

On the Reasons of Movement, Third Draft:
A Significant Work among Leibniz's Early Oeuvre

Abstract:

Among Leibniz's early works there is one which deserves to be much better known and probably needs a new title. The work in question was written in late 1669, or perhaps in the first months of 1670, and bears the title *De rationibus motibus (Dritter Entwurf), On the Reasons of Motion, Third Draft*. A more descriptive title would be *On the Properties of Body from Definitions*. It is a significant work on several levels. On its own it presents a striking theory of body. With a vocabulary that is part Hobbes and part scholastic, Leibniz presents a theory of body that is essentially modern. All active powers in a body derive ultimately from spatial motion. Among the most significant parts of the work – and we should remember that we are after Descartes but before Newton – is a derivation of inertial motion from metaphysical principles. In this we see a typical Leibnizian concern to ground natural philosophy in metaphysics. Furthermore, one may occasionally see the possibilities which led to his later doctrines; I'll indicate some of these lines. In other respects, however, it would be a mistake to interpret this work as foreshadowing Leibniz's later doctrines. In this period Leibniz is, consciously I believe, experimenting with different views and we should not attach too much importance to an occasional agreement between a doctrine in this period and one of a later period. Nonetheless, the same types of concerns and the same logical coherency among the elements of the doctrine are as present here as in the later Leibniz. It is in this that we recognize the Leibniz we are familiar with in, for example, *Discourse on Metaphysics*. Furthermore, nowhere in the early, pre-Paris, Leibniz are his intellectual capacities better illustrated than in this work.

It is hard to speak of the influence of Thomas Hobbes on Leibniz at this period without falling into contradiction. At one moment one wishes to argue that it is massive, and in the following moment that it is superficial. *On the Reasons of Movement, Third Draft* illustrates perhaps better than anywhere else the ambivalence of this influence. Leibniz adopts the vocabulary and the epistemology of Thomas Hobbes' *Concerning Body*. Thus at a surface level the influence of Hobbes is apparent. On a more careful reading, however, this influence quickly diminishes as we see that both the doctrine and even the motivations behind it are unrelated to the interests of Hobbes. The young Leibniz is not a follower of Hobbes, though he is an admirer. The epistemology that Leibniz takes over from Hobbes in this early work is difficult to place in either empiricist or rationalist frameworks. Elsewhere I have characterized *Concerning Body's* epistemology as definitionalism. *On the Reasons of Motion, Third Draft*, is an extreme example of such an epistemology. Whereas Hobbes does allow experience to motivate a change in the definitional foundations of his system, Leibniz's system is purely based on his definitions without any consideration of experience.

The real significance of the text in the Leibnizian oeuvre is to be found in its relations to the works immediately before and after its redaction. After reading the work of Huygens, Wallis and Wren on impact phenomena, Leibniz is predominantly thinking about the laws of motion. The first two attempts to tackle this problem, *On the Reasons of Motion, First Draft* and the *Second Draft*, were implicitly inadequate in his own eyes, though they are fascinating attempts to come to grips with the emerging natural philosophy of the period. Thus in the *Third Draft*, the laws of motion are largely set aside, the final theorems do deal with them briefly, and Leibniz searches into the properties of bodies, which he sees as underlying the laws of motion.