

Leibniz's Physical Explanation of Real Presence

Laurynas Adomaitis

*The major question that concerns this paper is why Leibniz moved away from his early physical system, expressed in *Theoria motus abstracti* and the *Hypothesis physica nova*. The general claim is that metaphysics together with theology was part of the reason why Leibniz abandoned it. Leibniz saw that his views on bodily action as motion and impenetrability lead to a misguided interpretation of the Eucharist. His solution was, first, to fully endorse the activity principle of individuation; second, to abandon the explanation of impenetrability through the composition of conatus admitting it among the basic qualities of bodies. In changing his position, Leibniz was trying to avoid falling into a similar situation in which Descartes found himself regarding the doctrine of real presence.*

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1.

Sometime during the Paris years (1672–1676), Leibniz came to be skeptical of what he had earlier called *phoronomia elementalis*, i.e. purely abstract geometrical mechanics. The earlier model of the *Theoria motus abstracti* and the *Hypothesis physica nova* consisted of a two-level structure – an abstract theory of motion (the *Theoria motus abstracti*) and a hypothetical reconciliation of that theory with experience (the *Hypothesis physica nova*). Leibniz had argued that all mechanical phenomena can be explained through geometrical terms given the sole hypothesis of ether. While staying in Paris he came to believe that there is a fundamental flaw in this approach and that the program of abstract mechanics is essentially incomplete.

Some reasonable suggestions are found in the secondary literature about why that happened. Arthur points out: “It is only after he has formulated the differential calculus in the spring of 1676 that Leibniz comes to the realization that endeavors [sc. *conatus*] should not be conceived as actually infinitely small parts of the continuum, but as arbitrarily small, finite motions”¹. Arthur’s argument

¹ R.T.W. Arthur, *Monads, Composition, and Force: Ariadnean Threads Through Leibniz's Labyrinth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 178.