

Preface

Although so much is new in Swedenborg's philosophy that "we must take Swedenborg in a large measure as independent of historical antecedents, and try to place ourselves in his own distinctive point of view,"¹ nevertheless there are elements in Swedenborg's arguments that cannot be fully understood without a knowledge of the philosophical concepts and terms of his day. They are part of the very language in which his writing is phrased. The significance of such knowledge is further emphasized by the consideration that it is actually through an awareness of Swedenborg's philosophical world, the world in which and for which he wrote, that we are enabled to stand where he stood and, as Hite says, "place ourselves in his distinctive point of view."

The twofold intent of this study, consequently, is 1.) to provide a basic knowledge of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), the philosopher whose ideas were among the principal contemporary factors in the intellectual environment of early 17th Century northern Europe, and thereby 2.) to indicate his place in Swedenborg's thinking and writing—and reception. For it can be argued that Leibniz not only played a part in shaping the philosophical world in which Swedenborg lived, but also that he played an even more significant role in the Divine drama of the redemption of

[†] This study is respectfully dedicated to the Right Reverend Willard D. Pendleton, whose insightful teaching originally awakened this student's awareness to the need of a thorough acquaintance with Swedenborg's European philosophical milieu in order to fully understand the Divine Truth revealed through him. The author also gratefully acknowledges the support of the Carpenter Fund Committee, whose grant funded this study.

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¹ As L. F. Hite said in his introduction to Swedenborg's *The Infinite* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1908), p. x.

human thought. Leibniz's appealing theses challenged men's thinking in regard to two fundamental questions: How does God govern the universe for the bringing forth of what is perfect and good—in spite of the reality of evil? and, What is the Divinely ordered relation of the mind to the body whereby God's same purposes are brought to pass? By virtue of his raising these vital issues so influentially, it might be postulated that in respect to the Lord's Second Coming Leibniz acted as a latter-day John the Baptist.

Like John who "must decrease before his Master," so does Leibniz's philosophy diminish before Swedenborg's theological writings; nevertheless, as will be seen, Leibniz was truly a giant of his times. Frederick the Great of Prussia called him an academy in himself. This acknowledgment is made now, at the beginning of this essay, in part by way of apology; for the pages of this study in no way presume to present the full stature of this universal genius and polymath,² nor begin to fully track and lay out his direct and indirect influence on the intellectual world of Swedenborg—and on the reception of the heavenly doctrine given through him. Such a comprehensive work of scholarship would take at least a volume, and a thick one at that.

Introduction

Our consideration of Leibniz's significance for Swedenborg is developed in eight sections, whose general effort is to present Leibniz as Swedenborg knew him. Section I establishes Swedenborg's direct awareness of his doctrines. Section II traces the development of European philosophy in the 17th century. Into this setting, Sections III and IV place Leibniz's life and philosophical development, and the genesis of his philosophy. Section V sketches the primary elements of Leibniz's complex philosophical system. Section VI analyses Swedenborg's evaluation and critique of Leib-

² Among his writings, which consisted for the most part of shorter essays in Latin, French, and German—published in learned journals—and of private letters, are: *Meditations de cognitione, veritate et ideis* (1684); *Lettres sur la question si l'essence du corps consiste dans l'entendue* (1691); *Nouveau système de la nature* (1695); *Nouveau essais sur l'entendement humain* (in reply to Locke's *Essay*, 1704; first published 1765); *De ipsa natura* (1698); *Essais de Théodicée* (1710); *La monadologie* (1714); *Principes de la nature et de la grâce* (1714). A collection of his philosophical writings ed. by C. I. Gerhardt (1875-1890) is a 7 vol. work.

niz. Section VII notes references to Leibniz in Swedenborg's Theological works. Section VIII considers what Swedenborg possibly "took" from Leibniz's philosophic thinking. And in Section IX we offer a concluding consideration.

In an endeavor to re-present his involvement with and reaction to Leibniz as accurately possible, Swedenborg's own notes from his reading of Leibniz have been extensively reproduced throughout this study.

I. Swedenborg's Awareness of His Contemporaries—Leibniz.

Unquestionably Swedenborg wrote with the thinkers of his own time in mind. This is evident in the opening example given below, from his 1734 treatise, *The Infinite*. For in this work, although he mentions neither Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz,³ nor Wolff by name, it is quite clear that he is dealing with issues these philosophers had raised. And so, addressing the question of the "distinctive qualities of the least natural or primitive entity [created by the Infinite]," he writes: "Here I will answer agreeably with the principles of those I am reasoning with."⁴

He then goes on to grant a then current, fundamental philosophical thesis, although without mentioning its specific source. But it is clearly recognizable as Leibniz's doctrine of the essential unit of creation, which that philosopher had termed the *monad*.⁵ Swedenborg says that the primitive entity he himself proposes, like that of those with whom he is reasoning, also contains "everything whatever we can possibly conceive as existing in nature, and that thus in this prime, or in an indefinite number of these primes or leasts, nature exists in her very seed; out of which, whether considered as one or many, she ultimately issues forth in all her diversity, in all her manifoldness, with all her distinct and abundant series..."⁶

³ This is the contemporary spelling, which will be used throughout. Older literature, incl. Swedenborg, has *Leibnitz*.

⁴ *The Infinite*, n. 30.

⁵ *Monads* will be discussed further below, in Section V.

⁶ *The Infinite*, ns. 30, 31.

Swedenborg's References to Leibniz.

Nowhere in *The Infinite* does Swedenborg mention the name of any particular philosopher, (not even the venerable Aristotle), but among those with whom he was clearly expressing some very limited agreement was, as we have begun to indicate, Leibniz—and an aspect of his *monadology*.

As will be shown, however, on several major points Swedenborg was *not* in agreement with Leibniz. His fundamental philosophical disagreement is specifically articulated in an essay on the mind-body relationship he wrote in early 1742 (published posthumously under the title, "The Soul and the Harmony Between Soul and Body").⁷ Here he derisively, and devastatingly, dismisses Leibniz's central thesis (which Leibniz had termed "Pre-established Harmony") as totally unacceptable because it "involves elements that are unknown and incomprehensible, and qualities that are occult."⁸

Further specific references to Leibniz are made by Swedenborg several times in his theological works. Indeed, Leibniz's theory of *pre-established harmony* is one of the focal starting points for the small tract titled *De Commercio Animae et Corporis*⁹ (*Intercourse of the Soul and Body*).

Besides this, Swedenborg makes explicit mention of Leibniz on five other points. In the just noted work the philosopher's system of *monads* is given as an example of the mistaken conceptions that result from a failure to observe the principles of cause and effect in reasoning about the mind-body relationship.¹⁰ The remaining three references are all based on Swedenborg's conversations with him in the spiritual world. The posthumous work on the Last Judgment, for example, contains a discussion with Leibniz and Wolff regarding simple substance and about pre-established harmony.¹¹ In *Divine Providence* Leibniz, together with many others, is

⁷Emanuel Swedenborg, "The Soul and the Harmony Between Soul and Body," *Psychological Transactions* (Swedenborg Scientific Assoc.: Philadelphia, 1955).

⁸*Psychological Transactions*, n. 4.

⁹Originally published by Swedenborg in London in 1769.

¹⁰Emanuel Swedenborg, *Intercourse of the Soul and the Body* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1947) n. 17.2.

¹¹Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Last Judgment (Posthumous)* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1934) ns. 262-264.

given a convincing demonstration of the fact that no one thinks from himself but from others.¹² And in *The True Christian Religion* a discussion with Leibniz is reported in which he agrees that, contrary to the viewpoint he had published when on earth, there are no connate ideas.¹³

Swedenborg's Acquaintance With Leibniz.

In all likelihood, Swedenborg was first made aware of Leibniz by his brother-in-law, Erik Benzelius, Jr.. When Emanuel's father moved to accept a call as bishop in Skara, his son remained at Uppsala to continue his studies there. He was then taken into the home of his oldest sister and her husband, Erik Benzelius, Jr.. This was extremely fortuitous for the young student. His brother-in-law was (as his learned, present-day countryman, Dr. Inge Jonsson notes) "one of the greatest figures in the intellectual history of Sweden...Emanuel probably read the lively correspondence that Benzelius, as university librarian, maintained with the great scholars of the period. Benzelius could tell of his meetings with some of them, not the least the brilliant Leibniz, on whom he had made a good impression..."¹⁴

From the Scientists in London.

In 1710, a year after his graduation from the University of Uppsala—and the year that Leibniz published his only book on his philosophy, *Tentamina Theodicaeae*—young Swedenborg began his post-graduate study-tour in Europe. He carried with him letters of introduction to several members of the Royal Society of London. He had had his brother-in-law, Erik Benzelius, write these door-opening letters to the learned so that he might gain the benefit of their work in mathematics, physics, and the natural sciences.

¹² Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Providence* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1949), n. 244.

¹³ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1950), n. 335.

¹⁴ Inge Jonsson, *Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Twayne, 1971), pp. 20,21.

At the time of his arrival in London the Royal Society numbered among its distinguished members leading scientists in the fields of astronomy, natural science and mechanics. Consequently it was not long before Swedenborg made the acquaintance of men like Newton, Halley and Flamsteed. And it was doubtless not long before the young Swede also became aware of Newton's conflict with Leibniz.

The feud was over who had developed the mathematics of calculus first. In 1684 and 1686 issues of the Leipzig journal "Acta Eruditorum" Leibniz had published two tracts presenting the fundamentals of his differential and integral calculus. Only a year later Newton's chief work, *Principia Mathematica Philosophae Naturalis*, appeared. In it he developed a similarly productive mode of calculation, termed the *calculus of fluxions*. This coincidence of publications immediately raised the question of whose discovery was actually the earlier and who deserved the credit. A passionate debate arose, and the opposing sides drew the zealous participation not only of the scholarly community of Europe but even of members of the royal courts, masonic lodges and polite society. In 1712, while Swedenborg was yet in England, a specially appointed investigative committee of the Royal Society announced its judgment, against—not unexpectedly—the foreigner, Leibniz. (The overwhelming majority of subsequent investigations has reversed this decision and given Leibniz the laurel.)

It is possible that Leibniz's fame as a mathematician stimulated young Swedenborg to familiarize himself with Leibniz's philosophical thought too. During the two years he spent in Paris after leaving England, from 1712 to 1714, he might have read Leibniz's French publications, articles in the *Paris Journal des Savants* and/or his first and only book, *Théodicée*.

Whether or not Swedenborg himself took a position for or against Leibniz' priority, or whether he actually did read Leibniz philosophical thoughts when in Paris is not known, but his interest in Leibniz at this time in his life is definitely documented. At the conclusion of his European tour of study and while enroute through the German provinces on his way back home to Stockholm, he writes to his brother-in-law, Erik Benzelius from Griefswalde on April 4, 1715, "I should have liked to meet Leibniz, who is at present in Vienna."¹⁵ Unfortunately for Swedenborg, with that

¹⁵ R. L. Tafel., *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg*; 3 vols. (London: Swedenborg Society, 1875) vol. I, p. 47.

missed connection the earthly opportunity was lost, for Leibniz died in November of the following year.

His contact with Leibniz's philosophy did not end, however, with Leibniz's demise in 1716. For years after the German savant's death the philosophic atmosphere continued to be permeated by his concepts. In 1739, for example, a Latin translation of his well-received French work in defense of God's justice, *Théodicée* was published (of which below). So abidingly current and widespread was Leibniz's influence that in 1759 the popular French iconoclast, Voltaire, sought to provoke a witty laugh by lampooning him in his play, *Candide*—where he presents Leibniz as the unquenchably and absurdly optimistic Dr. Pangloss, who sees even in the unjustified but failed attempt of his enemies to hang him, but one more proof of his (i.e., Leibniz's) thesis that this is "the best of all possible worlds." But Leibniz himself, although he firmly maintained that this world that God has created is "the best of all possible worlds," was in no wise an inane metaphysician; he defended the Deity with the forceful logic of one trained in the law. Philosophic thinkers and writers in Swedenborg's day (as even in our own) could scarcely avoid coming to terms with him.

Here are Swedenborg's own words, written in his above mentioned 1742 piece dealing with Leibniz's doctrine of the mind-body relationship, which Leibniz called "Pre-established Harmony":—

At the present day, pre-established harmony is regarded as an irreproachable answer delivered from a tripod [like that at the oracle of Delphi]; it rolls on the tongue of almost all our prophets and wise men; and by it they labor to explain what is meant by the soul and its harmony, and by the actions, laws, series and forces of the whole animal kingdom. It is this system that now carries the day, and that takes the prize from all others. In a few short years it has lifted high its head like the cypress towering above the lowly wayfaring shrubs; and from the tomb of Leibniz is growing still higher.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Documents* p. 28.

And concerning the prevalence of Leibniz's doctrine about the basic unit of existence, the *monad*, he observes:—

[In place of the atoms of the ancients which have been exiled and driven forth from the field of the learned world] monads and simples have been adopted as the primitive entities of the world. These are so widely proclaimed that our pulpits and professorial chairs resound with nothing but simples; the spectators applaud the sound and show their favor by unanimous voice and approval...¹⁷

It is scarcely surprising, consequently, to find Leibniz's books in Swedenborg's library. He is well represented in three works: (1) *Tentamina Theodicaeae* (a 1739 Latin translation from the original French version of 1710—the only book on his philosophy that Leibniz himself ever actually published), (2) *Journal des Scavans* (a 1739 Latin translation from this French journal) containing several articles by Leibniz, and (3) *Epistolae ad Diversos*, a posthumous edition of some of his correspondence. These epistles actually contain most of the meat of Leibniz's philosophical system. It seems he was less concerned about publishing his system for the world than winning the minds of a score or two of leading intellectuals. This he attempted to do by presenting closely reasoned arguments to select correspondents. Commenting on his failure to put his philosophy into published form, he very properly wrote of himself on one occasion, "*Qui me non nisi editis novit, non novit*" (One who knows me only by the published works, does not know me at all).¹⁸

Of the fact that Swedenborg read *Tentamina* and *Epistolae* both carefully there is no question. His notebook (posthumously published under the title, *A Philosopher's Note Book*¹⁹) contains over twenty extracts from them.

¹⁷ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Psychological Transactions*, trans. and ed. Alfred Acton (Philadelphia: Swedenborg Scientific Assoc., 1955), n. 55.

¹⁸ Nicholas Rescher, *Leibniz, An Introduction to his Philosophy* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p. 8.

¹⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Philosopher's Note Book*, (trans. Alfred Acton; Philadelphia: Swedenborg Scientific Assoc., 1931).

In the beginning of his notebook Swedenborg lists Leibniz among the authors from whom, in addition to unspecified others,²⁰ he was to quote:—

Rydelius	Wolff
Plato	Malebranche
Aristotle	Descartes
Augustine	Bilfinger
Grotius	Sacred Scripture
Leibniz	

These extensive notes on Leibniz and other significant philosophers were very probably made by Swedenborg in late 1740 and early 1741, in preparation for writing Transactions III and IV of the *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, which were to deal with the brain.²¹

On examining *A Philosopher's Note Book* we find that in making his notes Swedenborg's mode was to cite first from Leibniz's *Epistolae* and then from his *Theodicaeae*, not going through either book seriatim, but picking material on the subject he was currently considering. But beyond these two books Swedenborg used no other primary sources when making his notes. We find no direct reference, for example, to any of the Leibniz's articles in his Latin version of Paris' *Journal des Savants* (and he apparently had no copies of Leipzig's *Acta Eruditorum*, where Leibniz also occasionally published).

There were, however, two very significant secondary sources. Since the renowned Descartes had been in residence in Sweden at the court of Queen Christianna (1632-54) and left a dominant impression on the nation's philosophical faculties, one might think his, not Leibniz's, influence would abound in a library like Swedenborg's. But no, as Inge Jonsson points out, too many of the learned were concerned about the atheistic consequences that Descartes' mechanistic conception of reality would lead to (an opinion shared by even Voltaire in his book on Newton's philosophy). More acceptable were men like Malebranche and Leibniz, men in

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10. In addition to these authors whom Swedenborg listed, he also quoted from Pliny, Spinoza, Comte de Gabalis, Fred. Hoffman, Benj. Martin, Jas. Grassineau, Robt. Smith, Ruysch, and an unidentified author.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

actuality inspired by Descartes but able to combine the new science with profound religious experience.²² Consequently, in Northern Europe the promulgations of Leibniz's followers became the material that substantially filled the philosophers' discussions and library shelves in the mid-18th century. For Swedenborg the more significant of these epigoni were Christian Wolff and Georg Bernhard Bilfinger. From these two Leibnizians' respective works, *Psychologica Rationalis* and *Harmonia Animae et Corporis*, Swedenborg made pages upon pages of extracts. Bilfinger's detailed summary of the mind-body discussion provided him with a rich source of information when he wanted to get a both quick and comprehensive overview of the problem.²³

Besides this literary acquaintance Swedenborg did, of course, ultimately have a personal meeting with Leibniz, albeit a posthumous one. As noted at the beginning of this study, he ultimately met him in the spiritual world. Of this we shall have more to say later.

II. *The Development of European Philosophy of the 17th Century.*

What in the development and structure of European philosophy brought Leibniz to the forefront of thought?

The Swedish scholar, Martin Lamm, gives the following account of the ascendancy of Leibniz's theories and their place in Swedenborg's thinking:—

Leibniz's philosophy had in view the reconciliation of the Cartesian with the Aristotelian theological concept of nature; it sought to bring about the combination of a mechanical and an organic explanation of the world. Leibniz accomplished this by conceiving of bodies as phenomena of an inner, immaterial power. By retaining a mechanical explanation for physical processes, his monadology gave an explanation of the nature of things which transformed the universe into a living unity composed of animat-

²² Inge Jonsson, *Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971), pp. 14,15.

²³ Inge Jonsson, *Swedenborgs skapelsedrama* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1961) p. 51.

ed substances. Lasswitz has pointed out that within a short time this metaphysical explanation of the universe/world was applied by his followers directly to the plane of physical processes. Thus his monadology came to form the starting point for most of the attempts to replace mechanical atomism with the hylozoic doctrine of living molecules, which we meet in different quarters among philosophers and scientists of the Seventeenth century.

Swedenborg had of course already become acquainted with Leibniz and, as we have seen, had been affected by him on detailed points. But Leibniz scarcely seems to have reached his full significance for him until the time when he was editing the *Principia*, when he made a renewed acquaintance with Leibnizism in the rather watered down form it took in Wolff's works. These stood for him at that time as philosophical knowledge's last word, which he readily cited, although in reality he had an entirely different standpoint.²⁴

In the centuries prior to Swedenborg's time the first and last word in philosophy had come from the mouths of the *scholastics*, men like Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus. These men and others of this school sought to keep separate the spheres of religion and philosophy, of faith and reason, and by means of a priori reasoning, to solve anew the general problems of philosophy. In doing this, nonetheless, they took the Christian Church's articles of faith as their starting point.

A new course in European philosophy, on whose lines Leibniz subsequently also sailed, was set by the Frenchman, René Descartes (1596-1650). Like his fellow philosopher Bacon, across the Channel, Descartes resolutely set his face against old authorities. But unlike the English empiricist, he took mathematics as the model of his philosophical method.

In his effort to find an explanation of reality such as anyone with common sense and the faculty of reasoning would accept, Descartes began his philosophy with the self-evident axiom of personal existence, based on his own undeniable experience of doubt: *cogito, ergo sum*—"I think, there-

²⁴ Martin Lamm, *Swedenborg* (Stockholm: Hugo Gebers, 1915), p. 51.

fore I am." Having thus established the existence of the world of the mind, he proceeded to constructing a proof for the existence of God, and for the existence of the external world: just as the idea of an infinitely good and perfect God could not arise in the mind unless there were such a being to cause that idea, so also the sense that there is a world of the body, external to that of the mind, could not exist unless such were actually the case—for God, who endows us with the ability to sensate the world of the body, could not be a deceiver.

Related to these philosophic principles is his hypothesis that knowledge which is beyond sense experience is innate. There are ideas or truths either impressed upon the mind which the soul finds in itself, or which it has the ability to produce in the course of human experience.

For Descartes, mind is diametrically opposed to body. The attribute of body is extension: bodies are passive; the attribute of the mind is thinking: mind is active—free. But the two entities are in no way organically related; there is no causal interaction between mind and body. Except...Except that he does not maintain this view consistently. At times he accepts the theory of causal interaction without hesitation, positing that the soul has its principal seat in the pineal gland. Mental sensation, then, is the result of the movements transferred via the animal spirits to the pineal gland; bodily motion arises from a converse process. Yet how this transfer of activity from the one of these totally distinct realms to other took place, Descartes could not answer other than by attributing it to a Divine miracle. This miracle took place whenever the occasion (*causae occasionalis*) demanded. This process, *influxus occasionalis*, has been termed in English, **occasionalism**.

What seems to have particularly attracted Descartes to this extreme dualism—and what definitely alarmed his theological opponents—was that it left nature free for the mechanical explanations of natural science. Christianity's still dominant scholastic theology feared his exclusion of all Divine purposes or final causes from nature's domain. Taking a different, person-centered starting point in his philosophizing, Descartes had sincerely tried to harmonize modern science with religion, but failed.

The consequences of Descartes' failure to satisfactorily relate the realm of the spirit to the realm of nature is described by Thilly and Wood as follows:—

Nearly all of Descartes' difficulties are caused by this task of reconciliation; the function of his successors consisted either in pointing them out or in discovering ways of escaping them. It was possible to avoid the dualism of the system: (1) by eliminating nature as an independent reality and teaching absolute idealism (Malebranche); (2) by eliminating mind as an independent reality and accepting materialism (Hobbes, La Mettrie, and the French materialists); (3) by making both mind and matter manifestations of an absolute substance, God or nature (Spinoza).²⁵ Or it was possible to retain the dualism and frankly deny the possibility of interaction (parallelism).²⁶

III. *Leibniz's Life and Philosophical Development.*

This final route of escaping the Cartesian difficulties is the one Leibniz took. But although he deviated from Descartes' course, he began his journey from the same intellectual harbor, *scholasticism*. As a child of his age (b. July 1, 1646) and, specifically, as the son of a Lutheran professor of moral theology in the university, he could scarcely have done otherwise. He came under the influence of the Scholastics by reading their books in his father's library.

He was a remarkable child—and adult. By the time he was twelve he read Latin easily and had begun Greek. At the age of fifteen he matriculated in the University of Leipzig as a law student. But his first two years were devoted to the study of philosophy. His primary teacher was Jakob Thomasius, a Neo-Aristotelian, who is credited with having systematized the study of the history of philosophy in Germany. Mathematics, a discipline in which he was to become internationally renowned, did not become part of his study until he was seventeen. Then, in the summer of his seventeenth year, 1663, at Jena he studied under E. Weigel, a mathemati-

²⁵ Leibniz felt he observed a direct link between Descartes and Spinoza. He wrote: "It is well to beware...lest in confusing substances with accidents, in depriving substances of action, one fall into Spinozism, which is an exaggerated Cartesianism." *Theodicy*, n. 393, p. 359.

²⁶ Frank Thilly and Ledger Wood, *History of Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1957) 315.

cian of repute. However, he did not enter into a deeper study of mathematics until a decade later, when in Paris he made the acquaintance of Huygens. Obviously a brilliant student, at scarcely twenty years of age he stood for the degree of doctor of law at his university, but was refused it on account of his youth. Thereupon he presented it to the University of Altdorf, where his defense of it so impressed the faculty that not only a degree was awarded, but he was offered a professorship, which he declined.

It was at this time also (1666) that he published *De arte combinatoria*. This was his formula for determining the number of complexions (combinations and permutations) of the components of a complex group, whole, expression, or number. Although one of his less significant contributions to the field of mathematics, its concept of the symbolic representation of the content of and relationship between ideas was the bud from which an entire branch of his philosophical thought of the next two decades was to develop, namely, his own conception of a *universal mathesis*, as Swedenborg was to refer to it. In its later formulation Leibniz gave it the name *ars characteristica*. He was to envision it as a universal mathematics of thought, an art of discovery, a universal language, and the principle of a complete synthesis of knowledge in a great encyclopedia. In his account of *Early German Philosophy* Lewis White Beck writes:—

No philosopher, I think, has been so confident as Leibniz was that he had discovered an intellectual panacea. In Leibniz's accounts of what can be accomplished by its means, he says it will increase the power of the mind just as microscopes and telescopes increase the power of the eye; it will be to the discoverer what the compass is to the sailor; it will make arguments about all questions as easily resolvable as disputes in arithmetic; 'If we had an established characteristic we might reason as safely in metaphysics as in mathematics.'²⁷

Such a *universal mathesis* would be feasible, Beck also notes, because "*Leibniz' metaphysical conception of the world is that the world is so constituted*

²⁷ Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1969), pp. 204, 205.

that the ideal of the art of characteristic is achievable.”²⁸ i.e., that all its elements, aspects and relations can be represented symbolically.

How, then, did his philosophic thinking develop? The orthodox philosophy of Leibniz’s university days was, as above noted, scholasticism. But new views were arising and Leibniz was not unaffected by them. In fact, his turn away from scholasticism occurred, he says (although it may have been a year or two later), at the early age of fifteen. Walking in the Rosenthal gardens in Leipzig he asked himself whether he was going to go on as he was being trained, viz., as a scholastic, or to follow the new course philosophy was taking, which was based on a mathematical and mechanical study of nature? At the time he favored the modern view.²⁹

But this did not mean that he departed from the reverent attitude of the scholastics. His lifelong piously respectful approach to theological teaching is summed up in the following words—which caught Swedenborg’s attention—in his essay, “The Conformity of Faith with Reason”:—

That philosophy should be the handmaid of theology and not its mistress, was taught by Robert Baron, the Scotchman, in the very beginning of his book entitled, “Philosophy the Handmaid of Theology.”³⁰

Philosophy, however, was not his major course of study and did not become his vocation. At first he entered into the service of the civil state. The elector of Mainz, apparently impressed with a juridical essay young Leibniz had dedicated and personally presented to him, *Nova methodus docendi discendique juris* (A New Method for Teaching and Learning Law), gave him employment which led to his becoming one of the elector’s political advisors. In this capacity Leibniz came up with a scheme whose attempt was to interest the French in a joint Egyptian venture, and thus to divert French territorial aspirations away from Germany. The effort to promote this (never fulfilled) project occasioned Leibniz to make a political trip to Paris—a city that held an avocational interest for him as well.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

³⁰ *A Philosopher’s Note Book*, p. 47.

The year was 1672, a time when Paris was a center of intellectual excellence. There he met with such brilliant intellectual figures of the time as the theologians/philosophers Antoine Arnauld and Malebranche, and the astronomer-physicist, Christian Huygens.

Unquestionably this was a satisfyingly enriching period for the young Leibniz (he was but twenty-six³¹). For although the young German's profession was politics, at Mainz he had already been actively interested in scientific and philosophical matters, writing letters and essays whose themes revolved chiefly around the mechanical explanation of nature. In 1671, for example, he had published *Hypothesis physica nova*, in which, in agreement with Descartes, he argued for such a mechanical rationale. Here he postulated, with his contemporaries, that nature's motions originated in and are sustained by a fine, all-permeating ether.³² Swedenborg himself took note of Leibniz's theory, postulating that the ether is "the cause of gravity and at the same time of elastic force and magnetic direction of many other of the phenomena of nature...[and] that gyration is impressed upon it by light."³³

Like Swedenborg, Leibniz too was ever an application-minded theorist. (He chose as his life motto, *Theoria et Praxis*.)³⁴ The list of inventions he had come up with in the period prior to his departure from Paris includes discoveries and plans in the realms of mechanics, optics, hydrostatics, pneumatics and nautical science—besides new ideas in natural philosophy, law, theology, and politics. Today, in this age of computers, particularly noteworthy among all his bright ideas is his new design for a *calculator*. Although it was, of course, not electrical but mechanical, and did not use the binary system employed by present day calculators, it was able to

³¹ About the same age as was Swedenborg when he made his first visit to Paris roughly forty years later, in 1713.

³² In postulating an ether Leibniz was following his mentor, Huygens, who had invented the concept to explain the propagation of light. Among others of that period who believed in the existence of an ether was Newton, who endeavored to account for gravitation by changes of pressure in the ether, although he did not publish this theory because he was unable to verify it experimentally.

³³ Leibniz, *Epist. ad Diversos*, Tom III, [p. 59] Epist. xiv ad Thomasium, Jul. [22] 1671—*Philosopher's Notebook* p. 231.

³⁴ *The Philosophy of Leibniz* 5.

perform more calculations than the one Pascal had produced some years earlier—adding and subtracting, multiplying, dividing and extracting roots. A model of it was displayed by him to both the Academy of Paris and the Royal Society of London. While in London in 1673 his mathematical and other scientific accomplishments, together, no doubt, with his personal contacts (he had become acquainted with Oldenburg, the secretary of the Royal Society) brought him election to membership in the Society.

It was in the area of mathematics, in fact, that Leibniz found particular enrichment in Paris. As noted, Huygens was there. On returning to Paris in mid-1673 Leibniz devoted himself to studying higher geometry under him. This study soon led him to a series of investigations that resulted in his formulation of the new mathematical method known as *calculus*.

A call to new employment in 1676 gave him the opportunity to become personally acquainted with yet another great mind of the era. In the process of relocating to Hanover to begin service with Duke John Frederick of Brunswick (he had failed to secure appointment at the French court), he stopped over in Amsterdam. He there took the opportunity to establish a personal, philosophic acquaintance with Spinoza. He talked at length with him, read his unpublished *Ethica*, and copied various passages from it.

This call to Brunswick brought to a close the first three decades and first phase of Leibniz's life. They had been years of education and a period of free and energetic adventure in perfecting a system of thought, in mastering the intellectual and cultural tradition, and in establishing contacts with European leaders in many fields. The last four decades, from 1676 to 1716, formed the second phase, a time in which he more fully defined and reinterpreted his mature thought, in response to much misunderstanding and criticism.

But all the while he was attending to multitudinous other matters as well. The vicissitudes of this second phase, as characterized in the following by the great Leibniz's scholar, Leroy E. Loemker, give us a picture of his inclusive genius:—

For forty years Leibniz's life was torn between his unceasing work toward the advancement of science and the peace and well-being of Europe, and the intrigues and compromises required of

him by the ambitions of his masters. He was librarian and collector of coins; landscape designer and engineer, laboring for years on projects to rid the Harz silver mines, the basis of Hanoverian currency, of the water which threatened them. His engineering skill planned the water displays of the great garden of Herrenhausen for the delight of the court. He was jurist-politician, rendering historical and judicial opinions in favor of, and stinging satires against opponents of, the interests of the House of Hanover. He was a diplomat, successfully arguing for Hanoverian admission to the English throne. He collected historical documents to establish the line of Brunswick, back beyond Henry the Lion, the great leader of the Guelphs who defied the Emperor Frederick II, to a marriage with the House of Este; and finally, he was the historian of the House of Brunswick itself. His letters complained increasingly of this tension between the official and the essential in his life. In 1695, he wrote: '...I have indeed so many things in mathematics, so many thoughts in philosophy, so many other literary observations which I do not wish to have perish, that I am often bewildered as to where to begin.'³⁵

To this wide-ranging list of involvements should be added even a few more matters Leibniz felt important enough to find time for. Principal and most significant in its potential was his endeavor to produce a Christian apologetic that would doctrinally reconcile and re-unite the Catholic and Protestant churches, and convert the world by force of logical argument. Besides this he had correspondence with Jesuit missionaries in China and three meetings with Czar Peter the Great with the goal of developing a Russian-mediated relationship between East and West. And he amused himself with such diversions as the design of masques for the court at Herrenhausen and the composition of moderately risqué rhymes and couplets to titillate the sensibility of the Electress Sophia. These distractions notwithstanding, his philosophic productivity came to its fullness in these busy days of his life's second phase. It was between the years 1690

³⁵ Leroy E. Loemker et al., *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, Leclerc, Ivored. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1973), p. 6.

and his death in 1716 that his chief philosophical works were composed. These were published, not as books, but as letters to friends and as occasional articles in the *Acta Eruditorum* of Leipzig and in the *Journal des Savants*³⁶ of Paris. Principal among his correspondents were the Frenchmen Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Bayle, and English disciple of Newton, Samuel Clarke.

IV. *The Genesis and Essence of Leibniz's Philosophy.*

The *a priori* starting point for Leibniz's thought is, to use Loemker's words, "the perfections of God, the universal calculator from whose contemplation and choice of possibilities the world is born."³⁷ The subject of the opening section of his early (published in 1666, as noted above, when he was but twenty) *Dissertatio de arte combinatio*, was thematic of all of his thinking. This opening section was titled, "Demonstration of the Existence of God."³⁸ God, the infinite prime mover, was ever at the center of Leibniz's thought and philosophical constructs.

But Leibniz's God-centered constructs were also earth-related. One has only to pick up his *Discourse on metaphysics* to find, from the second paragraph onwards, a host of arguments not only about the goodness of God but also about the moral government of the world; and his *Monadology*, a concise, unpublished summary of his metaphysics written in 1714 near the end of his life, ends by recounting the fundamentals of his ethical theory. Both of these essays beautifully focus their conclusion on "the City of God":—

God is the monarch of the most perfect Republic consisting of all spirits, and the happiness of this City of God is His principal design. ("Discourse on metaphysics"—1686.)³⁹

This City of God, this truly universal monarchy, is a moral world within the natural world and is the most exalted and Divine of all

³⁶ As noted above, volumes of this journal containing his articles and a posthumous edition of his letters were both represented in Swedenborg's library.

³⁷ *The Philosophy of Leibniz* 14.

³⁸ *The Philosophy of Leibniz* 73.

³⁹ "Discourse on metaphysics," G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. & ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht-Holland / Boston-U.S.A.: D. Reidel, 1976) 326.

God's works. In it the true glory of God consists, for he would have no glory if his greatness and goodness were not known and admired by the spirits. It is also in relation to this divine city that his distinctive goodness is found, whereas his wisdom and power are shown everywhere. ("The Monadology"—1714.)⁴⁰

Although Leibniz was a brilliant jurist, mathematician and logician, and a capable courtier, and although he made original contributions to physics, beneath all lay a pious concern for establishing a *Weltanschauung* that had at its heart a moral system. Writing to the Frenchman Arnauld in a letter of 1769, in which he has just described his plans for a future work on theology, he manifests this concern:—

To lay the foundations for this great work, and to make it intelligible, I plan first to establish the *Elements* of true philosophy. For we need a new *logic*, to assess degrees of probability... We must make considerable advances in *metaphysics*, to have true concepts of God and the soul, of persons, and of substance and accident. Unless we have a more basic knowledge of *physics* we shall not be able to cope with the problems attending the story of the creation, the flood, and the resurrection of bodies, And finally we must discover the true theory of *ethics* to understand the nature of justice, justification, freedom, pleasure and happiness.⁴¹

This "great work," the only full book he composed on his philosophy, finally came into print in 1710. Written in French, its full title was, *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme, et l'origine du mal* ("Essays on Theodicy concerning the Goodness of God, Human Freedom, and the Origin of Evil"). *Théodicée*, or in its English spelling, "theodicy," is a term coined by Leibniz himself. Formed of the Greek words *theos* ("God") and *diké* ("justice"), it has entered the dictionary with the definition, "a vindication of the justice of God, esp. in ordaining or permitting natural and

⁴⁰ G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, pp. 651, 652.

⁴¹ John Hostler, *Leibniz's Moral Philosophy* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1975), p. 10.

moral evil."⁴² In this grand essay he explains its *raison d'être* in the following lofty words:—

Our end is to banish from men the false ideas that represent God to them as an absolute prince employing a despotic power, unfitted to be loved and unworthy of being loved. These notions are the more evil in relation to God inasmuch as the essence of piety is not only to fear him but also to love him above all things: and that cannot come about unless there be knowledge of his perfections capable of arousing the love which he deserves, and which makes the felicity of those that love him.⁴³

In his beautiful preface to the work in question he expands upon the purpose and significance of a true knowledge of God and of the role of religion in bringing this to pass:—

It is clear that Jesus Christ, completing what Moses had begun, wished that the Divinity should be the object not only of our fear and veneration but also of our love and devotion. Thus he made men happy by anticipation, and gave them here on earth a foretaste of future felicity. For there is nothing so agreeable as loving It which is worthy of love. Love is that mental state which makes us take pleasure in the perfections of the object of our love, and there is nothing more perfect than God, nor any greater light than in him. To love him it suffices to contemplate his perfections, a thing easy indeed, because we find the ideas of these things in ourselves. The perfections of God are those of our souls, he possesses them in boundless measure; he is an Ocean, whereof to us only drops have been granted; there is in us some power, some knowledge, some goodness, but in God they are all there in their entirety. Order, proportions, harmony delight us; paint and music are

⁴² *Webster's* (Springfield: Merriam, 1947).

⁴³ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy*, trans. Austin Farrer, ed. E. M. Huggard. (New Haven: Yale University, 1952), p. 127.

samples of these: God is all order; he always keeps truth of proportions, he makes universal harmony; all beauty is an effusion of his rays.

It follows manifestly that true piety and even true felicity contain the love of God, but a love so enlightened that its fervor is attended by insight. This kind of love begets that pleasure in good actions which gives relief to virtue, and, relating all to God as the centre, transports the human to the divine. For in doing one's duty, in obeying reason, one carries out the orders of Supreme Reason. One directs all one's intentions to the common good, which is no other than the glory of God. Thus one finds that there is no greater individual interest than to espouse that of the community, and one gains satisfaction for oneself by taking pleasure in the acquisition of true benefits for men. Whether one succeeds or not, one is content with what comes to pass, being once resigned to the will of God and knowing that what he wills is best. But before he declares his will by the event, one endeavors to find it out by doing that which appears most in accord with his commands. When we are in this state of mind, we are not disheartened by ill success, we regret only our faults; and the ungrateful ways of men cause no relaxation in the exercise of our kindly disposition. Our charity is humble and full of moderation, it presumes not to domineer; attentive alike to our own faults and to the talents of others, we are inclined to criticize our own actions and vindicate those of others. We must work out our own perfection and do wrong to no man. There is no piety where there is not charity; and without being kindly and beneficent one cannot show sincere religion.

Good disposition, favorable upbringing, association with pious and virtuous persons may contribute much towards such a propitious condition for our souls; but most securely are they grounded therein by good principles. I have already said that insight must be joined to fervor, that the perfecting of our understanding must accomplish the perfecting of our will. The practices of virtue, as

well as those of vice, may be the effect of mere habit, one may acquire a taste for them; but when virtue is reasonable, when it is related to God, who is the supreme **reason** of things, it is founded on knowledge. One cannot love God without knowing his perfections, and this knowledge contains the Principles of true piety. The purpose of religion should be to imprint these principles upon our souls: but in some strange way it has happened all too often that men, that teachers of religion, have strayed far from this purpose. Contrary to the intention of our divine Master, devotion has been reduced to ceremonies and doctrine has been cumbered with formulae. All too often these ceremonies have not been well fitted to maintain the exercise of virtue, and the formulae sometimes have not been lucid. Can one believe it? Some Christians have imagined that they could be devout without loving their neighbor, and pious without loving God; or else people have thought that they could love their neighbor without serving him and could love God without knowing him. Many centuries have passed without recognition of this fact by the people at large; and there are still great traces of the reign of darkness. There are divers persons who speak much piety, of devotion, of religion, who are even busied with the teaching of such things, and who yet prove to be by no means versed in the divine perfections. They ill understand the goodness and the justice of the Sovereign of the universe; they imagine a God who deserves neither to be imitated nor to be loved. This deed seemed to me dangerous in its effect, since it is of serious moment that the very source of piety should be preserved from infection. The old errors of those who arraigned the Divinity or who made thereof an evil principle have been renewed sometimes our own days: people have pleaded the irresistible power of God when it was a question rather of presenting his supreme goodness; and they have assumed a despotic power when they should rather have conceived of a power ordered by the most perfect wisdom. I have observed that these opinions, apt to do harm, rested especially on confused notions which had been formed concerning freedom, necessity and destiny; and I have taken up my pen more than once on such an occasion to give

explanations on these important matters. But finally I have been compelled to gather up my thoughts on all these connected questions, which I offer here, on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil.⁴⁴

Leibniz's confidence in the Divine wisdom and goodness was complete. Because God is perfect, he reasoned (as Voltaire scouted), our present world that He created must be *the best of all possible worlds*. This Swedenborg notes under the heading, "Providence, Fate, Necessity":—

Because wisdom directs God's goodness in its general operation among His creatures, it follows that Divine Providence shows itself in the whole series of the universe; and we must declare that, from the infinitude of the possible series of things, God elected the best, and that it is this best that actually exists...God so wrought that nothing could be done better than it was done. And therefore all things are perfectly harmonious and conspire together in the most beautiful way,—formal causes or souls, with material causes or bodies; efficient or natural causes, with final or moral causes; the kingdom of grace with the kingdom of nature. (*Theodicy* 41,46)⁴⁵

And although God is in no way the author of evil, even evil has its place in His "election of the best possible series." Evil exists, Leibniz says, using a term Swedenborg was to expand on after him, by God's "permission":

God, therefore, is not the author of essences, in that these are mere possibilities; and yet there is nothing actual in existence which he has not decreed and to which He has given existence. But he permitted evil because, in the best of all ideas to be found in the region of things possible, evil was involved; and the supreme wisdom could not but adopt this idea. (*Theodicy* 335)⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Theodicy*, pp. 51-53.

⁴⁵ *A Philosopher's Note Book*, pp. 65, 66.

⁴⁶ *Theodicy*, in *A Philosopher's Note Book*, p. 388.

One cannot but wonder if such a reverently conscientious attitude in Leibniz was not the basis for the “inner powers of judgment” that Swedenborg attributed to him when relating his meeting with Leibniz in the spiritual world.⁴⁷

The first series of notes that Swedenborg makes on Leibniz actually focus on his teachings regarding man’s spirit and related spiritual issues rather than on his unique philosophical doctrine which Swedenborg was later to address specifically, namely the soul’s relation to the body. Prior to his entry on Leibniz’s views on this topic, under the subject heading, “Systems Concerning the Soul,” he excerpts Leibniz’s views, along with those of other of the philosophers noted above, under all of the other following headings in his notebook:—

Justification, Faith, Good Works
 Will, Heart
 Truth, Good, Felicity
 Erudition, Wisdom, Intelligence, Being Learned
 Predestination, Fate, Necessity, the Providence
 and Prescience of God
 Fortune, The Fortuitous, Chance
 Love, Affection, Concord
 Free Decision
 Degrees, Priors, Posteriors
 Heaven, Auras, Ether
 God
 The Soul
 Organic Mind, Intellect, Reason
 Evils, Crimes, Sins
 The Simple, the One, Elements; Substance, Body,
 Matter;
 Series; the Individual, the Singular
 Piety, Religion.

Then come his notes under the heading:

Systems Concerning the Soul.

⁴⁷ *True Christian Religion* n. 335e.

And after this, notes under the headings:

The Last Judgment. The End of the World
Hypothesis, Conjecture, Probability
Miracles, Prodigies
The World. The Visible Globe.

As the foregoing list suggests, Leibniz's views on a wide range of subjects were of significance to Swedenborg—and some were not, e.g. Leibniz's extensive discussions of logic.

By making a more detailed examination of what Swedenborg transcribed from Leibniz's writing and from that of Leibniz's disciples, Bilfinger and Wolff, we can plausibly reconstruct Swedenborg's conception of what was valuable in Leibniz's philosophy. In the next section we attempt to summarize this by presenting cogent extracts from his own notes, as published in *A Philosopher's Note Book*.

V. *Primary Elements of Leibniz's Philosophical System.*

The structure of Leibniz's philosophy lies actually in the frame of his logic and in his *dynamic* or *energetic* conception of nature, i.e., of matter. The basic thesis of Leibniz's logic is that the predicate is completely contained in the intention of the subject of a true affirmative proposition. The essential attribute of a body, he believed, is not extension but *force* or *conatus*. Consequently he saw in bodies an inherent activity and movement. In Leibniz's system these are the characteristics which are embodied in the basic unit of finite existence the *monad*, of which he writes:—

True substances are nothing but simple substances, or what I call monads; and I think that in nature there are nothing but monads, all else being the phenomena resulting therefrom. Each monad is a mirror of the universe according to its own point of view, accompanied by a multitude of other monads which compose its organic body, wherein itself is the dominant monad. In this monad there are nothing but perceptions and tendencies to new perceptions

and appetitions; just as, in the universe of phenomena there are nothing but figures and motions. The monad then already includes in itself its own states, past or future; and this in such way that an Omniscient Being can there read them; and the monads bring themselves into mutual accord, being mirrors of one and the same universe, not differently represented. It is, as it were, a multiplication to infinity of one and the same universe, although the universe is itself of infinite diffusion. In this, consists my Pre-established Harmony (*Epist. ad M. Dancicourt* [Sept, 11] 1716 [*Epistolae*] Tom. III).

I assert that all souls, entelechias or primitive forces, substantial forms, simple substances or monads, or by whatever name they may be called, cannot naturally undergo birth or destruction. But I conceive of derivative qualities or forces, or what philosophers call accidental forms, as being the modifications of a primitive entelechia,—just as figures are modifications of matter ([*De Bonit. Dei*] n. 396).

Because of the lack of a true conception of the nature of substance and matter, false positions have been built up which lead to insuperable difficulties ([*Theod.*] Praef. n. 7).

Everywhere in nature there is an organism, the disposition of which is in the hands of God its Originator. This organism in nature would come more clearly into view, if further progress were made in the anatomy of bodies; and there would be constancy in the observance of it, if, with nature, we also were able to progress to the infinite, and, by our knowledge, to continue that subdivision which nature has continued in actuality (Praef. n. 28).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *A Philosopher's Note Book*, pp. 321, 322.

In Leibniz's system even both human souls and bodies—in fact, all things—are monads and aggregations thereof. Under his notebook heading, "The Soul," Swedenborg records the following:⁴⁹—

The monads (of which those that are known to us are called souls) change their own state according to the laws of final causes, or appetitions; the kingdom of final causes, however, is in accord with the kingdom of efficient causes which is that of phenomena...[However, I do not at all hold that the *continuum* is composed of geometric points; for matter is by no means the *continuum*, and continual extension is nothing but an ideal thing which consists of possibilities, and which, in itself, has no actual parts.] Intellectual wholes have no parts except in potency ([Epistolae] 'Tom. III [p. 284-5], Epist. ad Dancicourt [Sept. 11] 1716).

What you said to the illustrious Hoffman is, to my mind, quite satisfactory as a summary statement, though, in some places, I would perhaps have used words differently. Thus I would prefer saying that every monad is incorporated rather than *monadised*, that is, that every monad has its own organic, body, and thus constitutes a living thing. A *Substantiate* I would define as being an aggregate of monads. Every living thing may be said to be monadised, inasmuch as it is vegetated by one dominant monad. On the other hand, every monad, may be said to monadise, that is, to vegetate some living body; but not itself to be monadised (Tom III [p. 9n] Epist. xxiv ad Hanschium Sept., 1716).

The dominant monad in the aggregate forming an individual person is the soul or mind. Regarding this, Leibniz has a unique hypothesis, which Swedenborg also notes:—

Although our mind, like every creature, depends continually on God in its existence and action, yet I do not think that, for its

⁴⁹ Here and in following citations from *A Philosopher's Note Book*, for the sake of intelligibility, some of Leibniz's words omitted by Swedenborg have been supplied by the translator, Dr. Alfred Acton.

perceptions, it has any need of His peculiar concurrence in addition to the laws of nature; but rather, that it deduces posterior thoughts from prior, by virtue of an implanted power, and in an order prescribed by God. I would say the same thing also in regard to its perceptions of things sensible; for since these are not infused by God miraculously, and cannot be sent in by the body naturally, it follows that, by means of a Harmony divinely pre-established in the beginning, they are born in the soul by a set law. This is more worthy of a supremely wise Creator, than that He should perpetually violate, by new impressions, the laws given to the body and the soul. Meanwhile, by means of that divine concurrence which continually, attributes to every creature, whatever of perfection in him lies, it can be said that [that] object external to the soul is God alone, and, in that sense, that God is to the mind what light is to the eye. This is that Divine truth shining forth within us, which is so often spoken of by Augustine who, in this respect, is followed by Malebranche.⁵⁰

The strikingly novel point here is that the mind is in *no wise* dependent on the body for its perceptions. The mind acts independently of the body, it merely deduces posterior thoughts from prior. Thoughts simply and inexorably unfold, one from another, as geometrically as corollaries from a theorem, or as he himself puts it in the below quoted words, just as seeds in their unfolding growth. For Leibniz, as earlier noted, all of the predicate is contained in the subject. Or, in his own words, “It is one of the rules of my system of general harmony that *the present is pregnant with the future*, and that he who sees the whole, sees in that which is, that which is to be. And what is more, I have established by way of demonstration, that in each part of the universe God sees the entire whole, and this because of the perfect connection of things.”⁵¹

The remarkably self-contained, simple nature of monads is summed up by Leibniz in “The Monadology”:—

⁵⁰ *A Philosopher's Note Book*, pp. 276, 277.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

There is...no way of explaining how a monad can be altered or changed internally by any other creature, since nothing can be transposed in it, and we cannot conceive in it, as we can in composite things among whose parts there may be changes, that any internal motion can be excited, directed, increased, or diminished from without. *Monads have no windows through which anything could enter or depart.*⁵²

Because of his total separation of mind from body, Leibniz is perforce obliged to resort to an extra-causal explanation of their obviously apparent interaction. Thus his thesis of Pre-established Harmony. Some of his words on this subject, which Swedenborg records, are these:—

The Scholastic philosophers established a mutual and physical influx between soul and body; but it was properly judged that the thinking soul and the extended mass, did not, thereby, have any connection with each other, and that they were totally diverse creatures. Many later philosophers did not acknowledge any physical communication between soul and body, although there always remains a metaphysical communication which results in the soul and body composing one suppositum, or that which is called a person. The effect of such physical communication, did it exist, would be that the soul would change the degree and line of direction of certain motions occurring in the body; and, conversely, that the body would change the series of thoughts occurring in the soul. Descartes, in one of his treatises, wished to settle this matter, and to make one part of corporeal action dependent on the soul. For he was persuaded that he knew some rule of nature, which, as it seemed to him, taught that the same quantity of motion is preserved in bodies. He judged that it could not be possible, that the influx of the soul would violate this law of bodies; and yet he judged that the soul may nevertheless have the power of changing the direction of the motions which go on in the

⁵² Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Letters and Papers*, trans. and ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht/Boston: D. Reidel, 1976) 643; emphasis mine, KPN.

body almost in the same way as does a horseman who, although communicating no force to the horse on which he sits, yet does not cease from controlling its step by directing its force whithersoever he will. [But since this is done by the aid of reins, bridle and other material instruments, we understand how it is possible; we fail, however, to discover what instrument the soul can use for this purpose. Moreover, there is nothing in the soul or in the body that can make for an explanation of this changing of one thing by another.] In a word, whether the soul be said to change the quantity of force in the body or the line of its direction, either position is equally inexplicable. (n. [59,] 60)

In the system of Pre-established Harmony I show that every simple substance whatsoever, has perception naturally; and that its individuality consists in perpetual law, from which arises a series of perceptions attendant on itself which are begotten naturally one from another, for the representation of the body assigned to it, and by its aid, of the whole universe, in accordance with the mode proper to each simple substance, without any necessity of a physical influx received from the body. In the same way also, on the other hand, the body by virtue of its own laws, tempers itself to the wills of the soul, and consequently is obedient to the soul only so far as those laws carry it. The result is, that within the soul there is perfect spontaneity, so that in its operation it is dependent on none but God and itself (n. 291).

In the system of Pre-established Harmony, the body, from its native constitution, is moved to the carrying out of all that it does, according to the will of the soul, external things **giving** their assistance. Just as seeds, by virtue of their original constitution, naturally carry out the divine intentions, and this with a far greater skill than that which causes all things in our body to be disposed according to the decrees of our will ([*Conform. Fid. cum Rat.*] Praef. n. 30).

It might be well for me to point out that, while I deny a physical influx of soul into body or of body into soul,—at any rate an influx which results in the one upsetting the laws of the other,—I do not therefore deny a union of the one with the other, which from the two constitutes a single suppositum. But this union is something belonging to metaphysics, and produces no change in the phenomena...It is clear as noon-day that the soul is the entelechia itself or the active principle; while on the other hand, that which is corporeal, if understood by itself, or that which is merely material, contains nothing but what is passive; consequently, that the principle of action is in souls. (Praef. n. 33).⁵³

An amazing system, nothing short of a miracle! Leibniz himself does not so put it, but his disciple Wolff does. Wolff explains, “The pre-establishment of Harmony between soul and body is a miracle wrought in the creation of things; but afterwards, by virtue of this harmony, there follows in all men, naturally and perpetually, a co-existence of the perceptions and appetitions of the soul with the motions of the body, each being mutually consentient with the other” (*Rational Psychology* n. 629). And with this assessment Leibniz’s competitor, Newton, concurs, making the objection that Pre-established Harmony would be a true miracle and is opposed to the experience of all men, since every individual possesses in himself the power of seeing with his eyes and of moving his body at will.⁵⁴

VI. Swedenborg’s Evaluation and Critique of Leibniz.

The origin of Leibniz’s philosophical construct Swedenborg himself found to be Leibniz’s prior mathematical conceptions. He writes in his 1742 assessment of the mind-body problem:—

Unless conjecture deceives me, we are warranted in supposing that *the principles of the aforementioned system have been drawn from*

⁵³ *A Philosopher’s Note Book*, pp. 372, 374.

⁵⁴ Cited by Bilfinger, in *A Philosopher’s Note Book*, p. 356.

the calculus of fluxions or infinities, called the differential and integral calculus, where the differences equal nothing as it were, while the integrals, both constant and variable, denote motion, times, dimensions, lines, areas or bodies. And since there is no comparison between the indefinitely small and the whole, inasmuch as the one is like nothing while the other is a quantity or quality, hence there is assumed in the soul a harmony and a ratio of laws, similar to that in the body; not unlike as in the above mentioned analysis, where the ratio between the differences is assumed as being the same as between the integrals; and, although there is no dependence of the one upon the other, there being no possible ratio between a differential and an integral, yet the two can be joined together by analogies and harmonies, and the one can be combined in calculation with the other. Thus they can enter into the same equation and analysis, and so from the one can be elicited what is in the other, or what is the value of the other. But an argument drawn from the calculus and pure analysis is not valid as applied to real entities.⁵⁵

Further insight into Leibniz's rationale for his concept of pre-established harmony came to Swedenborg when he met him in the spiritual world. In postulating a Divinely pre-ordained, non-causal but precisely parallel relation between the thoughts of the mind and the actions of the body, Leibniz now recognized, he had not taken into account the fact of interior thought, i.e., that there are things which a person thinks but does not actually do or which he may do in a contrary, hypocritical manner, and that he had not attended to the role of affection in the thought process. Swedenborg's record of the conversation on this subject reads as follows:—

Concerning pre-established harmony, Leibnitz said, he had considered and deduced it from this, that thought acts as one with man's speech, countenance and action; and at that time he had not

⁵⁵ Emanuel Swedenborg, "The Soul and the Harmony Between Soul and Body," *Psychological Transactions* (Swedenborg Scientific Assoc.: Philadelphia, 1955), n. 47.

thought of interior thought, from which many men do not speak nor act; and which with many combats with the exterior; and still less did he think of spiritual thought, into which man does not come until after death; then that he considered nothing else in the world but thought, which at that time he acknowledged in place of the soul; and he did not consider affection at the same time, from which and according to which he thinks. Therefore now, after he has been instructed by angels he confesses that he erred, and he knows that the case is altogether otherwise.⁵⁶

And concerning monads themselves Leibniz explained that he, unlike his disciple Wolff, had actually conceived of them not as a purely simple substance, but as entities made up of finer parts:—

He said that he indeed acknowledged monads as unities; but that there were in them simpler and purer substances by which the monad was formed, from which changes of state existed therein; since if there were nothing therein, it would be nothing, in which there cannot be any change of state, for a vacuum admits of no change.⁵⁷

As noted above, Swedenborg was categorically critical of Leibniz's system of monads and pre-established harmony. The details of this critical evaluation are to be found in his unpublished ms., "Harmony Between Soul and Body." At their heart is the objection that Leibniz's theory is really *no* explanation, there is no cause-effect account of the mind body interaction; in the end it all falls back on a resort to a miracle of creation. Commenting on the Leibnizian proposition that *the mechanism of the body is incomprehensible, but yet is not devoid of probability* Swedenborg wrote in his 1742 essay, "Harmony of the Soul and Body":—

Here is the culmination of the system,—that these motions with their forces, determinations, laws and series, are all incomprehen-

⁵⁶ Emanuel Swedenborg, "The Last Judgment" (*Posthumous Theological Works*. New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1954) n. 264.

⁵⁷ "The Last Judgment" (*Posthumous Theological Works*) n. 262.

sible but conjecturable! As a consequence, all the properties predicated of them are occult qualities; for the mere fact that they are called natural is not enough. What service then has this so famous system performed? and what does it involve other than that all the laws of our kingdom are unknown to us, and that we can learn only that they are and also that the book of natural statutes and laws is kept well guarded and ever closed! Nor, so long as the system acts as guard and sentinel, can it ever be unlocked or its pages opened; and all who shall dare to break the lock of this volume or sunder its chain, must suffer the pains of Tantalus.⁵⁸

However, the extant, first part of this defective and unfinished essay (thirty-four or more pages are missing and the ms. stops in mid-sentence) presents no alternative solution to the mind body relation. But Dr. Alfred Acton felt, "there is reason to believe that the latter part of the MS, now lost, was an exposition of the author's own doctrine of harmony. For in the body of the work [*Economy of the Animal Kingdom*] the philosopher distinctly announces that it is his business not simply to destroy but also to construct."⁵⁹

Swedenborg had actually begun "constructing" his thesis eight years earlier, in 1734, in his work on *The Infinite*. Its second and concluding chapter deals with "The Mechanism of the Intercourse between the Soul and the Body." And already then, without mentioning Leibniz by name, as noted above in the Introduction, he seems to be dealing with issues he had raised, such as whether the soul was simple or composed of parts, and whether or not the soul was totally distinct from or contiguous with the body—"we affirm that there must be a *contiguum* or continuity, and that there can be no such thing as an absolute division or break between the soul and the body."⁶⁰ Swedenborg continued to develop this subject in print in 1742 when he published a finely articulated explanation of the

⁵⁸ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Psychological Transactions*, trans. and ed. Alfred Acton. (Philadelphia: Swedenborg Scientific Assoc., 1955), p. 47.

⁵⁹ *Psychological Transactions* xix.

⁶⁰ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Intercourse of the Soul and Body* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 1947), ns. 154, 183.

mind-body relationship as the concluding portion of Part I of *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom*. This, final, book-length chapter, titled, "An Introduction to Rational Psychology," opens with the words, "PSYCHOLOGY is the science which treats of the essence and nature of the soul, and of the mode in which she flows into the actions of her body."⁶¹

Characterizing previous theories regarding the communication of the soul and body (including that of Leibniz's *Pre-established Harmony*, although Leibniz himself is not mentioned by name) as "premature" and "flowing from a want of knowledge of the subordination of things," he proposes to develop a system which "merits the title of ESTABLISHED HARMONY."⁶²

VII. References to Leibniz in Swedenborg's Theological Writings.

Leibniz is one of the handful of actual contemporary personalities mentioned in Swedenborg's theological works. Explicit references to him are for the most part used like verbal engravings to illustrate the subject at hand. In *Intercourse of the Soul and Body* (1769) Swedenborg's earlier (1742) philosophical critique in "The Soul and the Harmony Between Soul and Body" is repeated, and now Leibniz's monads are here noted as an example of the failure to think from end, to cause, to effect:—

ENDS ARE IN THE FIRST DEGREE, CAUSES IN THE SECOND, AND EFFECTS IN THE THIRD. Who does not see that the end is not the cause, but that it produces the cause, and that the cause is not the effect, but that it produces the effect, consequently, that these are three distinct things which follow one another in order? The end with a man is the love of his will; for what a man loves, this he proposes to himself and intends: the cause with him is the reason of his understanding; for by means of reason the end seeks for middle or efficient causes: and the effect is the operation of the

⁶¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, trans. Augustus Clissold, (New York: New Church Press, undated), Vol. II, n. 5.

⁶² *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, ns. 6, 7. Subsequently, however, he refers to this new system as "co-established harmony," ns. 51, 55, 283.

body, from and according to the end and the cause. Thus there are three things in a man which follow one another in order, in the same manner as the degrees of altitude follow one another. When these three are established, the end is inwardly in the cause, and, by means of the cause, the end is in the effect: thus these three exist together in the effect. On this account it is said in the Word that every one shall be judged according to his works; for the end, or the love of his will, and the cause, or the reason of his understanding, are simultaneously present in the effects, which are the works of his body: thus in them is contained the quality of the whole man. [2] Those who do not know these truths, and thus distinguish the objects of reason, cannot avoid terminating their thought either in the atoms of Epicurus, the monads of Leibnitz, or the simple substances of Wolff. Inevitably, therefore, they shut up the understanding as with a bolt, so that it cannot think from progression; for, says the author concerning his simple substance, if it is divided, it falls to nothing. Thus the understanding remains in its own first light [*lumen*], which merely proceeds from the senses of the body, and does not advance a step further. Hence it is not known but that the spiritual is the natural attenuated; that beasts have rationality as well as men; and that the soul is a puff of wind, like breath from the chest when a person dies; besides several ideas which are not of the light, but of thick darkness.⁶³

Two other of the references to Leibniz in the Writings, one in *The True Christian Religion* and the other in *Divine Providence* center on the same subject, connate ideas. Descartes' view had been that *some* ideas are inborn (the "pure" concepts), Locke maintained that *none* were. But it was a corollary of Leibniz's postulate of "windowless" monads that *all* ideas are inborn. Where else, he reasoned, would they come from?

In *The True Christian Religion*, Swedenborg tells about an intense and bitter debate in which spirits clashed verbal swords over the subject of connate ideas, specifically, whether human beings have any ideas directly

⁶³ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Intercourse of the Soul and Body* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1947), n. 117.1,2.

from birth as some of the disputants thought animals do. An angelic spirit had spoken up and made the point that at birth no man—nor animal, for that matter— had any such inborn ideas:—

After this [explanation by the angel about human beings having no connate ideas] I looked round and saw close by Leibnitz and Wolff, who were listening intently to the arguments put forward by the angelic spirit. Then Leibnitz approached and signified his approval and assent; but Wolff went away both assenting and dissenting, since he lacked the inner powers of judgment which Leibnitz had.⁶⁴

One cannot but conclude that the good-hearted Leibniz had learned and grown in understanding since he came to the spiritual world roughly a half-century previously. One such learning experience is described in n. 289 of *Divine Providence* (published nine years before *True Christian Religion*). Leibniz, together with a number of other spirits, was given a convincing demonstration of the fact that no one thinks from himself but from others. Swedenborg writes:—

It has frequently been made manifest to me, that in hell no one thinks from himself, but he thinks from others around him, nor do these think from themselves, but they also think from others; and thoughts and affections pass in order from one society to another, and no one is aware that they do not originate from himself. Some who believed that they thought and willed from themselves were sent into a society and there detained, and communication with the neighboring societies to which their thoughts were usually extended was cut off. They were then told to think differently from the spirits of this society, and to compel themselves to think contrary to it; but they confessed that they found this impossible. This was done with many, including Leibniz who was also convinced that no one thinks from himself but from others; nor do these from themselves think, but that all think from influx out of

⁶⁴ *The True Christian Religion*, n. 335e.

heaven and heaven from influx originating from the Lord. When some had given careful consideration to this, they declared it to be amazing, saying that scarcely anyone could be induced to believe it, because it is quite contrary to appearance; but still that they could not deny it because it was fully proved.⁶⁵

VIII. What Swedenborg "Took" from Leibniz.

In the absence of any specific acknowledgement by Swedenborg that he had actually learned this or that from Leibniz, or of any manifest proof that such was the case, I am reluctant to make any assertions regarding Leibniz as the actual source of any particular idea for Swedenborg. Besides, as one excellent philosophical scholar has expressed it: "Looking for sources is a pleasant game, . . . but it is a dangerous game if played with too serious a purpose—played as if a philosopher can write only what he has read in another book."⁶⁶

Nevertheless, one cannot but note that several principles that are basic to Swedenborg's philosophy were earlier articulated by Leibniz, and that he even had perceived and expressed not a few fundamental spiritual truths presented in the Writings. As a first example we note his demonstration of the nature and oneness of God, which Swedenborg quotes in his notebook:—

[God is the first reason of things . . . The reason for the existence of the world must be sought for in a substance which contains in itself the reason for its own existence, . . . This reason can be nothing else than intellect; and its determining upon one world out of many that are possible, can be nothing else than the act of a will choosing.] The power of this substance then renders the will efficacious. *Power* tends to *esse*; *wisdom* or intellect to *truth*; and *will* to *good*. This intelligent cause must also be infinite in every way, and absolutely perfect in power, wisdom and goodness; for it

⁶⁵ Emanuel, Swedenborg. *Divine Providence* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1949), n. 289.

⁶⁶ Beck, Lewis White. *Early German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1969), p. 457.

tends to all that which is possible. Furthermore, since all things are inter-connected, it must be acknowledged as being one only. Its intellect is the origin of essences, and its will is the origin of existences. Here in a few words you have a demonstration of the one God with his perfections, and of the origin of things through him.⁶⁷

Like the Schoolmen, i.e., the scholastic philosophers, before him and like Swedenborg after him, Leibniz speaks of creation as an on-going process. Swedenborg's phrase is "*sustentatio est perpetua creatio*" [maintenance involves perpetual creation, as permanence involves a perpetual coming into being],⁶⁸ Leibniz's words are:—

...the creature depends continually upon divine operation, and that it depends upon that no less after the time of its beginning than when it first begins. This dependence implies that it would not continue to exist if God did not continue to act...⁶⁹

Leibniz speaks also of the fact that angels have bodies:—

...there can be no rational creature without some sort of organic body, nor any created spirit entirely separated from matter. But these organic bodies differ from each other in perfection no less than do the spirits themselves to which they belong.⁷⁰

These conceivably consequent similarities are documentable, from Swedenborg's notes on Leibniz, but there is yet another fundamental commonality whose immediate source is actually not specifically identifiable, namely that between aspects of Leibniz's *monad* and Swedenborg's *first simple* or *first natural point*. Like the *monad* this first entity of Sweden-

⁶⁷ *A Philosopher's Note Book*, p. 251.

⁶⁸ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divina Providentia* (New York: American Swedenborg Printing and Publishing Society, 1899), n. 3.2.

⁶⁹ *Theodicy*, p. 354.

⁷⁰ *A Philosopher's Note Book*, p. 281.

borg's system is the basic unit from which all Creation is unfolded out of the infinite. As he explains in his *Principia*:

There is a primary entity brought forth by the Infinite. Nothing can exist of itself; therefore it must exist by means of that which is capable of finiting, and which is of itself Infinite. Therefore composite things originate from simples; and simples from the Infinite, and the Infinite itself, which is the only cause of itself and of all things.⁷¹

Although, as noted in Section I above, in formulating his own theory of finition in 1734 Swedenborg was clearly responding to Leibniz's theory of *monads*, it cannot be definitely established that he had read Leibniz himself on this subject. Much of Leibniz's writing on this matter was not yet in print and generally available. The posthumous edition of his *Epistolae* did not come out until 1734 and the Latin translation of his *Tentamina Theodicaeae* was not published until 1739, and his discussions of the infinite were not published until 1768.⁷²

It is most likely that Swedenborg's knowledge of Leibniz came primarily through his premier disciple, Christian Wolff, whose *Psychologica Empirica* was published in 1732, and which Swedenborg read and made notes on in 1734. Indeed, at the conclusion of the *Principia* we also have Swedenborg's acknowledgement of having read two slightly earlier works of Wolff—but he declares that his own ideas had actually taken shape two years prior to this!

I cannot conclude, however, without referring to the name of Christian von Wolff of our age, who has given so much attention to the cultivation of his intellectual powers, and who has so much contributed to the advance of true philosophy by his various scientific and experimental researches. I refer more particularly to his *Philosophia Prima sive Ontologia* [1730], as also to his *Cosmologia*

⁷¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Principia*, trans. James R. Rendell and Isaiah Tansley: 4 vols. (London: Swedenborg Society, 1912) Vol. I, p. 512.

⁷² *Opera Omnia* (Geneva: Dutens, 1768).

Generalis [1731], in which he has formulated various rules and axioms to guide us in our progress to the attainment of first principles, a perusal of which has served very considerably to confirm my views; although the principles laid down in the present work had been worked out and committed to paper two years before I had an opportunity of consulting his works.⁷³

Besides the aforementioned theological points Leibniz also makes other unorthodox observations that find their counterparts in Swedenborg's theological writing, as for example that the damnation of unbaptized infants is counter to reason and false, that evil is from man and not from God, and that God's influx is according to man's reception, to mention a few.

But most especially in considering Leibniz's influence on Swedenborg one cannot help but think that his *Theodicy* must in part have determined the structure and argument of Swedenborg's *Divine Providence*. *Theodicy* was an attempt to explain the justice of God and His Providence—how a just and loving God can “permit” evil. Needless to say, this theme is similarly a central subject in *Divine Providence*. But, since Swedenborg makes no overt reference to Leibniz in *Divine Providence*, it would be purely speculative to allege specific influences from him.

IX. Conclusion.

Leibniz, we have seen, was indisputably a major figure in Swedenborg's thought-world. Like a latter-day, philosophical John the Baptist he drew men's attention to the supreme truth that all things are related in an organic structure of existence ruled by a beneficent God, to the end that an eternal and blessed kingdom of human souls may be brought into existence.

Even though Swedenborg felt obliged to address, and to correct, several of Leibniz's fundamental theses, as Frank Sewall wrote, “it is in

⁷³ *Principia*, vol. II, p. 292.

Leibnitz and Descartes...that we may trace Swedenborg[’s relation] to the philosophy of the past.”⁷⁴ Swedenborg himself acknowledged this relationship and dependence on his philosophic predecessors. In *The Infinite*, in expounding his concept that *tremulous motion is the cause of sensation*, he says, “I am by no means the first in this walk, but have learned predecessors.”⁷⁵

Swedenborg and his writings, both philosophical and theological, were thus in a sense a product of their times. The eminent Swedenborg scholar, Dr. Alfred Acton, puts this fact into perspective with the following words:—

Swedenborg was no mystic visionary empowered to transmit words of revelation merely by the opening of his spiritual eyes; no empty vessel suddenly inspired by some Divine afflatus...along with his earlier manuscripts we find page after page of excerpts from the works of the learned, which afterwards he used when writing his own works...⁷⁶

Just as the embryo of a Divinely formed new human being draws material substance from the womb of its progenitor, so must the Divine soul of a new revelation of Truth be fleshed out with the finite matter of prior forms and terms of human thought—forms in which all that is true is from no other source than the infinite God, who is Truth Itself. For in such a Divinely perfect human form, the Lord’s infinite Divine life itself can come to and redeem the souls of His children. □

⁷⁴ Frank Sewall, *Swedenborg and Modern Idealism* (London: James Spiers, 1902), p. 35.

⁷⁵ *The Infinite*, n. 216.

⁷⁶ Alfred Acton, *Introduction to the Word Explained* (Bryn Athyn: Academy of the New Church, 1927), p. 136.

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