

# Leibniz to Giambattista Tolomei<sup>1</sup>

Translated by Donald Rutherford

Hanover, 17 December 1705

I fear that my poorly timed letter will reach you while you are preoccupied with more important matters. I would have written earlier except that I had been waiting for your exceptional book, aptly titled *Philosophy of the Mind and the Senses*; would that there should follow from you a similar theology of the mind and heart, which is doubtless already prepared from your lectures. Thanks to Father Des Bosses of your order who teaches at Hildesheim, I have finally received the published work itself, and I could not stop myself looking through it quickly, though I am distracted in many ways. It was delightful after holding back for many years from reading such books to learn something of the present state of the schools and the reflections of a man in whom moderation competes with perspicacity. I once consulted Esparza and the excellent Sforza Pallavicino of your order, and it seems to me that these authors should be revived. I was also pleased by the parsimony of entities and mysteries, by the philosophical trees, and by the observations I found scattered here and there on the philosophical history of the schools, which until now we have lacked to our detriment.

I read with special care what you say about the composition of the continuum, the infinite, contingent things and related matters, particularly since with your great insight these things may be of service in supporting both natural religion and Christianity, concerning which the future things you promise undoubtedly will be exceptionally fine. It once seemed to me in meditating on it that there is no way to escape from the labyrinth of the continuum unless space itself, just like a common time, is taken to be nothing other than a certain order of compossibles, either simultaneous or successive, and you do not seem to shrink from this view. I have held as you do that whatever can be distinguished from the wholly real actually depends upon it [*ei actu inesse*], but the same is not true of the possible or ideal, just as a number cannot be understood as compounded from all possible fractions and no ultimate or smallest fraction can be imagined, whether it is taken to be simple and uniform or compounded in any way at all from any other ratio. Moreover, parts of a line correspond proportionally by means of fractions to parts of a unity. For the rest, from these and other things I have perceived, I have concluded that substance as well as accidental realities consist uniquely (as I have shown publicly) in *to dynamikon*, that is, in primitive and derivative active and passive force, which are commonly called form and matter and quality. But extension, and in it bulk or impenetrability, along with the rest of the corporeal predicates arising from these, which to many seem to constitute corporeal substance [*substantiam corpoream*] and are regarded by others as real absolute qualities, are in fact, I hold along with many ancient thinkers, only well-founded phenomena: certainly not phenomena that deceive but phenomena that have nothing else objectively real except that by which we distinguish dreams from waking, which is to say, the metaphysico-mathematical agreement among

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<sup>1</sup> GP VII 467-8.

themselves of all those things which souls or entelechies perceive, whether you compare these phenomena with themselves in the same entelechy or compare them with the phenomena of other entelechies. And these entelechies, when joined with something passive, in fact make up the entire universe (and you will recognize how much they also help us in explaining mysteries easily); nor do we find any other composition of an extended thing except from the phenomena of different perceivers or the different phenomena of the same perceiver, [phenomena] of such a number as there would be, if some infinity of souls were imagined to observe a particular performance or the same soul were imagined always to observe a different performance at an infinity of times. From this it is manifest also that all wholly real things are discrete in quantity, whereas a continuum is only ideal; I acknowledge more actual things than could be comprehended by any number, but these do not properly constitute a whole. Thus, strictly speaking, infinity can be attributed to neither number nor a line, and this (unless I am mistaken) I have demonstrated. The harmony of substances, or what is the same, of perceiving monads, is preestablished by a common cause, God (of whom there follows from this a new demonstration). I see that other things have already been noted by you in my short works; when these have been taken into account, nothing more seems to occur to me that would constitute a hurdle in general philosophy and that will not help wonderfully in theology. Would that there were time to reduce all these things to Euclidean demonstrations in the way I see could be done.

For the rest, especially since the new year is at hand which we begin with prayers, I beseech God that you, most excellent Sir, have health each day, so that just as you are accustomed to do, you may be able to contribute distinguished work in the future to His great glory, not only through contemplation but also through action. I have heard that my friend Father Bouvet has returned from the kingdom of the Chinese. I hope that his zeal, and that of his order, are supported by the supreme pontiff and the most Christian king, but above all that care is taken that when we carry our things there, we bring back from there the marvels of the [Chinese] people for ourselves, so that we may never regret that this opportunity was neglected.<sup>2</sup> Farewell and be well. Written at Hanover, 17 December 1705.

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<sup>2</sup> In the margin Leibniz wrote: "Our substantial matter has only potential parts, but the human body is an aggregate."