aspects in the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence, I see no evidence to suppose this influence extended to discussions about divine freedom (which fell squarely within Clarke's expertise). Moreover, Clarke's replies to Leibniz on this topic do not differ from the views expressed in his other writings, such as the *Demonstration*.

6   The most comprehensive and up-to-date analyses of Clarke's theory of liberty are *Of Liberty and Necessity* by Harris (2005) and a Jorati's recent analysis of Clarke's theory of free will (Jorati 2021). Jorati's paper also argues for the important similarities between Clarke and Leibniz on this topic; it argues that Clarke should be considered a compatibilist regarding free will rather than a libertarian.

7   Emphasis mine.

This section is divided into three parts. First, I will introduce Clarke's notion of liberty. Here I will show that Clarke defines liberty by making use of a strict distinction between passivity and activity; the will is active, while the intellect is passive. One important take-away of this reconstruction will be Clarke's idea of moral motives and moral necessitation. Secondly, I will tackle an important aspect of Clarke's notion of liberty, namely his claim that liberty means having a choice 'to act or forbear acting'. I will give my interpretation of this key passage in Clarke's *Demonstration*, and show how this connects to his conception of liberty. I will argue that this choice of acting/not-acting does not entail that the will acts completely independently from the intellect. Thirdly, I will focus on his correspondence with Leibniz, where I will analyse three important aspects of their debate: 1) choice among equals, 2) the principle of sufficient reason, and 3) the principle of the best. I will show that Clarke feared Leibniz came dangerously close to necessitarianism, and tried to avoid this danger through his own theory of divine freedom. Once we see that Clarke is not arguing against intellectualism, but only against necessitarianism, we are in a position to see that he is not a voluntarist, which I will move on to show in the second part of this paper.

1.1. WILL & THE LAST JUDGMENT OF THE UNDERSTANDING

The principal distinction of Clarke's philosophy is that between *activity* and *passivity*. This distinction forms the foundation of most of his philosophy and theology. We will encounter it at every stage of Clarke's account of freedom. The first place we will encounter it is in his distinction between the will and what Clarke calls 'the last judgment of the understanding'. The faculty of the understanding deliberates and decides on a best course of action, which is its 'last judgment', but its workings are completely passive and necessitated. Therefore, a completely different faculty is necessary to act on this judgment, namely the faculty of will. This distinction is important to Clarke, as he believed that many other people (most notably, Hobbes) incorrectly identified the will with the last judgment of the understanding. Clarke was at pains to avoid this conflation: 'All error in this matter', Clarke writes, 'has arisen from men's using the word, *Will*, in a *confused* sense, to express, (indistinctly) partly what is *passive*, and partly with is *active*' (W IV, 714).

Thus, the root of the free will problem lies in a conflation between the active and passive aspects of an immaterial substance. Clarke aims to avoid this error by means of the following definition of freedom and necessity: 'so far as any thing is *passive*, so far it is subject to *necessity*; so far as it is an *agent*, it is *free*: For *action* and *freedom* are, I think, perfectly identical ideas' (W IV, 714). To be an agent means to be a true cause. But to be a cause means one cannot be an effect. If A causes B, and B 'causes'[8] C, then only A is the true cause of C. In other words: The notion of a necessitated agent is a contradiction in terms. This leads to the well-known idea of libertarian or contra-causal free will: actions have as their sole cause the agent's active powers. Since the intellect (and the last act of judgment) is passive and necessitated, it cannot be the source of action. It is the will, and the will alone, which accounts for this power of action.

Consequently, it follows from Clarke's definitions that the will cannot be necessitated:

> If the two things now-mentioned [will and last judgment] were connected by a *true physical necessity*, there would remain *no difference* between *action* and *passion* [...]. Nay, indeed, there would be no such thing as an *agent* or *action* in the universe. [...] there would be in the universe, *all patient* and *no agent*, all *effect*, and no *cause*: Which is a manifest and most express contradiction. (W IV, 716)

We can understand Clarke's argument here as a special application of the cosmological argument for the existence of God. If everything happens by physical necessity, then everything is the effect of something else. This would mean that the world is an effect without a cause. But you cannot have an effect without a cause. Thus, there must *at the very least* be one true cause, which has set everything else in motion, and this true cause cannot be necessitated. Therefore, there must be at least one truly free agent in the universe. This proof of the existence of a first cause comes

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8   By which 'causes' here means that B leads to C in a physically necessitated way, i.e., without the production of new forces.

up a number of times in Clarke's *Demonstration*. Proposition II shows that there must be some self-existent being as the cause and ground of all dependent beings. This is later extended, in Proposition IX, to show that there must also be an original cause for all activity in the world:

> [S]ince everything must indeed have a cause of its being [...] 'tis impossible but there must be in the universe some being, whose existence is founded in the necessity of its own nature; and which, being acted upon by nothing beyond itself, must of necessity have *in itself* a principle of acting, or a power of beginning motion, which is the idea of liberty. (W II, 553)

It is clear that this argument has a very limited scope; it only establishes the existence of a single original real cause of motion in the universe. For Clarke's present purposes, however, this is all he needs to show: At least one being in this universe must have true agency (and hence true free will). In the course of his *Demonstration* he connects this to the existence of a single, all-powerful and omnipresent God. And so it is proven that God must be a free agent.

It is on these grounds that Clarke writes that the will is not determined by the last act of judgment through an efficient cause. Rather, the last act of judgment functions merely as an *occasion* for the will to cause its action. This leads to an important distinction between *physical* and *moral* determination, which Clarke spells out very clearly in the case of human freedom:

> The *act of volition*, or rather the *beginning of action*, consequent upon the *last judgment of the understanding*, is not *determined* or *caused* by that last judgment, as by the *physical efficient*, but only as the *moral motive*. For the true, proper, immediate, *physical efficient cause* of action, is the *power of self-motion* in men, which exerts itself *freely* in consequence of the *last act of judgment of the understanding*. But the *last act of judgment of the understanding*, is not itself a *physical efficient*, but merely a *moral motive*, upon which the *power of acting* begins to act. The *necessity* therefore, by which the *power of acting* follows the *judgment of the understanding*, is only a *moral necessity*. (W II, 565)

This analysis works equally for the case of God, as long as we understand the power of action to be efficient causation in general (generation, annihilation, modification). The point is that, while the last act of judgment does play an important role in determining the will, its role is not as a *physical efficient*. Rather, it functions as an occasion or motive for the will to determine itself. This distinction is important to Clarke:

> Here therefore seems at last really to lie the fundamental errour, both of those who argue against the *liberty of the will*, and those who but too confusedly defend it: They do not make a clear distinction between *moral motives*, and *causes physically efficient*; which two things have no similitude at all. (W II, 565)

Further clarification of this point is given in his 1717 response to Anthony Collins:

> Nothing that is *passive*, can possibly be the *cause* of any thing that is *active*. An *occasion* indeed, it may be; and *action* may be *consequent* (though without any *physical* connexion,) upon *perception* or *judgment*; nay, it may easily (if you please) be supposed to be ALWAYS *consequent* upon it, and yet at the same time there be no manner of *physical* or *necessary connexion* between them. [...] *Occasions* indeed they may be, and are, upon which that substance in man, wherein the *self-moving principle* resides, *freely exerts its active power*. But it is the *self-moving principle*, and not at all the *reason* or *motive*, which is the *physical* or *efficient CAUSE* of action. (W IV, 723)

Given Clarke's strict demand for contra-causal agency, the challenge is clear: He must account for the interaction between will and intellect, without establishing any 'necessary connection' between the two. The faculty of judgment cannot be the cause of action, because it is merely passive. Nor can reasons and motives be the cause of action, because those are only abstract notions. In other words, neither of these two can be allowed to cause anything to happen. Clarke

echoes the language of occasional causation as a way to bridge this causal gap, suggesting that the intellect only functions as the occasion for the activity of the will.[9] Nevertheless, as we will see later on, Clarke is willing to grant that a perfectly rational agent (such as God) *always* determines itself in accordance with what is best and most reasonable to do. Thus, the point is not that God ever acts contrary to his best judgment, but only that there cannot be a causal or necessary connection between will and judgment.

1.2. FREEDOM AND CHOICE

At first sight, however, it may appear as if Clarke does believe that the will can act contrary to its best judgment. In an important passage of the *Demonstration*, Clarke appears to establish a relation between freedom and liberty of indifference:

> The essence of *liberty* [...] consists in his *being an agent*, that is, in having a continual power of *choosing*, whether he shall *act*, or whether he shall *forbear acting*. (W II, 565–66)

Furthermore:

> [God] must of *necessity*, every moment, either *choose* to act, or *choose* to *forbear acting*; because *two contradictories* cannot possibly be true at once. But *which* of these two he shall *choose*, in this he is at perfect *liberty* : And to suppose him *not to be so*, is *contradictorily* supposing him *not to be the first cause*, but to be *acted* by some *superior power*, so as to be *himself* no *agent at all*. (W II, 566)

These passages appear to argue for the freedom of God's will to determine itself independently from his intellect or judgments. The challenge here is to understand the modal status of God's possibility of choice. To interpret this passage, we need to keep in mind one of Clarke's principal concerns: What does it take to be a true efficient cause? As I showed in section 1.1, all that is required for freedom is the absence of a physical necessity. As a point of principle, if only one state is physically possible, this state is said to be physically necessary (because its non-occurrence is impossible). To be a true agent, therefore, multiple states of affairs must be physically possible. And this is achieved by making the obtainment of this state of affairs instead of that state of affairs contingent upon God's will.[10]

This contingency does not mean, however, that God needs a freedom to *actually* choose contrary to what is best. In the following sections, I will show that Clarke believed that God's choices unfalteringly correspond to his best judgment. According to Clarke, it would be no more possible for God to choose anything but the best and wisest to be done, as it would be for God not to exist. It is only on the level of *physical necessity*, that the option of doing evil should be left open, so as to avoid necessitarianism.[11]

1.2.1. Will and Choice

The struggle to find a suitable balance between God's freedom and his steadfast choice for the best comes out most clearly in a lengthy and tense passage right at the end of his *Demonstration*, where Clarke struggles to bridge the argumentative gap between his discussion of God's natural and moral attributes. The following passage emphasizes his commitment to safeguard both God's freedom *and* his 'unalterable steddiness' in choosing what is best:

> From this account of the moral attributes of God, it follows: 1) That though all the actions of God, are entirely *free*; and consequently the exercise of his moral attributes

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9   To what extent this is a genuine form of occasionalism falls outside the scope of this paper. For Clarke's relation to occasionalism, see Sangiacomo (2018).

10   Such an appeal to the contingency of God's actions is nothing out of the ordinary for an early modern philosopher who rejected necessitarianism, though the grounds for contingency differed between authors.

11   This is a fairly typical account of moral necessitation as it had developed in the scholastic tradition. For more information on the intellectual background of this theory, see Murray (2004).

cannot be said to be necessary, in the same sense of necessity as his existence and eternity are necessary; yet these moral attributes *are really and truly necessary*, by such a necessity, as though it be not at all inconsistent with liberty, yet is equally certain, infallible, and to be depended upon, as even the existence it self, or the eternity of God. [...] though nothing, I say, is more certain, than that god acts, not *necessarily*, but *voluntarily*; yet 'tis nevertheless as *truly and absolutely impossible* for God not to do (or to do any thing contrary to) what his moral attributes require him to do; as if he was really, not a free, but a necessary agent. (W II, 573)

Here, more than anywhere else, Clarke shows his true colours: It is as necessary for God to do what is best, as it is for him to exist. It becomes clear from this passage that neither his concept of moral necessity, nor his idea of 'choosing to act or forbear acting', are intended to reject intellectualism:

free choice in a being of infinite knowledge, power and goodness, can no more choose to act contrary to these perfections; than *knowledge* can be *ignorance, power* be *weakness*, or *goodness malice*: so that *free choice* in such a being, may be as *certain* and *steddy* a principle of action, as the necessity of fate. (W II, 573)

From this it follows that God cannot but do what is best and wisest: 'an infinitely wise and good being, indued with the most perfect liberty, can no more choose to act in contradiction to wisdom and goodness; than a necessary agent can act contrary to the necessity, by which it is acted' (W II, 574). Consequently, Clarke explains elsewhere, 'God actually *is and cannot but be good*', or put differently: God is '*necessarily* and *essentially* good' (W I, 88).[12]

But surely the will is more than just a rubber stamp?[13] Is there nothing more to this 'power of choosing to act' than the will bringing the last judgment into effect? This is a tricky question for Clarke. The problem is that Clarke wanted to simultaneously reject necessitarianism, while keeping intact the complete certainty of God's choice for the best. Clarke was caught between a rock and a hard place: Relaxing the demands placed on God's goodness and wisdom (for instance by making goodness and rationality consequent upon God's will, à la Descartes) would ruin the argumentative power of his Boyle Lectures (as God's moral attributes would no longer be *a priori* rationally accessible), but he also had to avoid any whiff of necessitarianism.

We have already seen, however, that judgments cannot force the will to choose anything. Judgments provide occasions for the will to act, but ultimately it is the will's prerogative to determine itself. Therefore, Clarke argues that the kind of necessity involved in God's choice for the best is only a necessity upon the supposition of God's will (echoing the language of Bramhall and Molina): 'this is only a necessity upon supposition; that is to say, a necessity that a man should *will* a thing, when 'tis *supposed* that he *does will it*' (W II, 564).[14] This means that God's will always aligns itself perfectly with his judgment, without ever being forced to do so. Therefore, once considered from a causal or physical perspective, Clarke could say that moral necessity is 'only a figurative way of speaking, and in philosophical strictness of truth, no necessity at all' (Cl 5.1–20, W IV, 673). The reason for this is clear: goodness and rationality cannot cause anything, and therefore God's will or actions are not strictly speaking necessitated. For God to choose against his best judgment is 'a *contradiction in terms, morally* speaking ... But it is no contradiction in *physicks*' (W IV, 716).[15] The necessity involved here, so-called *moral* necessity, is the result of a perfect agreement between God's will and his judgment. This position of moral necessity, being absolutely certain and steadfast, but not strictly (or physically) necessitated, is central to Clarke's solution to the problem of divine freedom.

To continue on the theme of the certainty of God's doing what is best, the following passage may help us get a sense of just how certain moral necessities were for Clarke:

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12   I thank an anonymous referee for bringing these passages to my attention.

13   See also Rowe (2004).

14   See also Sangiacomo (2018) for more detailed analysis of Clarke's use of supposition necessity.

15   I am very grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing out the pertinence of this particular passage.

It was fit, and wise, and good, that infinite wisdom should manifest, and infinite goodness communicate it self. And therefore it was *necessary* (in the *sense* of necessity *I am now speaking of*,) that things should be made at such time, as infinite wisdom and goodness saw it wisest and best that they should. And *when* and *whilst* things are in being, the same moral perfections make it necessary, that they should be disposed and governed according to the exactest and most unchangeable laws of eternal justice, goodness and truth; Because, while *things* and their *several relations* are, they cannot but *be* what they are; and an infinitely wise being cannot but *know* them to be what they are, and *judge* always rightly concerning the several fitnesses or unfitnesses of them; and an infinitely good being, cannot but *choose* to *act* always according to this knowledge of the respective fitness of things: It being as truly impossible for such a *free agent*, who is absolutely incapable of being deceived or depraved, to *choose*, by acting contrary to these laws, to destroy its own *perfections*; as for *necessary existence* to *be able to destroy* its own *being*. (W II, 574)

In other words: God is left with no other choice but to do what is best and most wise: 'He cannot but choose to act according to this knowledge of the respective fitness of things.' This passage provides a very clear account of just how strong moral necessity is for Clarke, even if he tells us that it is strictly speaking not a true necessity. Clarke appears confident that this account of moral necessitation affords him the certainty of God's infallible choice for the best, without falling prey to necessitarianism. Furthermore, just a few pages later Clarke explicitly calls out what we may nowadays recognize as a voluntarist position, and makes clear that this is a position which he strongly opposes:

They who found all moral obligations ultimately in the *will* of God, must recur at length to the same thing; only with this difference, that they do not clearly explain how the *nature and will of God himself* must be necessarily good and just, as I have endeavoured to do. (W II, 576)

1.3. THE LEIBNIZ-CLARKE CORRESPONDENCE: CHOICE AMONG EQUALS

So far I have dealt with cases where God's intellect provides him with a clear preference for one choice over another. But one of the primary reasons for scholars to consider Clarke a voluntarist comes from his correspondence with Leibniz, in which Clarke and Leibniz appear to be polar opposites when it comes to God's freedom. This opposition is brought out most clearly in their debate on the topic of *choice among equals*. Ultimately, their disagreement comes down to the question whether God needs sufficient reasons for his actions, or whether he can act without a determining reason. When Leibniz brings up his PSR to reject choice among equals, Clarke responds as follows:

Undoubtedly nothing *is*, without a *sufficient* reason *why* it *is*, rather than *not*; and *why* it is *thus*, rather than *otherwise*. But in things in their own nature indifferent; *mere will*, without any thing external to influence it, is alone that *sufficient reason*. (Cl 3.2, W IV, 606)

Taken out of context, this can be read to say that the will has primacy over the intellect. If we are not careful it can even be thought to state that the will is completely independent from the intellect. However, a different interpretation arises once we combine it with the rest of Clarke's theory of divine freedom: Clarke is not arguing against intellectualism, but only against Leibniz's version of it, which he thought would lead to necessitarianism. This becomes clear in the following passage, in which Clarke criticizes Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason:

This notion [Leibniz's PSR] leads to universal *necessity and fate*, by supposing that *motives* have the same relation to the *will of an intelligent agent*, as *weights* have to a *balance*; so that of *two* things absolutely indifferent, an intelligent agent can no more choose *either*, than a balance can move itself when the weights on both sides are equal.

> But the difference lies here. A balance is no *agent*, but is merely *passive* and *acted upon* by the *weights*; so that, when the *weights* are equal, there is *nothing* to *move* it. But *intelligent beings* are *agents*; not *passive*, in being *moved* by *motives*, as a *balance* is by *weights*; but they have *active powers*; and do *move themselves*, sometimes upon the view of *strong* motives, sometimes upon *weak* ones, and sometimes where things are *absolutely indifferent*. In which *latter case*, there may be *very good reason to act*, though two or more *ways* of acting may be absolutely *indifferent*. (Cl 4.1, W IV, 620–21)

Once again, Clarke reminds us to be careful to distinguish between activity and passivity. A balance is passive, and depends on unequal weights as its source of motion. The situation is different for will and judgment. Here, the will is the sole source of motion; its active powers do not depend on reason. To compare God to a balance is to make God a passive being, which would destroy God's freedom. Another passage which shows this point very well comes from the third letter to Leibniz:

> when two ways of acting are equally and alike good, (as in the instances before-mentioned;) to affirm in such case, that God *cannot act at all*, or that 'tis no perfection in him to be *able to act*, because he can have no external reason to move him to act *one way* rather than the *other*, seems to be a denying God to have in himself any *original* principle or *power of beginning to act*, but that he must needs (as it were *mechanically*) be always determined by things extrinsick. (Cl 3.7, W IV, 609)

The key claim here is that God's activity does not causally depend on anything extrinsic to him (such as reason would be), but is instead wholly intrinsic. To say otherwise would deny God the power of self-motion. And, finally, it is also discussed extensively in the opening to his fifth letter:

> To suppose that an equal apparent goodness in different ways of acting, takes away from the mind all power of acting at all, as an equality of weights keeps a balance necessarily at rest; is denying the mind to have in itself a principle of action; and is confounding the power of acting, with the impression made upon the mind by the motive, wherein the mind is purely passive. The motive, or thing considered as in view, is something extrinsick to the mind: the impression made upon the mind by that motive, is the perceptive quality, in which the mind is passive: the doing of any thing, upon and after, or in consequence of, that perception; this is the power of self-motion, or action. [...] The not carefully distinguishing these things, but confounding the motive with the principle of action, and denying the mind to have any principle of action besides the motive, (when indeed in receiving the impression of the motive, the mind is purely passive;) This, I say, is the ground of the whole error; and leads men to think that the mind is no more active, than a balance would be with the addition of a power of perception: Which is wholly taking away the very notion of liberty. (Cl 5.1–20, W IV, 671)

This is an important passage, because so much has been made of Clarke's choice among equals. However, once we analyse this point of the correspondence from the vantage point of Clarke's active-passive distinction, it soon becomes evident that choice among equals is not employed in order to reject intellectualism, but merely to avoid necessitarianism. Leibniz rejected choice among equals because it violated his PSR: Everything needs a reason why it is thus and not otherwise, and therefore even God would not be able to make a choice among equals.[16] Clarke vehemently opposed this line of thinking: If God's will lacks an intrinsic and self-sufficient power of self-determination, then the distinction between will and judgment vanishes, and one falls into necessitarianism—God becomes nothing more than a balance being moved by its weights.

To put this more precisely: Clarke's worry was that Leibniz conflated 'sufficient reason' and 'sufficient cause'.[17] Clarke points out this problem near the end of the fifth letter, where he tells us that Leibniz's PSR 'is of an *equivocal* signification; and may be either so understood, as to mean *necessity only*, or so as to include likewise *will and choice*' (Cl 5.124–30, W IV, 700). What I take

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16   See also Rowe (1997).

17   See also Bella (2008).

Clarke to mean with this, is that abstract reasons may be sufficient to explain truths of necessity (such as 2 + 2 = 4), which do not require any activity for their obtainment, but they are not sufficient to ground actions.[18] For actions, a different kind of PSR needs to be employed, which we may call the causal PSR. This causal PSR states that the only sufficient reason for an action is the will of an agent. Thus, only the will itself provides the sufficient cause for action. We find evidence for this way of phrasing the issue in Clarke's fifth letter:

> the true and only question in philosophy concerning *liberty, is,* whether the *immediate physical cause* or *principle of action* be indeed *in* him whom we call the *agent*; or whether it be some *other reason sufficient*, which is the *real cause* of the action, by operating upon the agent, and making him to be, not indeed an *agent*, but a mere *patient.* (Cl 5.1–20, W IV, 673–74)

Notice how 'some other reason sufficient' is immediately connected to being 'the real cause of the action': If God's actions are grounded in his judgment, and his judgment is necessitated by goodness and rationality (as Clarke indeed believes), then God's actions are ultimately caused by antecedent relations of goodness and rationality.

Clarke was worried that Leibniz vacillated too easily between a logical PSR and a causal PSR.[19] This was dangerous, because if you conflate the two, the division between will and judgment vanishes, and God no longer has any true agency. Thus, to maintain the distinction between activity and passivity, the PSR needs to be bifurcated, 'so as to include likewise *will and choice*' (Cl 5.124–30, W IV, 700), because reasons are only passive and cannot be the cause of anything. Therefore, the sufficient reason (or, more accurately, sufficient ground) of God's actions cannot be mere reason, but has to be his mere will. To argue otherwise would lead to necessitarianism.

Thus, Clarke's defense of choice among equals does not constitute an attack on intellectualism per se. Clarke readily accepts that God's will always determines itself in accordance with what is best (which is the hallmark of intellectualism). Only in cases where there are multiple best options, God's mere will provides the tiebreaker, since the alternative would be to reject God's power of self-determination. Choice among equals here functions as a litmus test for a correct understanding of free agency: A true contra-causal agent must have the freedom to determine its own motion, without requiring external influences for its determination.

1.3.1. Clarke's principle of the best

Clarke always expresses himself in favour of God choosing (without exception) what is best and wisest. Sometimes there is only one best option, in which case God invariably chooses it. For instance, Cl 3.7 begins as follows:

> Where there is any difference in the *nature of things*, there the consideration of that difference always determines an intelligent and perfectly wise agent. (Cl 3.7, W IV, 609)

It is easy to miss the significance of this statement, but the otherwise innocuous phase 'difference of things' is in fact central to Clarke's system of ethics. For Clarke, ethics ultimately rests on the eternal differences, relations, respects or proportions between things, which necessarily lead to certain fitnesses, unfitnesses, agreements or disagreements of the application of different things one to another, 'not depending on any positive constitutions, but founded unchangeably in the nature and reason of things, and unavoidably arising from the differences of the things themselves' (W II, 612). These differences and relations determine (independently from the will of God), what is rational and good. With this in mind, we can read the passage from Cl 3.7 as a condensed statement of Clarke's principle of the best. A more elaborate and explicit statement of his own Principle of the Best can be found in his *Demonstration*:

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18   This corresponds to Sangiacomo's distinction between conceptual necessity and obtainment necessity (Sangiacomo 2018: 427).

19   See also Ducharme (1984: 175).

an infinitely wise being cannot but *know* them to be what they [the eternal relations] are, and *judge* always rightly concerning the several fitnesses or unfitnesses of them; and an infinitely good being, cannot but *choose* to *act* always according to this knowledge of the respective fitness of things: It being as truly impossible for such a *free agent*, who is absolutely incapable of being deceived or depraved, to *choose*, by acting contrary to these laws, to destroy its own *perfections*; as for *necessary existence* to *be able to destroy* its own *being.* (W II, 574)

Clarke clearly and unequivocally acknowledges here that a perfectly wise agent always does what is best and wisest on the whole. Clarke's PB differs from Leibniz's in one important way: Clarke detaches his PB from his PSR, whereas for Leibniz the PB is subsumed under the PSR.[20] In Clarke's version of the PB, there can be multiple equally good options, and God can choose one of these arbitrarily without needing a reason for his specific choice. The PB tells us God's will is always in accordance with his judgment of what is best, even if there are multiple equally good options. In fact, since the alternative would be to do nothing, God's non-action in the face of equal choices would be a breach of the PB.[21] Thus, while Clarke's PB and PSR are in some ways very different from Leibniz's, he does have principles that perform the same functions.

2. CLARKE AND THE VOLUNTARISM-INTELLECTUALISM DEBATE

Clarke's strong commitment to moral necessity, as well as the eternal relations of things, may come as a surprise to whoever expected to find a clear case of voluntarism in his writings. In this section I will examine the arguments that have been put forward in favour of Clarke's voluntarism and explain my disagreement with them. While many scholars have made brief mention of Clarke's voluntarism, only a few have argued for it in detail. The two most extensive cases for Clarke's voluntarism have been made by John Henry and Andrea Sangiacomo. They have put forward two distinct arguments, which rest on entirely different conceptions of voluntarism. I will call these the 'goodness account', and the 'free determination account'. Both of these conceptions are very common means of distinguishing between voluntarism and intellectualism. Henry has argued that Clarke is a voluntarist on both the goodness account and the free determination account. Sangiacomo rejects the goodness account, but nevertheless considers Clarke a voluntarist under the free determination account. As we will see, these two conceptions of Clarke's voluntarism are surprisingly different: Whereas the goodness account rules out the possibility of God being constrained by pre-existing notions of goodness, the free determination account has no difficulties at all allowing for such constraints on God's choice, instead emphasizing that God's choice was nevertheless not determined by these constraints.

2.1. THE GOODNESS ACCOUNT

While Henry has put forward a number of ways to define voluntarism over the years, his most consistently employed definition revolves around the notion of eternal uncreated truths of goodness. According to Henry:

> one of the traditional ways of characterizing the differences … is to say that the intellectualist believes that God does what is good, but the voluntarist says that what God does is good. The first implies that the good is an absolute concept independent of God, the latter carries no such implication. (Henry 2009: 81)

In a similar vein, he writes that voluntarists rejected the idea that God's will was constrained 'to choose a particular kind of creation by pre-existing absolute conceptions of what was good, or what was possible according to some philosophical position' (Henry 2009: 86). He repeats this

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20   See also Grover (1996).

21   This can be made sense of as follows: Suppose that in a game of chess you have multiple possible mate-in-one options, to win the game you must pick one arbitrarily, because the alternative would be to resign the game, which is far from the best possible move.

distinction in his 2018 article, in which he defines voluntarism as the view that 'there could not have been any co-eternal moral or physical principles to which God had to conform in the creation. He had complete freedom of operation and his omnipotence was not compromised by already existing moral, logical, or physical restraints' (Henry and McGuire 2018: 10). This is contrasted with the intellectualist position, which 'assumed that God's creation and providence were necessarily guided, and indeed constrained, by supposed co-eternal principles of good and evil, right and wrong, and so forth' (Henry and McGuire 2018: 10).

Applying this notion to the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence, Henry concludes that their conflict 'reveals, above all else, a clash between the differing worldviews of the voluntarist and the intellectualist' (Henry 2009: 89). This is because, according to Henry, Clarke argued that God's mere will is the sufficient reason for his choices, in contrast to Leibniz according to whom the reasons for God's actions are independent from his will. Hence, according to Henry, Leibniz takes 'a classic intellectualist position, opposed by the voluntarist claim that God can create arbitrarily, unconstrained by any supposedly eternal uncreated truths' (Henry 2009: 98–99).

Henry's argument rests on the assumption that Clarke allowed for a God unconstrained by eternal uncreated truths. As I have shown with my reconstruction, this is not a position Clarke accepted. It is abundantly clear that Clarke *does* believe morality, rationality, and mathematical truths are antecedent to God's will, and that these principles really do constrain God's will. Clarke explicitly argues that God 'must act always according to the strictest rules of infinite *Goodness*, *Justice*, and *Truth*', and that these rules are unchangeable, eternal, and (crucially) 'antecedent to *will* and to *all positive appointment*' (W II, 572). From these statements, it is clear that there is no way in which goodness depends on God's will, or that God can act contrary to what is best. To remove any lingering doubt about this, however, let me emphasize a passage from Clarke's sermon 'Of the Omnipotence of God':

> [It] is too often so understood, as if the *power and will of* God *made that to be* right, which *is* so; and as if it might as easily have made the contrary to *become* right. [...] but even with regard to *God himself also* it is plainly a mistake: For, not *power or will,* but the reason of things only, is the foundation of *right*: and tho' 'tis indeed certainly true, that whatever God does, we are sure 'tis right, because he does it; yet the meaning of this, is not, that God's *doing or willing* a thing, *makes* it to be right; but that *his* wisdom and goodness is such, that we may depend on it, even *without* understanding it, that whatever he wills, was *in itself* right, *antecedent* to his willing it; and that he *therefore* willed it, *because* it was right. (W I, 55) [22]

In other words: God cannot decide what is right and wrong, because right and wrong are grounded in the necessity of things, and therefore do not depend on the will or choice of God. Moreover, Clarke is very explicit that it would be as impossible for God to act against these laws, as it would be for a necessary agent to be free. Thus, while I agree with Henry that the goodness account may perhaps be one of the most consistent means we have for distinguishing between voluntarism and intellectualism, it places Clarke squarely in the intellectualist camp.

2.2. THE FREE DETERMINATION ACCOUNT

Another way to carve up the voluntarism-intellectualism distinction is through the contingency of creation. Henry points out, for instance, that one reason to suppose Newton to have been a voluntarist is that he believed that 'the world might have been otherwise then it is (because there may be worlds otherwise framed then this) Twas therefore noe necessary but a voluntary & free determination that it should bee thus' (Henry 2009: 88). While Henry unfortunately does not provide us with further details why exactly such language ought to be an indication of voluntarism, it is very much in line with what I will call the free determination account. The general gist of this argument is that a voluntarist believes that God could have made the world in a very important sense otherwise than it presently is, whereas an intellectualist would say God

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22   This is similar to what Clarke says in his sermon 'Of the Justice of God' (W I, 100–101).

could not have made the world otherwise. This argument has been made in various forms, and for ease of argument I will make a further distinction between a strong and weak version of the free determination account. The strong account states that according to voluntarists God had the freedom to choose different physical or metaphysical constructions of the universe, free from moral, physical, or possibly even metaphysical restrictions. The weak account states that while God's choices were significantly constrained by eternal truths, these constraints did not determine his choices, and therefore were still free determinations.

2.2.1. The strong account for free determination

The strong account tells us that according to voluntarists the world could have been framed differently in quite a radical sense, for instance, that God had the freedom to change the laws of physics or the nature of space and time. In the case of Clarke, the most well-known instance of such freedom is Clarke's argument for the existence of vacuum (Shapin 1981: 195), since this is a clear point of disagreement between Clarke and Leibniz, central to their correspondence, and which brings out most clearly their different views on God's choice for the best possible world. I will show here why the vacuum debate of the correspondence is not consistent with the strong free determination account for voluntarism.

Whereas Leibniz had argued that God had no option at all to create a void space, Clarke argued that the amount of matter in the universe was contingent, and completely dependent on God's free choice. Indeed, a world with more or less void space was physically possible according to Clarke, and God had to choose how much void space to keep in the universe. And, as is well-known, Leibniz's primary argument against void space (in the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence) is that more being equals more goodness, and that therefore any void space would detract from the total goodness of the world.[23] Any imaginable world with void space would have been even better without void space. Therefore, the best possible world by definition cannot contain voids. This argument is certainly in line with Leibniz's intellectualism, since it depends crucially on the claim that God chose the best of possible worlds.

But Clarke's insistence on the possibility of void space contradicts neither his principle of the best, nor the metaphysical constraints placed on God's creation. We have already seen that Clarke is strongly in favour of God's choice for the best possible world, and that throughout their correspondence Clarke continues to emphasize that God indeed invariably (and in some sense *necessarily*) chooses the best possible world. Furthermore, the possibility or impossibility of void space on a more fundamental physical or metaphysical level does not depend on God's will at all: According to Clarke, the nature of space is uncreated and antecedent to God's will, and as a result the *possibility* of void space is not dependent on God's will.[24]

Contrary to what the strong account for voluntarism would predict, therefore, their disagreement lies elsewhere. Namely, they disagree about the equivalence between being and goodness:

> a greater (as well as a less) quantity of matter, would have made the present frame of the world less convenient; and consequently would not have been a greater object for God to have exercised his goodness upon. (Cl 3.9; W IV, 609)

According to Clarke, the total amount of matter in the universe is not maximized, but optimized. The amount of void space in the world was chosen because it was required to create the best of all possible worlds. Any variation from this quantity would have resulted in a less perfect world. Hence, the disagreement between Leibniz and Clarke regarding vacuum is not about God's fundamental freedom from metaphysical constraints, but about the principles guiding the determination of the

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23   Whether void space is also metaphysically impossible for Leibniz, is not something I will consider in this paper, since this would be beside the point: If Leibniz and Clarke disagree regarding the metaphysical possibility of vacuum, this disagreement would be irrespective of their accounts of divine liberty, since neither philosopher believes God can do something which is metaphysically impossible.

24   Space, according to Clarke, is co-eternal with God. Before creation, there was already void space. It is doubtful whether it was even in God's power to prevent void space from ever existing, since this would have required an eternal universe rather than creation in time.

best possible world. In other words: it is a discussion about goodness, rather than metaphysics. Leibniz believed he had a showstopper principle ('more = better'), by which he could know for certain that a world with void space cannot be the best possible world (allowing him to circumvent the otherwise infinite analysis that would have to be made). Clarke did not have this shortcut available to him, since he denies this principle (Cl 2.2; W IV, 597). Therefore, he believes that the ratio of void to matter cannot be decided by human reason, but nevertheless that God chose the best possible ratio—and this is expressly stated by Clarke in his response.

That this argument about void space does not make as much of a difference as some scholars have assumed, becomes even more clear once we consider Leibniz's answer to a closely related question: Why didn't God make the created world last any longer or shorter than it currently will?[25] After all, since Leibniz does not believe the creation to be infinite in duration, it seems likely that God could have made the universe last a bit longer. According to Leibniz's more=better principle, such a universe must be better, since it contains more being. Leibniz's answer is illuminating: While it is true that God *could* have made the world last longer, 'whether such an augmentation be reasonable and agreeable to God's wisdom, is another question, to which we answer in the negative; otherwise God *would* have made such an augmentation' (Lz 5:56, W IV, 651). Though our human minds may think a longer duration would be better, this 'would be like as *Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam jungere si velit*',[26] Leibniz writes. In other words: The exact duration of the created world (from creation to annihilation) was a complex choice, depending on the balance and harmony of the whole,[27] which was decided by God on the basis of his infinite wisdom, in accordance with the principle of the best. The 'more=better' approach does not work with respect to time, and once Leibniz loses this principle, he takes recourse to a strategy very similar to Clarke's. The similarity between Leibniz's answer, and Clarke's answer regarding void space, is unmistakable (cf. Cl 3:9, W IV, 609), as Leibniz's God evidently had to make similarly contingent and complex choices as Clarke's God.[28]

While Clarke therefore clearly disagreed about the role of the quantity of matter in the selection of the best possible world, neither the free determination account nor the goodness account allows us to frame this in terms of a clash between voluntarism and intellectualism. Like Leibniz, Clarke readily accepted that God was morally necessitated to create the best of possible worlds, and that this rested on eternal relations of goodness which are antecedent to God's will. Therefore, his acceptance of void space does not provide evidence for his voluntarism.

2.2.2. The weak account for free determination

While the strong account has historically been more dominant in scholarship on the Leibniz-Clarke debate, at least two scholars have put forward versions of what I will call the weak account. This account was first put forward almost in passing by Ezio Vailati in his important study on the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence. While Vailati recognizes that Clarke's God invariably acted on his 'necessarily correct judgment', we should nevertheless consider Clarke to be a 'moderate' voluntarist, since:

> Clarke held that the will, in God as in us, is not causally determined by the
> understanding, and that therefore the rules governing the *potential dei absoluta*, a
> subset of which are the laws of nature, are freely self-imposed and not the result of the
> necessarily correct divine understanding: they are a manifestation of God's moral, and

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25   This is a slightly different question that the other question which is discussed at length in the correspondence, namely whether God could have created the world sooner. The difference is that creating the world sooner is impossible for Leibniz, since time is relational, and the first moment is always first moment. But even in this relational theory, the total duration of the world, between creation and annihilation, can take on various lengths.

26   A reference to Horace, meaning to think that joining a human head to a horse's neck would be an improvement.

27   This, I take it, is why he quotes Horace.

28   This also lines up with what we know of Leibniz's theory of infinite analysis. If the decision for the best possible world had been as cut-and-dry as the vacuum case, Leibniz would have difficulties accounting for the contingency of creation.

therefore free, attributes, not of God's metaphysical, and therefore necessary, ones. (Vailati 1997: 142)

This account was later worked out in more detail by Andrea Sangiacomo. According to him, 'Voluntarism … makes God's will somehow independent of the intellect. While God may be morally determined to act on the basis of what he understands to be the best, God's freedom is in no way restricted to acting in any particular way' (Sangiacomo 2018: 432). Intellectualism, on the other hand, is defined as the view that 'God's will is determined by God's intellect' (Sangiacomo 2018: 432). Hence, whereas for Henry co-eternal principles constraining God's will were considered incompatible with voluntarism, Sangiacomo and Vailati have no difficulties allowing such restraints within the voluntarism label, as long as there is some way in which God's creation is not directly determined by them. Instead, according to Sangiacomo, Clarke ascribes to God an arbitrary freedom to 'choose to act or forbear acting', which he sees as a crucial element in Clarke's rejection of Spinoza's necessitarianism.

This free choice, on Sangiacomo's reading, appears to be wholly separate from the intellect, and is something he considers a 'liberty of indifference'. Because of this element of arbitrary choice, God's actions are never antecedently necessitated, but only ever necessary on the supposition of his will. That God's actions are never antecedently necessary, and that this forms the ground of contingency, is indeed correct. But in order to secure supposition necessity, Clarke neither needs to nor wants to say that God's choices are indifferent: ''tis nevertheless as *truly and absolutely impossible* for God not to do (or to do any thing contrary to) what his moral attributes require him to do; as if he was really, not a free, but a necessary agent (W II, 573). It can hardly be considered a perfection to ever act contrary to what you know is best, which is why this is not the kind of freedom Clarke argued for. Instead, it is clear that God's will invariably chooses to do what he knows to be best.

A possible way out of this would be to acknowledge that Clarke's God is indeed incapable of ever *actually* acting contrary to his best judgment, but that Clarke only wished to allow for the non-actualized (physical) possibility of God acting against his best judgment. This would be compatible with my interpretation of Clarke's account of freedom to act or forbear acting. But it would be a questionable way to frame the difference, since Leibniz would also have to be considered a voluntarist on this account:

> God chooses among the possibles, and it is for that reason that he chooses freely and that he is not necessitated. There would be neither choice nor liberty, if there were only a single course possible. (Theodicy §235, as quoted in Sleigh 1990: 83)

God's free determination is a persistent theme throughout Leibniz's works. And while Leibniz's solution to the problem of free determination took on many forms, he always remained committed to the belief that 'if nothing were possible except what God in fact creates, what God creates would be necessary, and God, wanting to create something, could create nothing but that, without having freedom of choice' (Leibniz, letter to Arnauld dated July 1686, 62–63; G ii 56). His acknowledgement of free determination shifted over his lifetime, moving from what has been called the 'free decree approach' to his well-known theory of infinite analysis with many steps along the way (Sleigh 1990). But despite offering different solutions to this problem, the basic defense of God's possibility of 'choosing otherwise' is something both Leibniz and Clarke were committed to. This is because accepting the mere physical possibility of other choices is a common element in theories of moral necessity (Murray 2004: 13). As Leibniz made clear to Arnauld, *anyone* who opposed necessitarianism would have to acknowledge that God could have chosen otherwise. Such a commitment is not indicative of a disagreement between voluntarists and intellectualists, but rather indicative only of a rejection of necessitarianism. We should once more be careful not to conflate the rejection of necessitarianism with the rejection of intellectualism.[29]

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29   While it is mostly accepted that Leibniz at least *intended* to avoid necessitarianism, scholars are less certain whether his attempts were successful. Griffin has argued in favor of reading Leibniz as a necessitarian (Griffin 2013), as did Clarke for that matter. We may likewise question how successful Clarke was in avoiding necessitarianism; Jorati has made a compelling case for reading Clarke as a compatibilist (Jorati 2021).

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have provided a reconstruction of Clarke's account of divine agency, and applied it to the question of whether Clarke was a voluntarist. In the first part of this paper, I have reconstructed Clarke's account of divine freedom. I have shown that Clarke makes a strict distinction between the faculties of will and judgment, and argues that judgment is purely passive and the will purely active. I have argued that Clarke introduced this distinction between active and passive faculties in order to avoid necessitarianism. The strict distinction between will and judgment creates a sort of causal firewall, in which the judgment can never be the sufficient cause for the agent's actions. The will is the only cause of action, and it always remains casually independent from the judgment. Thus, judgment can only be said to morally necessitate the will, but never physically. Furthermore, I have examined the problematic passage regarding 'choosing to act or to forbear acting', and have shown why it does not lead Clarke to a voluntarist position. Lastly, my reconstruction has shed light on the issues of choice among equals, the principle of sufficient reason, and the principle of the best. Here too, I have shown why allowing choice among equals does not make Clarke a voluntarist.

In the second part of this paper, I have argued that the two main arguments which have been used to label Clarke a voluntarist are unable to adequately account for the differences between Leibniz and Clarke. While the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence has been put forward as a clear example of the voluntarism-intellectualism distinction, I have shown that it is difficult to see how this can be the case. Neither the goodness account nor the free determination can accurately account for the kind of disagreement we observe between Leibniz and Clarke. The goodness account for voluntarism fails because it makes both Leibniz and Clarke intellectualists, whereas the free determination account fails because it makes both of them voluntarists. I therefore conclude that the disagreement between Leibniz and Clarke cannot be characterized as one between a voluntarist and an intellectualist. There are many other possible explanations for their rivalry, but it is important that we acknowledge that both of them believed in the moral necessity of God's goodness, eternal laws or relations of right and wrong antecedent to God's will, and the certainty of God choosing the best of possible worlds. Overconfident in the validity of the voluntarism label, scholarship has overlooked this important conclusion, and misinterpreted Clarke's position on divine freedom.

I believe we need to critically re-examine the usefulness of this distinction for our understanding of the early modern period. Voluntarism has not delivered Foster's promises of explanatory power, and the ease by which scholars have relied on these labels has obscured the subtlety of early modern debates regarding liberty and necessity. That is not to say that there is no concern in the early modern period about the relation between god's freedom and his goodness. On the contrary: Clarke himself mentions something *much like* what we would now call voluntarism (though he explicitly distances himself from it). A total dismissal of the distinction seems too strong of a response. Where things have gone wrong, I think, is that we have overestimated the explanatory power this distinction offers, and have not been careful enough in determining who counts as a voluntarist. In the case of Clarke, remarks intended to reject necessitarianism have been mistakenly interpreted as signs of voluntarism. While the voluntarism/intellectualism distinction may function very well as a useful marker (and reminder) of an important early modern concern about God's freedom, it does not explain the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence—which was one of the major reasons offered in defense of this hotly contested distinction between voluntarism and intellectualism.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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