

Is Leibniz's Theory of Personal Identity Coherent?¹

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I. Wilson's Charge

In her influential 1976 article, "Leibniz: Self-Consciousness and Immortality In the Paris Notes and After," Margaret Wilson argues that Leibniz's mature theory of personal identity is incoherent.² "There is plenty of evidence in Leibniz's mature writings" (341), Wilson asserts, that he holds the following proposition:

(a) "I am a particular immaterial substance" (Wilson, 346).

However, Wilson argues that in his *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* Leibniz also holds the following proposition:

(b) "It is [logically or] metaphysically possible that I continue as an identical self-consciousness and identical self, independently of this particular substance" (Wilson, 346).

Wilson points out that there is a *prima facie* incoherence in the conjunction of (a) and (b). For suppose that I become the mayor of Princeton by taking on the substantial form of the mayor of Princeton while remaining psychologically connected to my past life. In other words, I retain the same self-consciousness but not the same "real" or substantial self. This phenomenon certainly seems possible, if (b) is true. But then how could (a) also be true? As Wilson puts it, "How can it be, from a logical or metaphysical point of view, that I cease to be the substance I am now identical with, and yet continue to exist?" (Wilson, 347). Wilson's charge of incoherence has been echoed by several other Leibniz scholars, including Nicholas Jolley: "[I]t is obviously incoherent to suppose that I could survive as the same person through a change in 'real' or substantial identity" (Jolley, 137), if that which is denoted by 'I' is a particular substance. Hence, if Wilson is right, it must be said that Leibniz's theory of personal identity, at least as articulated in his mature writings, is incoherent.

Let's put Wilson's charge of incoherence in argument form:

1. Leibniz's mature theory of personal identity embraces both propositions (a) and (b).
2. Propositions (a) and (b) are jointly inconsistent.
3. Hence, Leibniz's mature theory of personal identity is incoherent.

To my mind, any interpreter of Leibniz's mature theory of personal identity must come to grips with Wilson's argument, either by agreeing with Wilson³ or by attempting to show that one or both of her argument's premises are false.⁴ In this paper, I shall consider the several ways in which interpreters, since 1976, have

attempted to challenge the premises of Wilson's argument, and so have tried to rescue Leibniz's theory from Wilson's charge of incoherence. I shall argue that only one of these ways stands any chance of being successful.

2. *Am I a substance?*

Ezio Vailati argues that premise 1 is false, since the mature Leibniz denies proposition (a). Vailati says that "there is little doubt that Leibniz holds [that (a) I am a particular immaterial substance] in the *Discours de métaphysique*, written almost twenty years before"⁵ the *Nouveaux essais*; however, Vailati goes on to argue, "according to Leibniz's theory of personal identity in the *Nouveaux essais* [(a)] is false."⁶

Vailati claims that "[t]he evidence for [(b) that I could continue as the same person even through a change of substance] is textual and overwhelming" and "[b]y contrast, that for [(a)] is not."⁷ In other words, Leibniz does indeed abandon his earlier view that persons are particular substances for the distinctly Lockean reason that personal identity does not depend on sameness of substance at all. Vailati considers Wilson's claim that "there is plenty of evidence in Leibniz's mature writings" that he "identified the denotation of 'I' with a particular substance."⁸ But Vailati then notes that "Wilson does not provide any textual evidence for the claim that in the *Nouveaux essais* Leibniz holds [that persons are substances]." This should be of no surprise, says Vailati, for the simple reason that there is no "textual and overwhelming" evidence that for the Leibniz of the *Nouveaux essais* persons are substances.

Vailati is correct on one count: Wilson doesn't provide textual evidence that Leibniz embraces proposition (a) in the *Nouveaux essais*.⁹ But I'm sure the reason she doesn't provide evidence is because she thought the matter rather straightforward. I am not sure how overwhelming the evidence must be for Vailati but there is certainly textual evidence, whether or not Wilson refers to it.

So what textual evidence is there in *Nouveaux essais* that Leibniz holds proposition (a)? Consider first the following sentence from the section on innate ideas: "It is my opinion that reflection enables us to find the idea of substance within ourselves, who are substances" (NE, 105). This sentence, however, doesn't quite express proposition (a). The question remains: What *kind* of substance am I? Leibniz tells us in the section on personal identity: "I would rather say that the I and the he are *without parts*, since we say, quite correctly, that he continues to exist as really the same substance, the same physical I" (NE, 238; my emphasis). (Leibniz means by 'physical' (physique) here real (réel).)¹⁰ Leibniz is clearly saying here that persons are simple, indivisible substances, not composites of any kind. Persons,

referents of the 'I', are therefore immaterial substances. It's also interesting to note that not only does Leibniz assert that we are substances but also that we endure as the *same* substance. (Other passages from the *Nouveaux essais* that reiterate this view are discussed in §3.)

So, at the very least, Vailati needs to show how it is that these passages do not represent textual evidence for Leibniz's commitment to proposition (a). Not only does he fail to do so, but I do not see how this could be done in a plausible manner. Moreover, supposing that Leibniz were to abandon (a) in the *Nouveaux essais*, I would be curious as to why Leibniz would change his mind, while leaving no clues in earlier writings that he would do this. It is useful to note that Leibniz often appears more conciliatory to Locke in the *Nouveaux essais* than he actually is.¹¹ On top of this, there is no hint in later writings that Leibniz rejects (a). Hence, Vailati fails to show that premise 1 is false and so Wilson's charge of incoherence in Leibniz's mature theory of personal identity remains unanswered. (Before moving on, we should note that *a fortiori* the view that the mature Leibniz rejects *both* a and b as a way of demonstrating the falsity of premise 1 cannot be successful.)

3. Are (a) and (b) inconsistent?

It is tempting to challenge premise 2 by arguing that (a) and (b) are actually consistent on Leibnizian grounds. Accordingly, the following view has been attributed to Leibniz: (a) I am contingently identical with a particular immaterial substance but (b) it is logically possible that I continue as an identical self-consciousness and identical self, independently of this particular immaterial substance.¹² This is an intriguing strategy; however, I shall argue that there are two serious problems with it.

The first problem turns on Leibniz's account of self-consciousness. But before looking at this account, it is useful to remind ourselves what the inconsistency of (a) and (b) involves. The incoherence which Wilson derives from Leibniz's mature theory of personal identity is a *logical* incoherence. The proposition (b) seems to directly contradict (a), *whether or not* any transfer of consciousnesses from a substance to another substance actually occurs. Taken together, (a) and (b) imply that a given substance and self-consciousness—that is, consciousness of *that* substance—could go their separate ways. But that seems to entail that (a) is false.

Now, if one were to argue for the consistency of (a) and (b) one might try to deny that for Leibniz self-consciousness must be consciousness of a *particular* immaterial substance. For how else can we make sense of preserving the identical self-consciousness over time while ceasing to be identical with the same substance? If, God willing, I, being identical with substance S1 at t1, become identical with a

different substance S2 at t2, how is it possible that I have the same self-consciousness at t2 that I had at t1 when I was identical with S1? But can we make a plausible case that *for Leibniz* self-consciousness need not be of a particular substance and thus *identical* self-consciousness over time need not be consciousness of the *same* substance over time?

Wilson identifies Leibnizian self-consciousness with consciousness of a particular substance which is distinct from other substances. However, Wilson notes correctly that this is perfectly consistent with the view that the most one can be unconfusedly or distinctly aware of through self-consciousness is that one is a substance, not that one is some particular substance. Where does Leibniz stand on this matter? Consider the following passage from a letter to Antoine Arnauld:

It is not enough for understanding the nature of myself, that I feel myself [to be] a thinking substance, one would have to form a distinct idea of what distinguishes me from all other minds; but of that I have only a confused experience. (GP II, 52-53/LA, 59, my emphasis)

Leibniz appears to say here that we can have no reliable consciousness of ourselves as particular substances. If Leibniz is indeed saying this, it seems possible for us to be mistaken about whether the substance we are identical with is the very same substance as the one we now are conscious of having done or felt such and such in the past. But apart from the problem that the apparent view of this 1686 letter to Arnauld is not repeated in similarly straightforward language in later works (including the *Nouveaux essais*) by Leibniz, *even if* self-consciousness is construed in this way the inconsistency of propositions (a) and (b) seems to persist. Wilson explains emphatically:

Now, only so far as this [that is, that one cannot be conscious of his or her substance as distinct from other substances] is true does it make any sense to say I might retain consciousness of self-identity while losing identity of substance. (It seems I wouldn't "know the difference.") But even so it does not make enough sense to suppose such a divorce between self-consciousness and consciousness of substance. For if I am just a particular substance, my self-consciousness must be consciousness of this substance. It certainly cannot be consciousness of another substance—one that is not myself!¹³

In other words, it is absurd to ask the following question: "When I am aware of myself at different times, is it necessarily always myself of which I am aware?" Wilson's point is a good one. Even if we cannot be distinctly or unconfusedly aware of the substance that we are identical with as a particular substance, distinct from all others, it is by no means obvious that our self-consciousness need not be

consciousness of the substance that we are identical with. Indeed, Leibniz sometimes suggests exactly this: “[W]e have a *clear, but not a distinct* idea, of substance, which in my opinion comes from the fact that we, who are substances, have an internal sensation of it in ourselves” (GP III, 247/AG, 287; my emphasis).¹⁴ At any rate, I can find no explicit assertion in Leibniz’s writings that a substance’s self-consciousness can be consciousness of a numerically distinct substance from itself.¹⁵

So we are now able to isolate the first problem with the view that (a) and (b) are jointly consistent on Leibnizian grounds. Leibniz’s account of self-consciousness still requires consciousness of a particular immaterial substance, whether this entails distinct or confused awareness. If so, how can we preserve identical self-consciousness over time (as (b) requires) but cease to be identical with the same substance?

There is a second problem with the view that (a) and (b) are consistent. Saying that (a) and (b) are consistent seems to require that (a) be taken as a contingent truth: I am *contingently* identical with a particular simple substance. But, it seems to me, in the *Nouveaux essais* Leibniz holds not only that I am a particular substance, but also that I am *necessarily* a particular substance. In other words, synchronic *as well as* diachronic personal identity requires sameness of substance for Leibniz.

Consider the following passage from the section on personal identity:

Organization or configuration alone, without an enduring principle of life which I call ‘monad’, would not suffice to make something remain numerically the same, i.e., the same individual. ... as for substantial beings, which are sustained by a single spirit: one can rightly say that they remain perfectly ‘the same individual’ in virtue of this soul or spirit which makes the *I* in substances which think. (NE, 231-232)¹⁶

Leibniz’s specific concern here is with the diachronic identity of “substantial beings,” such as plants and animals: What is logically or metaphysically required for a substantial being to “remain numerically the same” individual over time? Leibniz then says that the answer to this question is no different from the answer to the question of what is required for the identity of persons (i.e., “substances which think”), namely, sameness of substance (“soul or spirit”). Now, it is true that Leibniz doesn’t explicitly say that the *diachronic* identity of persons also requires sameness of substance, but it would be very odd, to say the least, if he thought that the diachronic identity of substantial beings—but *not* substantial beings which happen to be *persons*—required sameness of substance. So I find Ben Mijuskovic’s

reading of the above passage perfectly reasonable: "Thus, according to Leibniz, personal identity is grounded in the immaterial, simple nature of the soul, which necessarily maintains its unity and identity."¹⁷ Likewise, I agree with Clifford Brown, who also writes in regard to the above passage: "The presence of a dominant monad is then a necessary condition of true individual identity."¹⁸ In any case, Mijuskovic's and Brown's reading is corroborated by other passages from the *Nouveaux essais*.¹⁹

4. *Does Leibniz deny (b)?*

Thus far, none of the ways we have considered in which Leibniz's theory of personal identity might be rescued from Wilson's charge of incoherence have succeeded. Propositions (a) and (b) cannot be rendered consistent on any reading that Leibniz himself would accept. Neither does the claim that Leibniz abandons proposition (a) in the *Nouveaux essais* have textual merit. But there is another route we might take; one initially promising response remains. Might it be the case that Leibniz never holds proposition (b) at all?

In all, there appear to be four passages which scholars use to argue that Leibniz holds proposition (b)—that it is logically possible that I continue as an identical self-consciousness and identical self, independently of a particular substance. They are all to be found in the section on personal identity in the *Nouveaux essais*. Let's consider the first three passages as a group:

- i. You seem to hold, sir, that this apparent identity [one's sense of self-identity] could be preserved in the absence of any real identity. Perhaps that could happen through God's absolute power If a man could be a mere machine and still possess consciousness, I would have to agree with you, sir; but I hold that that state of affairs is not possible—at least not naturally. (NE, 236)
- ii. I admit that if God brought it about that consciousnesses were transferred to other souls, the latter would have to be treated according to moral notions as though they were the same. But this would disrupt the order of things for no reason (NE, 242)
- iii. I acknowledge that if all the appearances of one mind were transferred to another, or if God brought about an exchange between two minds by giving to one the visible body of the other and its appearances and states of consciousness, then personal identity would not be tied to the identity of substance but rather would go with the constant appearances, which are what human morality must give heed to. (NE, 244)

Leibniz is certainly conceding something to Locke in each of the above three passages. The question is what. I believe that Leibniz makes a two-fold concession

to Locke in these passages, *neither* of which commit Leibniz to proposition (b). First, he concedes the logical possibility of thinking machines and migrating consciousnesses. Second, he admits that we ought to treat that which possesses apparent identity (and certainly this might be manifested by thinking machines and bodies with new consciousnesses) as persons or morally responsible agents. How would we know the difference? Not really privy to what's happening at the metaphysical level, "human morality must give heed to" apparent identity and not to real identity. This is usually not a problem, considering that in the "order of things" apparent identity tracks real identity. But our judgments of personal identity and moral responsibility can certainly go awry in the event that God brought it about that "apparent identity ... be preserved in the absence of real identity." In a letter to Lady Masham, written at the time of the *Nouveaux essais*, Leibniz writes on the matter of distinguishing thinking machines from thinking substances, "I do not know, madam, how one would tell a primitive natural capacity of thought from a substantial principle of thought joined to matter" (GP III, 364/WF, 220). And, surely if God transfers not only the "internal" appearances (self-consciousness and memory) but also the "external" appearances as well, namely, the body, when he transfers apparent identity from one substance to another, we would not be privy to any loss of continuity of substance. But, of course, the mere fact that we *ought to treat* something as being a person or morally responsible agent does not imply that that thing is *in fact* a person or morally responsible agent. Hence, on Leibnizian grounds, passages i-iii can be read as consistent with the denial of proposition (b).²⁰

Edwin Curley agrees that passages i-iii can be read as consistent with a denial of proposition (b) and thinks that they should be read this way. However, Curley cannot say the same for the final passage used to show that Leibniz embraces proposition (b) in the *Nouveaux essais*. For starters, it is disconcertingly forthright:

iv. [E]ven if God were to change the real identity in some extraordinary manner, the personal identity would remain, provided that the man preserved the appearances of identity.... (NE, 237)

Curley says that he "can see no way of interpreting this as consistent with the generally anti-Lockean tenor of Leibniz's remarks...."²¹ Similarly, Jolley asserts that "Leibniz here definitely concedes that personal identity is separable from substantial identity: he abandons the claim that one and the same immaterial substance is a necessary condition of personal identity."²²

I believe, however, that passage iv can be read as consistent with a substantial

conception of person, namely, (a).²³ I mean to say that the “extraordinary” action of God does not refer to the annihilation of a substance by God or the transference of a person’s experiences from one substance to another substance, or even machine, for that matter. Benson Mates seems to hold this view. He writes: “At [NE, 237] it looks as if Leibniz is countenancing the possibility that X at t might be [personally or] morally identical with Y at t' even if they were not really identical, but I think that in that passage the clause ‘... if God were to change the real identity in some extraordinary manner’ need only mean ‘... if the temporal development of the soul in question contained a discontinuity’.”²⁴ If Mates is right, then this is how we *should* read the specious persons passage. For Leibniz to deny the truth of proposition (a) in any way—as I have argued in §3 is required if Leibniz embraces proposition (b)—would be textually and philosophically at odds with Leibniz’s metaphysics. Moreover, if Leibniz is not committed to (b), not only will his theory of personal identity avoid Wilson’s charge of incoherence, but also it will not involve any mysterious change of mind on Leibniz’s part.

But is the specious persons passage consistent with proposition (a); is Mates right? Unfortunately, Mates does not say any more on this matter, relegating his suggestion to a footnote. So let us therefore see if his idea has interpretive merit. One thing must be understood at the start. God can certainly miraculously intervene in the life of a substance without changing that substance’s real identity. “Properly speaking, God performs a miracle when he does something that surpasses the force he has given to creatures and conserves in them” (GP II, 93/AG 82).²⁵ In other words, miraculous states of substances are states that are produced externally by God, and that do not arise from the nature of the substance itself. But the concept or notion of an individual substance includes all of its states, both natural and miraculous.²⁶ Hence, God can miraculously intervene in a substance’s life without altering its real identity.²⁷ Leibniz says as much in the *Discours* §16: “[W]e can say equally that the extraordinary action of God on this substance does not fail to be miraculous, despite the fact that it is included in the ... individual notion of this substance” (GP IV, 441/AG 49). Nevertheless, any change in real identity of a substance on God’s part (who or what else could do it?) would have to be miraculous. For substances are enduring entities, persisting identically through time and change, and causally independent of other (created) substances.

Perhaps certain things that God could do would change a substance’s real identity. What would these be, since all of a substance’s states, miraculous and non-miraculous, are included in its concept? How about annihilation? The problem here is that it is difficult to see annihilation as entailing a change in the identity of

a substance; rather, it entails an end of the substance. It would seem that any change of *x* presupposes that *x* endure through that change. However, there is a way in which God could change a substance's real identity without destroying that substance once and for all; for example, if its states violated the principle of continuity. For Leibniz the perceptual states of a substance arises in an orderly fashion, naturally and spontaneously. Any discontinuity would be extraordinary and miraculous, directly due to the hand of God. But perceptual continuity for Leibniz is not logically necessary,²⁸ thereby allowing the possibility that God could disrupt the natural continuity of a substance. Certainly we can imagine one and the same substance perceiving something that was not similar in content (that is, discontinuous) to a perception immediately "preceding" it: for example, a painful pinprick that was preceded not by the perception (whether conscious or unconscious) of a cushion replete with pins on my chair (nor by anything else related in content) but by a beautiful sunset, and nary an intervening perception, as we would expect if our perceptions followed the law of continuity. Would this disruption of perceptual continuity "change the real identity"? I am not sure we can rule out the possibility. (And, as I read him, so it seems to Mates.) Would it cease to be a substance? Probably not. Like annihilation, discontinuity, not being a perceptual state at all, is something not contained in a substance's concept or notion. Rather, it describes how the perceptual states of a substance are related or connected. Nevertheless, surely a substance would be genuinely altered if its states were no longer continuous.

In other words, for Leibniz it is important to distinguish between a substance's "categorical" properties and its "ordinary" properties of perception. The former kind of property is not listed in a substance's complete concept whereas the latter kind is. Could a change in its categorical properties "change the real identity" of a substance without destroying that substance, and thus without necessitating the transference of the appearances of identity? Again, I don't see why Leibniz could not be saying this. A Leibnizian substance, in the natural course of things, has the categorical property of having continuous perceptions or states. Now, it would be miraculous—that is, not in the natural course of things—if its states no longer exhibited such continuity, but those now discontinuous states belong to one and the same substance. I conclude that Mates is right: "the clause '... if God were to change the real identity in some extraordinary manner' need only mean '... if the temporal development of the soul in question contained a discontinuity'."²⁹ And, if this interpretation makes sense, it should be preferred, since it attributes neither inconsistency nor change of mind to Leibniz.

5. Conclusion

We have considered the several ways in which scholars have attempted to rescue Leibniz's mature theory of personal identity from Wilson's charge that such a theory is incoherent. I have tried to show that only one of these ways—namely, to show that Leibniz never countenances the logical possibility of an individual retaining personal identity over time while undergoing change in substantial identity—stands any chance of answering Wilson's charge.

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Notes

¹I thank Ken Clatterbaugh, Cass Weller, Robert Coburn, Nicholas Jolley, Paul Lodge, Jonathan Bennett, and David Keyt.

²Margaret Wilson, "Leibniz: Self-Consciousness and Immortality in the Paris Notes and After," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 58 (1976), pp. 335-52.

³I number among those who agree with Wilson, or who have at one time agreed with her, that Leibniz's mature theory is incoherent: Samuel Scheffler, "Leibniz on Personal Identity and Moral Personality," *Studia Leibnitiana* 8 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976), pp. 219-40; Henry Allison, "Locke's Theory of Personal Identity," *Locke on Human Understanding*, ed. I. C. Tipton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Nicholas Jolley, *Leibniz and Locke: A Study of the New Essays on Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984). Also, in private correspondence, Jonathan Bennett has revealed his agreement with Wilson.

⁴Those who reject one or both of her argument's premises, and so attempt to rescue Leibniz's theory from the charge of incoherence, include: Ezio Vailati, "Leibniz's Theory of Personal Identity in the New Essays," *Studia Leibnitiana* 17 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1985), pp. 36-43; Benson Mates, *The Philosophy of Leibniz: Metaphysics and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 145; Harold Noonan, *Personal Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989). Clifford Brown and Udo Thiel both seem to reject premise 1, but I don't know whether they have Wilson in mind: Clifford Brown, *Leibniz and Strawson: A New Essay in Descrip-*

tive Metaphysics (Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 1990), p. 92; Udo Thiel, "Personal Identity," *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, eds. M. Ayers and D. Garber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). I suspect that Catherine Wilson would reject premise 1: Catherine Wilson, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: A Historical and Comparative Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 232-64, esp. p. 242.

⁵Vailati, p. 37.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Vailati, p. 36.

⁸Wilson, pp. 341.

⁹Vailati, pp. 36-7. The evidence Wilson does present is more relevant to her claim that self-consciousness of the I is what gives us our correct understanding of the nature of substance. The passages are from: PNG §5; M §16; NS §11; NE, 14.

¹⁰See Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett's notes in NE, lxiii.

¹¹Indeed, Stuart Brown's contends that "[a]lthough his *New Essays* are the most detailed commentary Leibniz wrote on any philosophical work, he was not influenced by Locke in any way." Stuart Brown, "The seventeenth-century intellectual background," in *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, 57. Allison, p. 115, would disagree with Brown: "Unquestionably the most important treatment of Locke's theory of personal identity is contained in Leibniz's *New Essays* Although Leibniz succeeds in pointing out the main weaknesses in Locke's argument, his own analysis betrays the influence of his English contemporary. In fact, Leibniz's very formulation of the problem is modelled after Locke's...." Also, see Marc Bobro, "Book Review of *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*," *Auslegung* (Winter/Spring, 1996), pp. 64-5.

¹²In private correspondence, Jolley has said that he now finds himself to be attracted to this way of understanding Leibniz in the *Nouveaux essais*. In my own case, the converse is true. I once argued for the consistency of propositions (a) and (b) in an unpublished paper, but have since changed my mind. Although I do think that the joint truth of (a) and (b) is certainly an intriguing possibility.

¹³Wilson, p. 347.

¹⁴Immediately prior, Leibniz tells us what he means by 'clear' and 'distinct': "I call an idea clear when it is sufficient for recognizing a thing ... but I call an idea distinct when I understand its condition or requirements, or, in a word, when I have a definition of it, if it has one...." (GM III, 247).

¹⁵Robert McRae, "The theory of knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, ed. by Nicholas Jolley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995),

p. 189, notes that for Leibniz “[a]pperception of the self and its actions is conceived by Leibniz as *like* immediate sense experience.” In fact, at the time of the *Nouveaux Essais*, Leibniz calls such an experience of the substances that we are ‘intimate’ (Gr 558). Compare Descartes’ words in the French version of the Sixth Meditation: “[I]t is certain that I—that is, my soul, by which I am what I am—am really distinct from the body, and can exist without it” (AT vii, 78/CSM ii, 54, fn. 4).

¹⁷Mijuskovic, p. 210.

¹⁸C. Brown, p. 92.

¹⁹In a famous passage from the *Nouveaux essais*, a substantial conception of person is not asserted outright but is nevertheless strongly suggested through Leibniz’s twin-earth or duplication example. (NE, 245) Here, Leibniz attacks Locke’s theory of personal identity by offering an example of a twin-earth on which live persons indistinguishable in appearance and identical in memory as persons now on earth. But, according to Locke’s theory, because they share the same memories or consciousness, a person on earth is one and the same as his or her counterpart on the twin-earth. Leibniz concludes that this is an absurd result. Leibniz’s own solution is as follows. Since there are two earths and two sets of humans—one set living on earth and the other living on twin-earth—they must be individuated. What individuates each pair of persons is therefore, by hypothesis, imperceptible to us. God, of course, perceives a difference between each pair of persons. What is that difference? It has to do with each person’s substance, their “insensible constitutions.” Jolley concurs with this reading of Leibniz and concludes: “Leibniz insists, then, in opposition to Locke that the essence of personal identity is the persistence of the same substance, or in other words that the set of perceptions which defines a substance at one state is identical with the set of perceptions which defines it at a succeeding state.” See Jolley, p. 143.

²⁰For a detailed discussion of this, and especially passage i, see my “Thinking Machines and Moral Agency in Leibniz’s ‘Nouveaux essais,’” *Studia Leibnitiana* XXX/2 (1999), pp. 178-93.

²¹Curley, p. 325, fn. 27.

²²Jolley, pp. 135-6.

²³Cass Weller has suggested to me that Leibniz is being disingenuous to Locke here in the sense that he is willing to concede the possibility of a change of real or substantial identity only on the condition that we deal with Locke’s *substratum* conception of substance (a “blank slate” to which, theoretically at least, any consciousness can be affixed). I am wary of this suggestion for the simple reason that

in the same section of the *Nouveaux Essais* Leibniz makes other "concessions" that are clearly not disingenuous; for example, he countenances the possibility of thinking machines. We know that this is not disingenuous since in other works Leibniz speaks of machines that are endowed with mental states. See Paul Lodge and Marc Bobro, "Stepping Back Inside Leibniz's Mill," *The Monist* 81 (1998), pp. 554-73.

²⁴Mates, p. 145, fn. 24.

²⁵Compare GP iv, 441-442/AG 48-49; GP iv, 520/L 484 (1698); A vi, 6, 66; GP vi, 241; and, GP vi, 326. See Robert Sleigh, Jr., *Leibniz and Arnauld* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 78-9.

²⁶GP iv, 433, 439/AG 41, 47 and GP ii, 40. See Robert Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Idealist, Theist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 93.

²⁷Sleigh, p. 135, seems to agree: "[it would be an] unfortunate consequence that miraculous intervention would disrupt a substance's identity over time."

²⁸The continuity displayed by a substance's series of perceptions over time is ultimately due to God's discretionary power. BC ii, 558/W 186-187; GP ii, 183/L 521; GP ii, 193; GP iii, 51-55/L 351-353. For further commentary, see Donald Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 30. Also, see Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* v. 4 (New York: Doubleday), p. 298.

²⁹Mates, p. 145, fn. 24.