Working on Leibniz’s vast essays and texts can seem overwhelming. As exciting as it is to study the details of the *Monadology* and *Discourse on Metaphysics*, the *Theodicy* and the letters to Arnauld, it can be terrifying to sit back and think that there are thousands of other pages of equally sublime and often more difficult philosophical material. The personal notes are particularly daunting. Because Leibniz wrote these for himself, it is often difficult to grasp his reasoning and decipher his underlying philosophical motivation: he typically neither states his most basic assumptions nor articulates how the piece he is presently writing fits into a general plan or project. Sometimes he just plays with an idea or tries out an argument. As Leibniz himself wrote about his notes: “instead of treasure ..., you will only find ashes; instead of elaborate works, a few sheets of paper and some poorly expressed vestiges of hasty reflections, which were only saved for the sake of my memory.”¹ But even Leibniz’s more polished essays can be unnerving in manuscript. These sheets—which contain deletions, additions, an enormous number of reformulations, and reconsiderations—reveal an impatient intellect hurrying to express its ideas. Because Leibniz is so often reluctant to set the stage for a philosophical proposal or to acknowledge its various implications, one often has to go well beyond the text in order to understand how the proposal at hand relates to other parts of his thought. Moreover, Leibniz encourages confusion by using one terminology (say, scholastic) in one text and an entirely different one (say, mechanical) in another. The moral to the story is clear: one cannot depend either on a single essay or on a small group of passages taken in isolation from others in the same period. When it comes to Leibniz’s writings, it is necessary to take the widest possible textual perspective.

The paper previously known as *Primae veritates* serves as an excellent example of some of the problems that face the student of Leibniz’s thought. In 1901, when Couturat made such a convincing case for his account of Leibniz’s philosophy, his key witness was *Primae veritates*. As Couturat writes: “This fragment is unfortunately not dated. But by comparing it to short works and letters of known date, we can conjecture with high probability that it was written about 1686 when Leibniz completed the principles and the essential theses of his system.”² Most subsequent scholars have agreed with Couturat, although some have given the text an even earlier date. For example, Loemker describes the essay as
a “forestudy” of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and places the essay within the years 1680-84.³

The *Primae veritates* also offers a case study in the dangers of considering any of Leibniz’s essays in isolation. The text itself encourages at least two serious interpretative mistakes. First, the only account of substance contained in the essay is the complete concept theory. Leibniz’s other characterizations of substance during the period are not present. In the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and the related correspondence with Arnauld, for example, Leibniz emphasizes the fact that a substance is a unity per se, though he neither motivates this notion nor indicates exactly how it is related to the complete concept theory. Because the main texts of the period offer no clues about how to connect these accounts either with one another or with some of the other prominent claims about substance (e.g., that each substance mirrors all the others), many scholars have concluded that there is little or no relation among them, and hence that there is no underlying theory of substance. According to Mates, for example, Leibniz’s “definitions of ‘substance’ seem to have little connection with one another.” Mates writes:

> we are left to wonder what reason he could possibl[y] have had for holding that those and only those entities that ‘have with them active force’ also have ‘concepts that contain every quality of whatever falls under them’ . . . . At any rate, it [is] clear enough that for Leibniz the only substances are the monads, even though it is unclear how he reached this conclusion.⁴

The second interpretative mistake encouraged by the *Primae veritates* is its bald assertion that the central doctrines of Leibniz’s metaphysics follow from the definition of truth. Couturat deemed the essay his most important piece of evidence; and Russell happily used it in the preface to the second edition of his book (in 1937) as proof of his original interpretation of 1900.⁵ But Couturat and Russell were wrong, and Leibniz was misleading: the theory of truth neither precedes the other first truths logically nor, as it turns out, does it precede them historically.⁶ But the fact that the theory of truth is neither logically nor developmentally prior did not prevent Leibniz from trying out this presentation of his tenets. Even a quick survey of some of his better-known texts of the 1680s and 1690s discloses other very different formulations. For example, in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Leibniz displays his doctrines in a different order and with different emphasis. In that summary of his philosophy, Leibniz discusses a number of theological matters, before turning in section 8 to “the notion of an individual substance,” a version of the concept-containment theory of truth, and the doctrine of marks and traces. Beginning with its summary-title (in italics), section 9 reads as follows:
“That each singular substance expresses the whole universe in its own way, and that all its events, together with all their circumstances and the whole sequence of external things, are included in its notion. Several paradoxes follow from this; among others, it follows that it is not true that two substances can resemble each other completely and differ only in number.”

The point to emphasize is that Leibniz is not being disingenuous in either the *Discourse on Metaphysics* or the *Primae veritates*: an understanding of the deep motivation behind the theory of truth and the complete concept account of substance would in fact motivate the other doctrines.

As this discussion of *Primae veritates* suggests, the proper study of Leibniz’s thought demands a wide textual base and the utmost care in scholarship. However, despite the diligence and care employed by twentieth-century scholars, it has not been possible either to acquire the right textual base or to answer all the relevant scholarly questions with the majority of Leibniz’s papers — until now.

Since 1923, the Berlin Akademie der Wissenschaften has been publishing Leibniz’s papers. Series II contains the philosophical letters and Series VI the philosophical papers. Thus far, only one volume in Series II has been published. Since 1980, with the publication of the third volume of Series VI, the editors of Leibniz’s philosophical writings have been working furiously in the Leibniz Archives of the University of Münster to complete their painstaking work on the next batch of Leibniz’s papers. With the publication in the spring of 1999 of Series VI, Volume 4, many of the scholarly problems that have confronted scholars for so long were solved. Volume 4 contains all the philosophical papers written by Leibniz between 1677 and June 1690.

The significance of this publication for students of Leibniz’s thought is colossal (and this is true even for those scholars who have had copies of the *Vorausedition*). There are 2949 pages of Leibniz’s comments on topics in all areas of philosophy. Volume 4 of Series VI is itself four volumes: volumes A, B, and C contain the edited and annotated versions of 612 documents which range in length from a few words to many pages; the fourth volume houses the marvelous indices to these vast texts. In Leibnizian fashion, the enormous complexity of these writings, notes, comments, arguments and observations has been reduced to an elegant harmony: the texts are securely bound, helpfully introduced, rationally organized, carefully annotated, and thoroughly indexed.

Given the vastness of Leibniz’s writings and the nightmarish state of some of the individual documents (copious emendations made on pieces of paper without watermarks or dates), the mere process of getting these texts rationally organized
and carefully edited is itself a major accomplishment. The fact that this edition is so superbly done is largely due to the foresight and creativity of Heinrich Schepers. Although the original volumes of the Academy edition of Leibniz’s philosophical writings are adequate, it was Professor Schepers who raised the standards of the Leibniz Archives to their present extraordinary height. Over the years, Schepers has surrounded himself with dedicated and talented assistants, developed a superb and subtle understanding of the details of Leibniz’s thought, and maintained a grand passion for the quirky intellectual personality of Leibniz himself. But Schepers also had the striking foresight to recognize the help that computers could offer: he began the computerization of the editorial work in 1975, and has increased it over the years.

Volume 3 of Series VI was the first volume produced under the directorship of Schepers and it goes well beyond its predecessors in its editorial sophistication. The texts in volume 3 are thoroughly edited, carefully annotated, meticulously dated, and well indexed. Schepers is generally committed to the view that the scholar deserves to be given as many of the details of the texts as possible, and he refuses to close off possibilities of interpretations. I once argued with him at length about the dating of a document. Given my detailed interpretation of a series of related texts, I wanted him to accept that one essay was written before another in the series. On purely philosophical grounds, I still believe that I am right about that date. But Schepers kindly pointed out to me that however convincing my argument, it was his duty to assign dates to documents on the basis of facts that were more objective than the ones I had to offer. These hard facts include types of paper and watermarks, references to recently published books or other datable events (especially letters), and sometimes the occurrences of certain phrases or terminology that Leibniz began to use in response to a book (say, the serious re-reading of Augustine’s Confessions). In short, Schepers’ goal as an editor has been to give the scholar as many details as can be known, and no more. To this end, the Academy edition has managed to find a unity within the apparent chaos of Leibniz’s papers. Volume 3, which was published in 1980 and contains the papers of Leibniz’s Paris period (1672-1676) has more coherence, more annotations, and better indices than any of the previous Academy volumes.

Volume 4 contains nearly three times more material than any previous volume. Because the basic organizational demands here were so enormous, the success of the volume is all the more startling. First, let’s consider the physical arrangement of texts. In the beginning, after a painstaking process of placing papers within the 1677-1690 period, there were 612 documents. These were reduced to 522 texts
and textual groups, which are numbered and paginated sequentially across the three volumes and are organized into six main areas. Consistent with earlier volumes in the Academy edition, texts are arranged chronologically within area and each text or textual group is assigned a number. Under Schepers’ direction, the Academy editors have been especially good at arranging related texts into groups whose coherent interrelations encourage scholarly insight. A textual group is constituted of either drafts of (roughly) the same text or comments made at (roughly) the same time on (roughly) the same topic. For example, one textual group (N. 332) in Volume 4 is a collection of five distinct papers which Leibniz wrote in response to Augustine’s *Confessions*. Each of these is given a number (332.1, 332.2, etc.) and each is either a paraphrase of a part of Augustine’s text or a response to something Augustine argued or claimed. Although the order of the members of this sort of textual group is usually chronological, only one of these documents can be dated even roughly. Despite the fact that some of these texts might have been written any time between 1677 and 1716, it is extremely helpful to have all of Leibniz’s comments on the *Confessions* placed together.

The majority of textual groups, however, are formed out of essays written on related topics during a relatively short period of time. For example, the seven short essays that constitute textual group N. 367 are all related to “the cause of motion and the qualities of bodies,” and were composed between the summer of 1678 and the winter of 1680-81. This sort of group makes the analysis of Leibniz’s views on a set of closely related topics very much easier than it otherwise would be.

The general headings under which the texts are arranged within the three volumes are as follows. Part A, which contains texts 1-247, is entitled “Scientia Generalis. Characteristica. Calculus Universalis.” All of volume A is taken up with this material, and roughly a fourth of volume B. The total number of pages under this heading is 1344. Part B, which completes volume B, contains texts 248-351 and includes Leibniz’s metaphysical works. Volume C includes Parts C, D, E, and F. Part C covers the writings on natural philosophy and contains texts 352-384, while part D includes the writings on theological topics and contains texts 385-452. Part E covers the writings on moral topics and includes texts 453-486. Finally, Part F is entitled “Scientia Juris Naturalis” and contains texts 487-522. Each of these six sections has two parts: the first and longer contains Leibniz’s essays and texts, the second includes marginalia, his excerpts and paraphrases of books, and in some cases translations.

Schepers’ introduction helps to contextualize the organization and layout of texts.


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He offers the motivation behind each group of collected texts and presents the broad context in which to see them. Although he admits that his comments must be brief (since an account of the documents and their context would be much longer than volume 4 itself!), he works hard to summarize his vast knowledge about how these 522 textual groups are situated within Leibniz’s intellectual life.

So much for the physical arrangement of Leibniz’s documents, and Schepers’ introduction. Let’s now consider the truly gargantuan editorial work accomplished here. These three volumes of texts represent years of reading and rereading, collating and researching hundred of pieces of paper of various sizes and shapes. Some of these are tiny slips of paper with a few scribbled words; some are many-paged essays which went through several drafts, with copious marginal notes, cross-outs, additions, overlapping lines indicating where one text was to be inserted, sometimes inside another added text. Many of these were personal notes almost certainly not written for public consumption in which Leibniz is in a sense talking to himself. Some were drafts of essays to which Leibniz returned several times. Others were essays which he put aside only to return to several years later. Most are not dated. It was the responsibility of Schepers and his staff to edit, date, and contextualize each sheet of paper.

For those of us who have had the pleasure of working at length in the Leibniz Archives in Münster, we know something about the patience, care, and pig-headedness of the Academy editors. There is Gerhard Biller whose special talent (though there are many) is to “read” the word that Leibniz, at some frustrated moment, blacked out entirely. Where the rest of us would see only a large black spot, Biller could find a word. There is Martin Schneider whose keen logical mind would sometimes find mistakes in Leibniz’s text because he could see that the details of the argument did not fit together tightly enough unless one acknowledged a slight mistake in Leibniz’s Latin, French, or German. And of course there is Heinrich Schepers who often seems to live in the archives, either working away for hours in the computer room, worrying about dates, or reading in his office. This “reading” sometimes consists in staring for hours at a tiny scrap of paper on which Leibniz had scribbled a few choice remarks which seemed utterly illegible to the untrained eye. I once saw Schepers spend the best part of a sunny afternoon holding a scrap of paper roughly the size of a 3 x 5 card in the sun as it poured in his office window. When my curiosity got the best of me and I asked what he could possibly be doing, he explained that Leibniz had written this note while in a carriage. Because his handwriting was even more illegible than usual and because the crucial indecipherable phrase was scribbled around a corner of the scrap,
Schepers was having a terrible time discerning the string of letters. Eventually of course it all became clear and the scrap became a short text in volume 4.

It is such patience, care, and skill that has led to the massive annotations of Volume 4. Some of the notes on a text refer to another text in the edition that is somehow related. Many of the annotations offer crucial information about the source of Leibniz’s comments and references: when Leibniz makes a brief marginal comment about an author—whether early modern, Renaissance, medieval, or ancient—the Academy editors offer the exact book in which the author’s views appear. The detective work required to track down such sources is enormous, as is the benefit to scholars: since many of the authors and texts to which Leibniz obliquely refers are not well-known, these sorts of citations constitute an invaluable scholarly aid. But of course most of the notes in Volume 4 are taken up with Leibniz’s own emendations. But not only Leibniz’s! The editors also tell us about the additions to drafts of texts which were made in someone else’s hand. We are thereby given a clear view of the complicated history of some of these documents. One of my favorite examples is a text (N. 376) written in 1689 entitled *Notata Quaedam G.G.L. Circa Vitam et Doctrinam Cartesii* (see copy on the following page). The original pages composed by Leibniz form a chaotic mass of sentences within sentences over other sentences. On each side of these large sheets of paper, Leibniz left himself a margin within which to make additions. On some pages there are nearly as many words scribbled in the margin as there are in the main text. From this inchoate mass of words, a secretary produced a clean copy on which both Leibniz and the secretary made emendations. Then, a final copy was made on which Leibniz added a few comments. These various layers of additions and comments on *Notata* are discernible in the notes.

When one confronts the enormity of the notes in Volume 4, it is hard to imagine that there could be times when one yearns for more information. But there are a few such cases. First, the abbreviations used in the notes are presented only in the final volume and one has to search for them there. It would have been sensible to place them in each volume for easy reference. Second, there are times when the information given about a text is brief to a fault. For example, in *Conversatio cum Domino Episcopo Stenonio de Libertate* of late 1677 (N. 262), the editors are not as clear as they could be about which parts of the text belong to Steno and which to Leibniz. They write that all the italicized parts originate with Steno, but in fact some come from Leibniz. This is brevity to a fault: scholars would benefit here from more of the facts.

As difficult as it was for the Academy editors just to read the words on paper...
Notata Quaedam G.G.L. Circa Vitam et Doctrinam Cartesii. Partial view of left half of the folio which appears in A VI 4 as N. 376, pp. 2062-63. Original copy courtesy of Christia Mercer. Permission from the Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek Hannover to print “Faksimile der Handschrift LH IV,4 d l Bl. 2 verso” is gratefully acknowledged.

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and sort out the texts, the accurate dating of documents created the greatest difficulties. Many of these sheets of paper were left undated, some without watermarks or any straightforward means of placing them within a specific period of time. Intensive detective work was required to date such documents. Schepers’ creative brilliance as an editor perhaps shines brightest here: he used all the scholarly detective tools as well as the newest computerized means to place these documents within the ebbs and flows of Leibniz’s philosophical activity. Computers were used to identify the frequency of newly coined or newly acquired phrases. Given the excellent sense that Schepers and his assistants have of Leibniz’s philosophical biography, relative dates could then be offered. When there was neither internal or external evidence that could be used to date a text, Schepers’ inclination was to place the text in the widest possible time-span.

The computerized system in the Leibniz’s Archives also helped produce the extensive indices of the 4th part of Volume 4. The Index of topics is nearly 300 pages long and includes more minor words than previous volumes. The Index of texts is 70 pages and the Index of names 43 pages. Since Leibniz refers to almost all of the important books and people of the seventeenth century, the value of the latter two indices extends well beyond their relevance to Leibniz’s thought. And that is not all! There is a nifty list of Biblical texts cited by Leibniz, and a concordance between Volume 4 and the relevant texts in the Gerhardt edition and the texts in Couturat and Grua. For those of us who have used the *Vorausedition*, there are two concordances: one that moves from the texts of *Vorausedition* to those of Volume 4 and one that moves from Volume 4 to the *Vorausedition*. Not only are there more indices than ever before, the standard indices of names and of things are more complete and easier to use than in previous Academy editions. Anyone who has tried to consider all the uses of an important term by Leibniz within a period of time or who wants to survey all of his references to a particular philosopher knows the frustration of surveying an entire page for the one use of the relevant phrase or name. In Volume 4, the search is made short by the inclusion of line numbers in the main indices.

We can turn once again to *Primae veritates* as an excellent example of the power of the scholarly help that the volume affords. *Primae veritates* stands in the final quarter of the texts of Part B, section 1, namely, among the papers on metaphysical topics. It thereby occupies a place among a number of papers written either during or immediately after Leibniz’s year-long stay in Italy, which occurred between March 1689 and March 1690. Written on Italian paper, it is clear that this important essay was not composed either before or directly in con-


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nection with the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. Although the Academy editors admit that *Primae veritates* stands in a long line of essays that treat metaphysical issues related to the *Discourse*, they place it in a group of 9 texts, which deal with a set of related topics (e.g., about freedom and about how God can be “a fountain of existences”), and they place it within the period of early 1689 - fall 1689. Once we place *Primae veritates*, which the editors appropriately entitle *Principia Logico-Metaphysica*, in this more specific textual context, once we pay close attention to the changes in formulations and the annotations that Leibniz made on the text, and once we employ the subject index to compare the use of terms in this essay to other uses in the same period, the philosophy of *Primae veritates* looks rather different than it did to Russell and Couturat.

I do not mean to suggest, of course, that Volume 4 of Series VI solves all our scholarly difficulties. Besides the simple fact that Leibniz’s thought is subtle and very, very difficult, there remain other textual gaps. As I write, the editors in the Leibniz Archives, tucked away in the center of Münster, are working furiously to produce the next volume of Leibniz’s philosophical letters. Series II, Volume 1, published in 1972, only got as far as 1685. The Academy editors not only have to edit, annotate, and index the vast number of letters written between 1686 and the end of Leibniz’s long life, they also have to add the whole editorial apparatus to the letters of Series II, Volume 1. Like Volume 1 of Series VI, Volume 1 of Series II contains only an Index of people. It lacks all the other indices and much of the editorial assistance so important to scholars. In the same way that Volume 2 of Series VI included the material that was missing from Volume 1, Volume 2 of Series II will have to include the relevant materials for Volume 1. Once the letters have been published, the Academy editors will move on to the philosophical papers written after June 1690. In other words, many barriers remain to a thorough-going analysis of Leibniz’s thought.

But the work that remains to be done should not detract from the enormous importance and success of Volume 4 of Series VI. As students of Leibniz, our study has been made significantly easier by the publication of this important work.

Notes

1 Academy, Series VI, vol. iii, p. 533.
2 Louis Couturat originally published *Primae veritates* and his interpretation of Leibniz’s thought in *La logique de Leibniz d’après des documents inédits* of 1901. He then summarized his position in “Sur la métaphysique de Leibniz,” *Revue de


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3 Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber in their Philosophical Essays accept the Couturat date (see p. 30). For the views of Loemker, see L, p. 267.

4 Mates, The Philosophy of Leibniz, 194-95.


7 VI iv [B] 1541-42: AG. pp. 41-42

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