

G.W. Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe, Reihe I* “Allgemeiner Politischer und Historischer Briefwechsel,” Band 21 (April – December 1702), (Ed. Leibniz-Archiv Hannover). Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 2009, Pp. xxvff., 799, Indices.

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I

The main importance of the latest Academy-Edition volume (AI, 21) of Leibniz’ *General Political and Historical Correspondence* (covering the period April-December 1702¹) is that it continues and amplifies Leibniz’ sympathetic treatment of radically Platonizing “idealism” in his great essay of June 1702, “Letter concerning what is Independent of the Senses and of Matter”—a treatment which broke off (in vol. 20 of the Edition) in March 1702 as Leibniz was still working on the essay, but had not yet presented it to its dedicatee, Queen Sophie-Charlotte of Prussia. Vol. 21 now carries this Graeco-German story down to the end of 1702, with important letter-exchanges between Leibniz and the Queen, her mother Electress Sophie of Hannover, the Anglo-Irish “free thinker” John Toland, Thomas Burnett of Kemney, and Pierre Bayle, among others. Vols. 20 and 21 together let us see the detailed working-up of the great burst of Platonizing which then led Leibniz to write *Méditation sur la notion commune de la justice* (built on Plato’s *Euthyphro* and *Republic*) a year later in 1703, and then the *Nouveaux Essais* of 1704 (in which Leibniz identifies himself with Plato and Locke with the empiricizing Aristotle)².

II

In our review last year of Volume 20 of Leibniz’ *General Political and Historical Correspondence*, June 1701-March 1702 (*The Leibniz Review* vol. 18, December 2008), the most important letters dealt with “What is Independent of the Senses and of Matter”; and that celebrated essay of June 1702 was in turn Leibniz’ Platonizing critique of a no-longer-extant paper by John Toland (1670-1722), the Anglo-Irish “free-thinker,” deist, and materialist (and author of *Christianity not Mysterious*) who spent quite a lot of time in Northern Germany between 1701 and 1708, who charmed the Queen of Prussia and the Electress of Hannover—they found him amusing even though he aggravated their courts—and who finally wrote the *Letters to Serena* (1704) as a tribute to the Queen³.

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These same first few years of the eighteenth century provided Leibniz not just with time for a renewed burst of Platonizing “idealism,” but for a broad re-consideration of English thought and politics as well. In 1701, a series of English ambassadors and envoys brought to Hannover the “Act of Settlement” conferring the English crown on Electress Sophie and her descendants—and John Toland, as we have seen, was a visitor to the courts of both Hannover and Berlin in this period; but in “stolen hours” (as he called them⁴) Leibniz was also working on his monumental commentary on Locke’s *Essay* (which he began seriously with his 1700 “remarks” on Locke’s *Second Reply to the Bishop of Worcester*). Thus for Leibniz in 1700-1704, “England” and “Plato” converged and even collided: the 1703 *Méditation* on justice defends Platonizing idealism against Hobbes’ version of materialism, and a weaker version of this same idealism/materialism contestation then shapes the *Nouveaux Essais* in 1703-1704 (*contra* Locke).

Leibniz could say plainly and bluntly against John Toland (who was conveniently wandering through Germany) what he took care to say much more cautiously and diplomatically against John Locke: Leibniz worried about the “materialism” of both (especially the practical-theological consequences), but he wanted to publish a large commentary on Locke’s *Essay* (the *Nouveaux Essais*) which would be received respectfully if not joyfully in England, whereas he had no corresponding wish to comment lengthily in print on Toland’s *Christianity not Mysterious*.

Leibniz’ rationalism and ecumenism went far, especially in the *Preliminary Dissertation* of the *Théodicée*—but not far enough to encompass Toland. Hence in his only published monograph Leibniz—without mentioning Toland’s actual name—said only that “the English author” of a book “entitled *Christianity not Mysterious*” is “ingenious” but has “met with disapproval”⁵: this oblique and back-handed remark is Leibniz’ only published mentioning of Toland. (Indeed after the premature death of Queen Sophie-Charlotte in February 1705, Leibniz treated Toland with growing irony: “M. Toland is now here [in Hannover]: he has made a tour of Berlin and Vienna ... [and] was the welcome one at the court of Düsseldorf, where he was regaled with several medals for having printed a little discourse in England to show that the Elector [Palatine] is not a persecutor of Protestants” [to Thomas Burnett, March 1708⁶]. But ironizing never led Leibniz to agree with Daniel Defoe that Toland was “a man scandalous among Christians.”⁷)

Since Leibniz’ most important letters in the new *General Correspondence* vol. 21 deal (once again) with “Letter concerning what is Independent of the Senses and of Matter,” one should begin with a brief account of this remarkable

essay—which among all Leibniz’ writings does most to justify Robert Adams’ calling him an “idealist.”⁸ For in this paper for Queen Sophie-Charlotte, Leibniz uses Platonism to defeat not just John Toland but (much more importantly) the Lockean and even Aristotelian notion that there is nothing in the understanding which has not come from the senses; that, for Leibniz, is almost as bad as the “Hobbism” which treats mind as an epiphenomenon of matter (“the mind is none other than a motion of certain parts of the organic body”⁹)—the Hobbism which also treats all “conceptions” (universally) as caused by the “pressure” of “outward objects” (“Hobbes speaks as if it were possible to derive memory, intellect, will and consciousness from [bodily] magnitude, shape and motion alone”¹⁰). But, Leibniz says tartly in *Quid sit Idea*, “I take it to be certain that the mind is something else than the brain.”¹¹

“This thought of ‘I,’” Leibniz urges in “What is Independent,” “who distinguishes himself from sensible objects, and of my own action which results from it, adds something to the objects of the senses”—such as the idea of moral necessity, which the senses will never “see.” And since, he continues, “I conceive that other beings can also have the right to say ‘I’ (or one could say it for them), it is by this that I conceive what is called substance in general”; and it is also “the consideration of myself which furnishes me with other notions of metaphysics, such as cause, effect, action, similitude, etc., and even of logic and of morality.” Thus, Leibniz insists, one can say that “there is nothing in the understanding which has not come from the senses, except the understanding itself, or he who understands.”¹² With that last sentence, which sums up the main thrust of the *Nouveaux Essais* (written only slightly later), Leibniz at once reaffirms an adequate notion of a rational substance—as a being who has the “right” to say “I” (a moral entitlement) and who does not just passively receive “impressions” in the manner of a plant—and justifies Greek antiquity against English modernity (including that of Toland).

“Being itself, and truth, are not entirely learned through the senses,” Leibniz goes on to say. “For it would not be impossible that a creature have long and ordered dreams, resembling our life, such that all that one believed to perceive through the senses would only be pure appearances” (what he elsewhere calls “well-founded *phenomena*”). It is for this reason that “we need, then, something beyond the senses, which distinguishes the true from the apparent.” But here, Leibniz hopes, “the truth of the demonstrative sciences” such as mathematics, logic, and ethics may “serve to judge the truth of sensible things.” For as “able philosophers both ancient and modern” have correctly remarked, even if “all that I believe that I see

should be only a dream,” it would nonetheless “remain always true that ‘I’ who think while dreaming would be something, and would think effectively in many ways, for which there must always be some reason.”

It is for these reasons, Leibniz continues, that “that which the ancient Platonists have remarked, is quite true and very worthy of being considered”—namely, that “the existence of intelligible things and particularly of this ‘I’ who thinks and which is called mind or soul is incomparably more certain than the existence of sensible things,” and that, therefore, “it would not be impossible, speaking with metaphysical rigor, that there should be at bottom only these intelligible substances, and that sensible things are only appearances.”¹³ But, Leibniz complains, our “lack of attention” makes us “take sensible things for the only true ones.” And this is exactly the demi-Platonic language of the *New Essays*: “You do not see justice as you see a horse, but you understand it no less, or rather you understand it better.”¹⁴ Leibniz then goes on, in his letter to Sophie-Charlotte, to stress the centrality of Plato’s *Meno* in understanding “ideas” (as he had already done in *Discourse on Metaphysics* XXVI); both geometrical and moral necessity, equally,

... show that there is a *light born within us*. For since the senses and inductions could never teach us truths which are thoroughly universal, nor that which is absolutely necessary, but only that which is, and that which is found in particular examples; and since we nevertheless know necessary and universal truths of the sciences, a privilege we have above the brutes; it follows that we have derived these truths in part from what is within us. Thus we may lead a child to these by simple interrogations, after the manner of Socrates, without telling him anything, and without making him experiment at all upon the truth of what is asked of him. And this could very easily be practiced in numbers and other similar matters [e.g. ethics].¹⁵

Leibniz then, having stressed the necessity of mathematics, insists that the necessity of morality is “seen” through extra-sensory *lumière naturelle*: “for example, one can say that there are charitable people who are not just, which happens when charity is not sufficiently regulated For in justice is comprised at the same time charity and the rule of reason. It is by *lumière naturelle* also that one recognizes the axioms of mathematics.” (That “also” is revelatory.) “Necessary truths,” Leibniz urges, are known only by *lumière naturelle*: “for the senses can very well make known, in some sort, what is, but they can not make known what ought to be, or could not be otherwise.”¹⁶ As usual, Leibniz as demi-Platonist uses, back to back, moral and mathematical examples of what rational “substances” know—à

priori, though not indeed pre-natally—through “natural light,” independently of sense impressions. The Plato of *Meno* and *Phaedo* is largely supported, Locke broadly criticized.

In the end not just Toland but Locke is subjected, in the 1702 letter to Sophie-Charlotte, to a weaker version of the criticism which Leibniz had leveled for decades against Hobbes: that British “empiricism,” with its passive notion of a material substance which is only receptive, cannot account for (a) the *conceivability* of moral ideas (“what ought to be”); (b) the notion of a self with the “right to say ‘I’”; (c) the self-determining monadic activity (going beyond passive receptivity) of a self-so-conceived. This shows again (if further proof were needed) that for Leibniz an adequately conceived substance or monad is the *substratum* of all further reasoning about morality, justice and religion. Thus the “monadology” is the foundation of *iustitia caritas sapientis*: only a rational substance can know the “idea” of “what ought to be” through *lumière naturelle*, and then strive to bring it about.¹⁷

It is worth noticing that, in a later elaboration of “What is Independent,” Leibniz indicates that self-determining monadic activity (“the right to say ‘I’”), bathed in the *lumière naturelle* of “moral necessity,” is as problematical for Toland as for Hobbes or Locke: “When M. Toland was here [in Berlin] he accused M. Bayle of not understanding Spinoza; we shall see if he understands him better ... M. Toland claims particularly to disapprove of the fatal necessity of this author [Spinoza], but we must see what he will say.”¹⁸ But “what he will say,” for Leibniz, will be just as “fatal” to freedom as “Spinozism” itself: for a Tolandian materialist *cannot* accept the idea of a self-determining monad guided by an extra-sensory notion of “what ought to be.”

III

When John Toland, the direct object of Leibniz 1702 paper for Sophie-Charlotte, read the piece, he wrote back to the Queen that “far from it being the case that there is anything in our thoughts which does not come from our senses, and that the ‘I’ [*le moi*] is of this number, as the letter [of Leibniz] claims, on the contrary the ‘I’ is nothing other than the impression that sensible things make on the brain. And this impression has infinitely diverse degrees, which come to be known only through [sense] experience.”¹⁹ And this Toland-response then inspired Leibniz to write to Electress Sophie of Hannover that “Monsieur Toland has declared his opinion

to Her Majesty, which is exactly that of Hobbes—that there is nothing in nature except figures [shapes] and movements, which was also the opinion of Epicurus and of Lucretius.”²⁰ And Hobbes-Epicurus-Lucretius, for Leibniz, together amount to an unholy Trinity which sustains the “evil doctrine” (as Leibniz says in a 1702 letter to Bayle²¹) that there is no “naturally” immortal immaterial soul (of the kind found in *Phaedo*) and that there is thus no “natural” justice with “a reality of its own” (of the sort found in *Theaetetus*).

Actually Toland, in an effort to flatter Sophie-Charlotte, had ended his letter to the Queen with an ill-advised joke (of which Leibniz would uncharitably take advantage). In the closing lines of his letter Toland had said: “here, Madame, is all that one can expect of a mind so immersed in matter as my own. But I will add that, when I think about certain rare and superior spirits like that of your Majesty, it inspires me to take back everything I said, and to plead (against the senses) for intelligence.”²² Leibniz, taking this “base spaniel fawning” (Shakespeare) as a kind of virtual confession, wrote to the Queen that Toland “makes us hope that, another time, he will plead for intelligence against the senses . . . [rather] as did Carneades in older times, who, having praised justice to general applause [in Rome], declaimed against it the following day.” This reference to a notorious story told by Cicero in *De Republica* III shows that what most bothered Leibniz in Toland’s “materialism” was the moral-jurisprudential damage it did, especially to *justice*: the problem was practical, not just “epistemological.”

[Toland] will pass from black to white, if he sides with us, and if he himself attacks (which he can do in a very efficacious manner) the sentiment of the materialists—whose doctrine, if it is pushed and *outré*, would establish only confusion and [Epicurean] chance, and would destroy (along with intelligence and order) not only the natural immortality of the soul, but even the existence of divinity . . . [which would] deprive the human race and even the universe of its perfections.²³

The reason, incidentally, that Leibniz hoped Toland might, Carneades-like, “pass from black to white” and reverse himself, was that the English materialist was simply not coherent or consistent or radical or indeed intelligent enough to be really, “*exactly*” Thomas Hobbes; and so in another part of his same letter to Sophie-Charlotte, Leibniz says that

I do not notice that [Toland] directly fights against the immateriality of the soul, apparently recognizing that the properties of matter, that is to say extension and impenetrability, being purely passive, cannot provide a principle

of action, and that the modification of these material notions, that is to say figures and movements—in a word, *la machine*—cannot produce either perception or thought. Thus in effect he grants me that there are in the soul materials [*des matériaux*] which the external senses do not furnish at all. For he uses a comparison with an architect. The object of the senses are to him like the materials of the house, and the capacity which understands feelings [*les sentiments*] and uses them in its reasonings is like the architect with his rules... But one must consider that in the soul of this architect (with his rules) one must count *him* among the materials, that is to say among the objects of thought—since we think of ourselves, and of our faculties, rules, thoughts, and reasonings. And these rules are that inner light [*lumière interne*] which establishes all of the consequences of the necessary truths of which I spoke in my discourse.

And then, following his repeated little *jeux d'esprit* about non-material “materials” in the soul—a foretaste of the *Nouveaux Essais*—Leibniz reveals that what he most wants to defend is precisely “necessary truth” about “the order that God observes with respect to reasonable souls” (including of course the soul of the architect)—an order in which men are “made in his image, and capable of society with him,” so that they are “not only parts of *la machine* of the universe” but “still more citizens of the most perfect state” or “persons.”²⁴ And in that perfect state Carneades would be *wrong* about justice as Epicurean “artifice” and unnatural “folly” [*stultitiam*].

Leibniz was pleased enough with the aforementioned 1702 “evil doctrine” Bayle-letter to keep it in his Hannover archives until autumn 1716, at which time he published it prominently in the Amsterdam-based *Histoire critique de la république des lettres*—at the same time praising Plato as “the greatest idealist.” And this was the *last* piece published by Leibniz in his lifetime—so that at the very end of Leibniz’ career his anti-Epicurean, anti-Hobbesian, Platonizing “idealism” was proclaimed in the intellectually freest capital of Europe. It was his farewell utterance: within weeks he was dead.²⁵

But Francophone philosophers with good memories might have recalled that, three decades before the 1716 Amsterdam-publication, Leibniz had said in Bayle’s own journal, *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (1687), that Plato’s *Phaedo* “contains some very beautiful and very profound thoughts” against “philosophers who are too materialistic” and who therefore give inadequate weight to “an intelligent principle beneath matter.” And this matters above all, Leibniz thinks, for *justice*:

When they [the materialists] come to philosophize about the universe, instead of showing that this intelligence does everything for the best and is the reason for the world which it has found good to produce in conformity with its ends, [they] try to explain everything solely by the concurrence of crude particles, thus confusing conditions and instruments with the true cause. This, says Socrates, [*Phaedo* 98 c-e] is like trying to explain the fact that I am sitting in prison awaiting the fatal cup and am not rather on my flight to the Boeotians or some other people, where we know I could have saved myself, by saying that I have bones, tendons, and muscles that could be flexed in such a way as necessary in order to sit down. Truly, he says, these bones and these muscles would not be here, nor would you see me in this posture, if my mind had not judged that it is more worthy for Socrates to submit to what the laws of his country command.²⁶

And finally Leibniz recalls *Phaedo* 98c: “The cause of everything that Socrates does is mind.” (Small wonder, then, that Leibniz devoted so much time to his own Latin translation of *Phaedo*—and also of *Theaetetus*. And small wonder, too, that Leibniz would soon say—in notes on Bayle, suitably enough—that “we should be ...more than Platonic and hold that all the actions of souls are immaterial and independent of mechanism.”²⁷)

It is noteworthy that Leibniz still had his 1687 *Phaedo*-encomium in mind near the end of his life, recalling in a late letter to the French Platonist Remond (June 1715)

...that beautiful passage in the *Phaedo* of Plato, which I cited in part in a journal [Bayle’s *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*]—saying that, in supposing that an Intelligence produces all things, one must find their source in final causes. On this point Socrates blames Anaxagoras, who had said that an Intelligence [*nous*] has produced all things, but after that spoke only of the concurrence of corpuscles, without using that Intelligence and without taking notice of the purposes of things.²⁸

Leibniz cherished the *Phaedo* from his translation of the work in 1676 to his death four decades later—a remarkable and sustained devotion which served as the *Grundlegung* for Graeco-German idealism. For Leibniz held that the *Phaedo*, in refuting *les philosophes trop matériels*, also revealed *la sagesse divine*, “the consideration of the best and the most perfect” through “the wisdom of the Legislator” (A II, 2 p. 486).

IV

Leibniz' letter of 22 April 1702 to Queen Sophie-Charlotte, written during the revising of "What is Independent," offers a miniaturized version (in fewer than three pages) of some of the great Hannoverian's central concerns, both theoretical and practical.²⁹

The most important of these concerns has to do with the meaning of "disinterested" love, which had been at the heart of the fratricidal conflict over *fraternité* and *pur amour* between Bossuet and Fénelon (and which had held Leibniz' attention throughout the 1690s); this dispute then had a huge bearing on Leibniz definition of justice as "wise love" in the *Codex Iuris Gentium*. As Leibniz says in an important letter to the Abbé Nicaise,

I explained my definition [of disinterested love] in the preface to my *Codex diplomaticus-iuris gentium* ... because I needed it in order to give the definition of justice, which in my opinion is nothing else than charity which follows wisdom. Now, charity being a universal benevolence, and benevolence a habit of loving, it was necessary to define what love is... To love truly and in a disinterested way is nothing other than being brought to find pleasure in the perfections or in the felicity of the object [of love].³⁰

"Your Majesty," Leibniz says in the 22 April letter, "Has great reason to insist that hope and fear not be our motive in the search after truth itself, which merits a disinterested love."³¹ Here the title of Malebranche's celebrated book, *De la Recherche de la Vérité* (1674/5), provides the occasion (*pour ainsi dire*) for saying that even *intellectual* activity must be animated by the same "disinterested" love which is at the root of Leibnizian morality and jurisprudence—an early-Augustinian thought which reaches the Bishop of Hippo Regius *via* Plato's notion of all-animating *eros* in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, and which then moves on to Leibniz in Northern Germany. Here Leibniz balances delicately: with the ascetic Fénelon, self-regarding "hope and fear" are not the worthiest motives;³² but with the fleshier Bossuet the *self* (itself) is preserved by an insistence on that love which "we" feel, and which is the underpinning of *iustitia caritas sapientis*. And as an example of "disinterestedness" Leibniz adduces (in the same 22 April letter) the Elector of Hannover's allowing the Duchy of Wolfenbüttel (which had been taking French payments from Louis XIV) to disarm without having to recognize Hannover as the newly-minted (but still contested) ninth "Electorate" of the Holy Roman Empire.³³ In this way Leibniz draws together slightly *recherché* ethical-theological

controversies over disinterested love and the most immediate and pressing political problems of the day: for his constant aim is to “fit” political questions into his *iusprudentia universalis*, so that *Flugschriften* mirror “real” *Schriften*. (Monads may have no windows, but Leibniz’ minor writings always open out onto greater ones).

In the 22 April letter, Leibniz goes on to handle in a passing, jocular vein two matters which he took (elsewhere) with entire seriousness: binary arithmetic and metempsychosis. In this letter Leibniz treats as an amusing trifle (for the diversion of a lady of the Prussian court) the binary arithmetic which “I took pleasure one day in inventing,” as a “pleasing way of doing arithmetic, in which there are only unities and zeroes.”³⁴ But from other letters, especially one to the Jesuit China-expert Joachim Bouvet, we know that Leibniz attached gigantic significance to his mathematical discovery — as the basis of nothing less than the Creation (*ex nihilo*) itself. Beginning with modest claims about “the new numerical calculus which I have invented, not for vulgar practice but for the theory of science,” Leibniz goes on to say less modestly (in the letter to Bouvet) that “this calculus gives an admirable representation of the Creation” — since “by following this method all the numbers are written by a mixture of unity and zero, rather as all the creatures come uniquely from God and from nothing,” so that there is “nothing in mathematics which seems to me finer for the use of religion,” and so that one can even say, “not in vain, that essences are like numbers, and all the imperfections of things consist only in negations (from which it results that St. Augustine said quite well [in *De Libero Arbitrio*] that evil comes from nothingness).” Following a lengthy, multi-page exhibition of the workings of his new binary arithmetic, Leibniz finally says:

But my principal aim, mon Reverend Père, has been to furnish you with a new confirmation of the Christian religion with respect to the sublime issue of the Creation which will be in my opinion of great weight with Chinese philosophers and perhaps with the Emperor himself who loves and understands the science of numbers. To say simply that all numbers are formed by combinations of unity with nothing, and that [this] ‘nothing’ suffices to diversify them — that seems as credible as to say that God has made all things out of nothing, without making use of any primitive matter, and that there are only these two first principles, God and nothing: the God of perfections, and the nothing of imperfections or absence of essence It may be that this great monarch [of China] will not be displeased to learn that a European of your acquaintance, who is infinitely

interested in what concerns China and its dealing in Enlightenment with Europe, has made this [arithmetical] discovery . . . and perhaps this will bring this Prince to order that I be sent fine items of Chinese knowledge . . . with respect to some extraordinary experiments in physics or to certain discoveries in medicine.

Leibniz then adds that “you will understand that I shall not profit at all for myself alone, and that the public will get all the good from it, but that since I am the Director of a new society of sciences [the Berlin Academy] . . . I will not be displeased to be useful to it by presenting it with some uncommon things.”³⁵

An astonishing letter! In it everything that matters to Leibniz—mathematics (and *calculus*), geometry, theology, charity, Augustine, creation, China, academies, science—is brought together in what he himself calls a “unity.” And it matters too that Bouvet was a fellow-Hellenophile who loved *le divin Platon*. The letter to Bouvet is one of the great *tours de force* in the whole Leibnizian *corpus*, and shows that if Locke had been concerned with specifically *human* understanding, Leibniz dealt with understanding or mind as such—including binary arithmetic as a “representation of the Creation” (i.e. the “understanding” of God). (But for the Prussian court Leibniz was briefly willing to make this into a *divertissement*.)

Moving on, in the same 22 April letter, Leibniz makes a small quick joke of something else that he really took very seriously: namely metempsychosis. In the letter, Leibniz hopes that the 1701 “Act of Settlement” conferring the English crown on Hannover—the policy of King William III—will continue with the new English ruler: “If Queen Anne continues as she has begun, someone among those who believe that souls pass from body to body will say that she has swallowed up that of King William.”³⁶ But Leibniz, of course, even in “What is Independent” itself (which he was still reworking in April 1702), says that metempsychosis is the mythological part of Pythagoreanism which Plato was right to suppress:

[Some] philosophers and poets . . . have thrown themselves on the fictions of metempsychosis or of the Elysian Fields, in order to give some ideas which the populace will find striking. But consideration of the perfection of things or (what is the same thing) of the sovereign power, wisdom and goodness of God, who does everything for the best, that is to say in the greatest order, will be enough to content those who are reasonable.³⁷

And metempsychosis (as Leibniz always says) would unreasonably violate that “greatest order”: it would be a “strange and inexplicable leap” which would allow evasion of just deserts (as Leibniz urges in a 1715 letter).³⁸ Leibniz could joke

about “transmigration” of souls in his 22 April letter, as he had joked about binary arithmetic: but both were *important* to him—binary arithmetic for Creation, non-metempsychosis for justice.

V

At the very end of 1702, a half-year after his “Letter concerning what is Independent of the Senses and of Matter,” Leibniz was still worrying about the moral consequences of Toland’s version of materialism, saying in drafts of letters to Pierre Bayle that the Aristotle-disciple Dicaearchus (according to Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* I, 10) “denied that the soul was something substantial” and “reduced” it to “a modification of matter or of extended mass” (in explicit opposition to Plato’s *Phaedo* 85e-86d); and he adds that “Epicurus, Hobbes and Spinoza are of the same opinion.” Leibniz goes on to say sarcastically that “our learned Englishman,” Toland, “Seems also to claim that matter can become able to think, as it can become round, and thus that a certain [physical] organization, or a certain shape, can produce thought.” But anti-Platonic, materialist views such as Toland’s (Leibniz tells Bayle) cannot account for the *Timaeus*-like truth that “the soul is an imitation of God as far as is possible for a created thing:”

For like [God] it is simple and yet also infinite, in that it contains everything implicitly through confused perceptions—though with respect to clear perceptions it is limited, whereas everything is clear to the sovereign substance, from which everything emanates, which is the cause of existence and of order, and is in a word the ultimate reason for things. God contains the universe eminently, and the soul or unity contains it actually, being a central mirror, though active and vital, so to speak. Indeed, we can say that each soul is a world apart, but that all these worlds agree, and represent a different relation to the same phenomena. And this is the most perfect way of multiplying beings as far as possible, and in the best way possible.³⁹

And “perfection” and “bestness” are attributes of the fully *justifiable* “best of all possible worlds” which is the maximum instantiation of *justitia universalis* in *Théodicée*, *theos-dike*, “the justice of God.”

Of course, Leibniz was far less worried about the “materialism” of John Toland than he was about that of the infinitely more important John Locke; that is finally clearest in the *Nouveaux Essais*, but it was already plain in Leibniz’ 1700 *Remarks*

on Locke's *Essay*.

Leibniz' *Remarques sur la seconde réplique de Locke* share (in some measure) the Bishop of Worcester's worries about the practical implications of the *Essay*—much as Leibniz' remarks on Hobbes' *Liberty, Necessity, and Chance* (appended to the *Théodicée*) share some of Bramhall's worries about "Hobbism." For while Leibniz says in the *Remarques* that "in recognizing that man is a substance endowed with a soul which reasons and with a suitable organic body, we [also] recognize that God can give, join, or unite to matter certain substantial perfections which differ from each other," he nonetheless laments that Locke "seems to add that it is properly matter *itself* which can think, or that thought could be a modification of matter . . . and infers therefrom that the soul could be material and mortal by its nature, but immortal by grace, which would [supposedly] suffice for the great purpose of religion and of morality." But immortality by supernatural "grace" (not by "nature"), Leibniz says, is "a sentiment which I would like to be able to avoid"⁴⁰; and he accomplishes this "avoiding" most famously in the original *Préface* to the *Nouveaux Essais* (once again *contra* Locke), where he says that Locke's notion of non-natural immortality by revealed grace alone "destroys" what is philosophically "most important" by being "*directement opposé à la philosophie Platonicienne*"⁴¹—that is to the *Phaedo* and its notion of the natural immortality of an immaterial soul, a natural immortality in which the *psyche* can eternally receive justice (as in the true myth of a final judgment at the end of *Gorgias*).

Locke's thought, Leibniz fears, is harmful to "universal jurisprudence"—as he makes clear in a letter to Jaquelot from 1704: "Locke too much weakened the generous philosophy of the Platonists" which had demonstrated natural immateriality and immortality, and this "can abase us and even do harm to morality."⁴² Hence Leibniz insistence, at the end of the *Remarques*, that "one must say that action, life, feelings, thought are affections of [the soul], and not *modifications* of [matter]," as in the "too-material philosophy [of Locke]."⁴³

It is precisely *la philosophie trop matérielle* of both Locke and Hobbes—and then of John Toland—which, according to Leibniz' *Remarques* on the *Essay*, makes impossible the "recognition" of man as "a substance [naturally] endowed with a soul which reasons"; but, for Leibniz, a correct notion of "substance" or monad is morally-jurisprudentially central: "on the knowledge of substance, and in consequence of the soul, depends the knowledge of virtue and of justice."⁴⁴ And this comes out very clearly in a remarkable Leibniz-letter written within a few months of the *Remarques* on Locke—a joint letter to Electress Sophie of Hannover and to

Queen Sophie-Charlotte of Prussia.

In this letter of June 1700—composed with the *Remarques* on Locke freshly in mind but also strongly anticipating “What is Independent of the Senses and of Matter”—Leibniz begins with “this simple substance, this unity of substance, or this monad,” then says that these “unities” which are “rational souls” (“*le moi en nous*”) reason by means of “universal, necessary and eternal truths” which come from “the internal and divine light of ideas,” leading to “a society between them and God.” Leibniz then offers in the margin of the letter a table of “square numbers” as evidence of “universal, necessary and eternal truths”—as he would soon do again in *Méditation sur la notion commune de la justice* (1703)—and finally says that “the souls which are capable of these reasonings are called minds [*esprits*], and one can say with justice that they are made in the image of God, and that there is a society between God and them—such that God is, with respect to them, not only what an architect is to his building, but still more what a Prince is to his subjects.”⁴⁵ And this *parallel* between mathematical necessity and the necessity of justice (and wise princely government) is utterly characteristic of Leibniz’ *Meno*-like demi-Platonism, which would soon bring about (in exactly two years) the “Letter concerning what is Independent of the Senses and of Matter.”

VI

To be sure, Leibniz’ correspondence with Sophie-Charlotte did not end in December 1702 (with the final letters in A I, 21) but continued until the Queen’s sudden, unexpected, shocking death (at age 37) in February 1705; and it is worth mentioning two especially important letters from 1703 which relate strongly to the “Platonizing idealism” of “What is independent of the Senses and of Matter”—letters which are indeed virtual extensions or elaborations of the great 1702 essay.

In August 1703, Leibniz sent a letter to the Queen to advise her of the writing of the piece which we now know as *Méditation sur la notion commune de la justice*; this is Leibniz’ only known, surviving letter concerning the *Méditation* (his greatest single writing on *justice universelle*), and in it Leibniz says that

. . . having had a conversation with Monsignor the Elector [Georg Ludwig] in the presence of Mme the Electress [Sophie], on the nature of goodness and of justice—whether it is an arbitrary thing, or whether it is grounded in eternal reasons, like numbers and [geometrical] figures—I have written a small discourse on this head, and I don’t know whether I shall dare one day to place

these trifles [*bagatelles*] under your Majesty's eyes.⁴⁶

What Leibniz did not add in this brief *Brief* was that the *Méditation* begins with an almost-verbatim paraphrase of the key questions from Plato's *Euthyphro*: are the truths of justice and piety *willed* by the gods, by *fiat* or decree, or are they loved (even *by* the gods) because they are true though "eternal reasons" like those of "numbers"⁴⁷? And Leibniz also did not add that the *Méditation*, after its opening encomium of Platonism, goes on to reduce Hobbes to the Thrasymachus of Plato's *Republic* (338c) who claims that justice is nothing but the interest of "the most powerful." (Here Leibniz takes very literally Hobbes' claim in *Leviathan* ch. 31 that if any mortal man actually had quasi-divine "irresistible power," he would rule all other men on earth by godlike *natural* "dominion"—without need of "covenant" or agreement or "will and artifice" to "authorize" sovereigns.⁴⁸) Still, Leibniz' insistence (in the letter to Sophie-Charlotte) on "eternal reasons" and on "numbers" shows his *Meno*-like Platonism clearly enough.

Another extension or elaboration of "What is Independent" is to be found in Leibniz' letter to Sophie-Charlotte of December 1703, which begins with a critique of Locke's empiricism and materialism from a Platonizing perspective:

This author [Locke], though quite able, is not enough of a mathematician to know the nature of demonstrations. This makes it the case that he has not known how to distinguish sufficiently between the sources of universally necessary or eternal truths, and of particular or contingent truths of fact.

After a number of mathematical examples of *les vérités nécessaires*, again *Meno*-like, Leibniz goes on to say that

. . . since, then, eternal reasons or truths cannot be proven by mere experiences or by the external senses, it follows that they find their source in inner light or in natural reason . . . One doesn't know these kinds of truths except with the aid of *lumière naturelle*.⁴⁹

And "natural light," of course, is the very phrase which dominates "What is Independent."

Leibniz' complaint to Sophie-Charlotte that Locke was "not enough of a mathematician to know the nature of demonstrations" bears not merely on mathematics (and geometry), but—for Leibniz the professional *jurisconsult*—even more on morality and (especially) justice. In a letter to Thomas Burnett of Kemney which strikingly parallels his December 1703 missive to Sophie-Charlotte, Leibniz urges that while a Locke-critic has "exhorted" the English philosopher to "give demonstrations of morality . . . I believe that he would have found it difficult to

succeed. The art of demonstrating was not his strength.”

I hold that we often understand without reasoning that which is just and unjust, just as we understand without reasoning some of the theorems of geometry; but it is always good to arrive at demonstration. Justice and injustice do not depend only on human nature, but on the nature of intelligent substance in general.⁵⁰

The “nature of intelligent substance in general,” of course, had been the central theme of “What is Independent.” And all of this reminds us that the Leibniz of the Locke-countering *Nouveaux Essais* held that justice is indeed Platonically “demonstrative” (like logic, arithmetic and geometry):

The soul originally contains the principle of several notions and doctrines . . . as I hold along with Plato . . . And not without reason if is thought that these flashes of light [Plato, *Laws* III] indicate something divine and eternal, which appears above all in necessary truths Logic also, along with metaphysics and ethics [*la morale*], of which the one forms natural theology and the other natural jurisprudence, are full of such truths; and consequently their demonstration can come only from the inner principles which are called innate.⁵¹

The basis of “demonstration” in *jurisprudence universelle*, for Leibniz, would be roughly this: justice is *caritas sapientis*, the “charity of the wise”; charity or love in turn is a *sentiment de perfection*; and perfection itself necessitates the existence of the (logically possible) *ens perfectissimum*, God, who is love-worthy in *excelsis*—so that in the end Platonic “eternal” justice rests on “Anselmian” perfectionism.⁵² Or, as Leibniz says in the 1700 *Observationes de Principio Iuris* (written partly *contra* Hobbes and Locke), “the intrinsic perfection or badness of acts, rather than the *will* of God, is the cause of justice”⁵³—and this also strongly anticipates the opening of the 1703 *Méditation* on justice, of which Leibniz had written to Sophie-Charlotte in August 1703.

In the period 1700-1704, then, the great 1702 essay “What is independent of the Senses and of Matter” is literally, temporally, spatially the center of a great mass or constellation of Platonizing idealism: an idealism which is then prefatory (a few years later) to *Théodicée*, *theos-dike*, “the justice of God”—since in the *Theodicy* Leibniz offers a one-line summary of “What is Independent,” saying (III, 382) that Plato believed that “material and tangible things” are in Heraclitean “perpetual flux,” while saying that “immaterial substances . . . alone are real” (“nor was he in that altogether mistaken”⁵⁴). And now we begin the 300th anniversary celebrations of *theos-dike*, 1710-2010, which completes and crowns Leibniz’ relationship with

his pupil Sophie-Charlotte: had she not thrown John Toland in Leibniz' path, we would not have "What is Independent of the Senses and of Matter," nor indeed the *Théodicée* on its Platonizing side—and perhaps not even the *Nouveaux Essais* as we know them. Leibniz' "idealism" might have remained an idea.

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Notes

¹ G.W. Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Reihe I, "Allgemeiner Politischer und Historischer Briefwechsel," Band 21 (April – December 1702). (Ed. Leibniz-Archiv Hannover.) Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 2009.

² Leibniz, *Nouveaux Essais*, "Préface" (1st version), in A VI, 6 (Berlin 1962), ed. Robinet and Schepers, pp. 50-51.

³ On John Toland, see especially Antonio Lamarra, "An Anonymous Criticism from Berlin to Leibniz' Philosophy: John Toland against mathematical abstractions," in *Studia Leibnitiana*, Sonderheft 16, "Leibniz in Berlin," ed. H. Poser and A. Heinekamp, Stuttgart 1990, pp. 89 ff. See also G. Carabelli, *Tolandiana: Materiali bibliografici per lo studio dell'opere e della fortuna di John Toland (1670-1722)*, Florence 1975, esp. pp. 195-196.

⁴ See Lamarra, op. Cit., pp. 89ff. See also Robert Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1982, ppp. 19ff.

⁵ Leibniz, *Theodicy* III, pars. 382.

⁶ Leibniz to Thomas Burnett (March 1708), Ger. III p. 317.

⁷ Daniel Defoe, *An Argument Proving that the Design of Employing and Ennobling Foreigners* (etc.), London 1717, p. 50.

⁸ Robert M. Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Idealist, Theist*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1994, passim. Leibniz, "Letter concerning what is Independent of the Senses and of Matter" (letter to Sophie-Charlotte, June 1702), A I 21, pp. 338 ff. (earlier in O. Klopp (ed.), *Die Werke von Leibniz*, Hannover 1865, vol. X.)

⁹ Hobbes, "Third Objections to Descartes," in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, ed. Adam-Tannery, Paris 1830, vol. 10, p. 287.

- ¹⁰ Leibniz, *Apologia Catholicae Veritatis*, in *Politische Schriften*, vol. 6, ed. H. Rudolph and W. Li, Berlin 2007, pp. 760-761.
- ¹¹ Leibniz, *Quid sit Idea*, Ger. VII, pp. 263-264.
- ¹² Leibniz, “What is Independent,” op. Cit., A I 21, pp. 338 ff. (English in Loemker, #57, pp. 547 ff. [2nd ed.].)
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Leibniz, *Nouveaux Essais* III, 5, 12 (A VI, 6, p. 412).
- ¹⁵ Leibniz, “What is Independent,” op. Cit., A, I 21, pp. 338 ff.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Leibniz, to Pierre Coste (1712), Ger. III, p. 428.
- ¹⁸ Leibniz, to Sophie-Charlotte (April 1704), in Klopp, *Die Werke*, op. Cit., vol. X, pp. 229-230.
- ¹⁹ Toland, to Sophie-Charlotte (for Leibniz), October-November 1702, in A I, 21, No. 378, pp. 637 ff.
- ²⁰ Leibniz, to Electress Sophie, in A I, 21, #53, pp. 66-67; (Sophie’s reply, Ibid. #63, p. 80: “I am not surprised that poor Toland takes the part of the cannibals.”)
- ²¹ Leibniz, to Pierre Bayle, in Loemker 2nd ed., op. Cit., pp. 577
- ²² Toland, to Sophie-Charlotte (for Leibniz), in A I, 21, No. 378, pp. 637 ff.
- ²³ Leibniz, to Sophie-Charlotte (December 1702), in A I, 21, p. 729.
- ²⁴ Ibid., pp. 729 ff. (earlier in Klopp, *Die Werke*, op. Cit., vol. X, pp 187-188).
- ²⁵ Leibniz, 1702 (but published in 1716), Ger. IV, pp. 554-571 (Loemker 2nd ed. pp. 574 ff.).
- ²⁶ Leibniz, in *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (1687), Ger. III, pp. 51-55.
- ²⁷ Leibniz, Ger. VI, pp. 539-546.
- ²⁸ Leibniz, to Remond (1715), Ger. III, p. 645.
- ²⁹ Leibniz, to Sophie-Charlotte (April 1702), in A I, 21, #131, pp. 184-186.
- ³⁰ Leibniz, to Abbé Nicaise (1698), Ger. II, p. 581.
- ³¹ Leibniz, A I, 21, pp. 184-186.
- ³² On Fénelon’s “quietism,” in which the “self” disappears without remainder into God (in a kind of *nirvana*), see Patrick Riley, Intro. to Fénelon’s *Telemachus*, Cambridge, UK 1994, pp. vii ff.
- ³³ Leibniz, to Sophie-Charlotte, A I, 21, pp. 184-186.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Leibniz to Father J. Bouvet, S. J., A I, 19, No. 202, pp. 408-410.
- ³⁶ Leibniz, to Sophie-Charlotte, A I, 21, pp. 184-186.
- ³⁷ Leibniz, “What is Independent,” op. cit., A I, 21, pp. 338 ff.

- ³⁸ Leibniz, to Remond (1715), Ger. III, p. 635.
- ³⁹ Leibniz, drafts of letters to Bayle, Ger. III, pp. 68 ff.
- ⁴⁰ Leibniz, *Remarques*, A VI, 6, op. cit., pp. 42 ff.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48n.
- ⁴² Leibniz, to Jaquelot, Ger. III, p. 473.
- ⁴³ Leibniz, *Remarques*, op. cit., pp. 42 ff.
- ⁴⁴ Leibniz, to Coste, Ger. III, p. 428.
- ⁴⁵ Leibniz, to Sophie and Sophie-Charlotte, A I, 18, pp. 114-115. See also Gerda Utermöhlen, “Die Rolle fürstlicher Frauen im Leben und Wirken von Leibniz,” in *Studia Leibnitiana*, Sonderheft 16, op. cit., pp. 44 ff.
- ⁴⁶ Leibniz, to Sophie-Charlotte, in Klopp (ed.), *Die Werke*, op. cit., vol. X, pp. 212-213.
- ⁴⁷ Plato, *Euthyphro*, 9e-10e.
- ⁴⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. M. Oakeshott (Oxford 1946), ch. 31. On this part of Hobbes’ thought, see Patrick Riley, “Hobbes,” in *The Philosophers’ Philosophy of Law*, Berlin 2009, ch. 3.
- ⁴⁹ Leibniz, to Sophie-Charlotte (December 1703), in Klopp (ed.), *Die Werke*, op. cit., vol. X, pp. 220-221.
- ⁵⁰ Leibniz, to Thomas Burnett (1705), Ger. III, p. 307.
- ⁵¹ Leibniz, *Nouveaux Essais*, op. cit., “Préface,” A VI, 6, pp. 50-51.
- ⁵² See the reviewer’s essay on Leibniz’ *Méditation* in *The Leibniz Review*, December 2003.
- ⁵³ Leibniz, *Observationes de Principio Iuris*, in Dutens (ed.), *Leibnitii . . . Opera*, vol. IV, iii, pp. 275 ff.
- ⁵⁴ Leibniz, *Theodicy* (ed. Huggard, 1952), III, 382.