

Space-Time Parallelism in Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence: Vacuums Beyond and Within the World

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One assumption shared between Leibniz and Clarke/Newton, and with nearly every other philosopher of the seventeenth century, is the strong analogy between space and time. This paper critically examines this space-time parallelism in connection with the question of the vacuum, which is treated in detail in the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence. In contrast with several recent influential commentators (Vailati, Futch, Khamara), this paper maintains that Leibniz erred (perhaps strategically) in treating the question of spatial and temporal vacua as strictly analogous. Certain crucial arguments against spatial vacua do not seem to extend to temporal vacua. For example, Leibniz argues that an empty space would derogate from God's perfection: "therefore he has actually placed some matter in that space." (Letter 4, 46; L 691; AG 332) But it is unclear why a limited period of rest or stasis – empty time – would detract from God's excellence; if it did then the best world, i.e. this one, would need to undergo maximal (phenomenal) change. Furthermore, Leibniz insists that arguments against extramundane spatial vacua apply equally against intramundane vacua "for they differ only as greater or less." (Letter 4, 7; L 687; AG 328; see also Letter 5, 33; L 701; AG 335) This may be true of empty space but it does not seem true of empty time. For example, Leibniz says against a spatial vacuum: "extension must be the affection *of* something extended. But if that space is empty, it will be an attribute without a subject, an extension without something extended." (Letter 4, 9; L 687; AG 328) But an empty time, or changeless duration, within the world needn't be the duration *of* nothing. There are also significant epistemic asymmetries between intramundane spatial and temporal vacua, as Leibniz himself notes the *New Essays* (NE 155) This paper argues that despite the guiding methodological space-time parallelism of the correspondence with Clarke, Leibniz may have embraced a more ontologically robust conception of time (or duration) than space (or extension).