

ABSTRACT OF 1996 ESSAY COMPETITION WINNER

“When *Did* Leibniz Adopt the Pre-established Harmony?”

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It has become something of a received view among contemporary scholars that Leibniz first adopted the pre-established harmony around the time of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and *Correspondence with Arnauld*, i.e., 1686-87. However, in their recent contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, Christia Mercer and Robert Sleigh Jr. have challenged this orthodoxy by claiming that Leibniz was committed to the doctrine, in all but name, by April 1676. In the present paper, I argue that the evidence that Mercer and Sleigh present to support their somewhat radical thesis is problematic in a number of respects. But rather than embracing the ‘received view’, I present further evidence in favor of the view that Leibniz had in fact adopted the pre-established harmony by 1679.

Mercer and Sleigh suggest that three theses are essential for pre-established harmony, which express the spontaneity, correspondence and causal isolation of substances respectively. In the first section of the paper I consider the support that Mercer and Sleigh present for their claim that Leibniz had adopted each of these theses by April 1676. The passages in question are taken from a number of the papers that make up Leibniz’s Paris notes. Here I argue that, although there can be little doubt that Leibniz was committed to the correspondence of substances at this time, there are difficulties with the case that is made for Leibniz’s adoption of the theses of spontaneity and causal isolation. In particular, I claim that the evidence that Mercer and Sleigh present is consistent with a version of occasionalism.

The second section considers more general problems which must beset *any* attempt to attribute a particular position to Leibniz, concerning substantial causation, based on the Paris notes. Leibniz wrote a number of papers in 1676 to which Mercer and Sleigh do not refer, and examination of these writings reveals several passages that appear to contradict the pre-established harmony. Sometimes Leibniz speaks as a traditional Aristotelian, with an ontology of corporeal substances that partake in genuine causal interactions, and, at others, as an occasionalist for whom all genuine causal power rests with God. In light of these considerations, and Leibniz’s own testimony in the dialogue *Pacidius Philalethi* later that year, it seems that the most reasonable conclusion is that Leibniz did not have a settled view of the issues at this time, and that the Paris notes contain nothing more than explorations of the available options.

In the final section, I turn to more positive considerations and present evidence that Leibniz had in fact adopted the pre-established harmony by 1679. Having already claimed, earlier in the paper, that there is no reason to think that Leibniz ever rejected the correspondence of substances, the aim here is to show the presence of spontaneity and causal isolation. Support for both of these theses is found in a number of pieces from this year, including the essay *De affectibus*, the *Dialogue between Theophile and Poliodore*, and two letters to Malebranche.

The paper closes with a consideration of the possibility that, in 1679, Leibniz may have been dogged by uncertainties similar to those that arose in the Paris period. Examination of the relevant texts has, so far, revealed only one passage that points to such vacillation. This is taken from a letter to Weigel written in 1679. As Mark Kulstad has pointed out, this passage seems to indicate that Leibniz was favorably disposed to a form of occasionalism at this time. However, I argue that consideration of the remainder of this letter reveals an alternate reading that is consistent with Leibniz's adoption of pre-established harmony.