

**Stony Brook University  
The Graduate School**

**Doctoral Defense Announcement**

**Abstract**

*The Science of Right in Leibniz's Practical Philosophy*

By

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This dissertation examines a rather infrequent topic of Leibniz's theory of natural right. It argues that the ground and development of Leibniz's practical philosophy depends essentially on his conception of natural right. His conception is informed by a variety of historical sources, most dominantly Aristotle and the Roman Digest. In contemporary terms Leibniz' conception of natural right may be called "subjective right." For Leibniz, this means, according to his definition, that right is the moral power (and moral necessity) of a rational substance. From this definition may be derived his account of obligation, moral goodness, the just condition, the account of justice as virtue, and justice defined as the charity of the wise. On the most basic level, right is the self-limiting power of a rational substance. On the broadest level right implies moral perfection or virtue, and contributes to the freedom of the subject.

These claims are supported through detailed examination of Leibniz's most important writings on natural right, writings which span his career from beginning to end (1666-1706). I show that when Leibniz's claims about the "demonstrability" of jurisprudence, right, and morals are examined closely, a "science of right" must take a central rather than peripheral position in his practical philosophy. Most treatments of Leibniz's practical philosophy focus on pleasure, happiness, love, metaphysical and moral perfection, freedom versus necessity, or on problems related to God's "choice" of the best possible world. Most often, if it is treated at all, his theory of natural right is thought to be either derivative of more central issues or superceded by later developments. I argue, however, that even the latest developments of Leibniz's practical philosophy (such as the account of justice as *caritas sapientis*, and the theory of "moral necessity" found in the *Theodicy*) depend on his foundational theory of right. Leibniz established the elements of this foundations this theory very early on, and well before he had articulated even his earliest conception of monadic substance. In essential respects, this foundation does not change in the course of Leibniz's philosophical career.

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**Dissertation Advisor:** Jeffrey Edwards