Leibniz to Pierre Dangicourt[1]

Translated by Donald Rutherford

Hanover, 11 September 1716

I am astonished that a mind as mathematical as your applies itself also to philosophical investigations. This will aid my plan of rendering philosophy demonstrative. It seems to me that our views are not very far apart from each other. I am also of the opinion that, to speak exactly, there is no extended substance. This is why I call matter not substance but substantiated [*non substantiam sed substantiatam*]. I have said in some passages (perhaps from the Theodicy, if I am not mistaken) that matter is only a regulated and exact phenomenon, which does not deceive when one observes abstract rules of reason. True substances are only simple substances or what I call *monads*. And I believe that there are only monads in nature, the rest being only phenomena that result from them. Each monad is a mirror of the universe according to its || point of view and is accompanied by a multitude of other monads which compose its organic body, of which it is the dominant monad. And in itself there are only perceptions and tendencies to new perceptions and appetites, just as in the universe of phenomena there are only shapes and motions. The monad, therefore, envelops in advance in itself its past and future states, in such a way that an *omniscient* being is able to read them in it; and monads agree among themelves, being mirrors of the same universe to infinity, though the universe itself is an infinite diffusion. In this consists my preestablished harmony. The monads (of which those that are known to us are called souls) change their states by themselves according to the laws of final causes or appetites, and yet the kingdom of final causes agrees with the kingdom of efficient causes, which is that of the phenomena. However, I do not say that the *continuum* is composed of geometrical points, for matter is not a *continuum* and continuous extension is only an ideal thing, consisting in possibilities, which has no actual parts in it. All intellectual things have parts only potentially. Thus, a straight line only has actual parts to the extent that it is actually subdivided to infinity, but if there were another order of things, the phenomena would bring it about that it would be subdivided differently. This is like an arithmetical unity, which is also an intellectual or ideal whole divisible into parts, as for example into fractions, not actually in itself (otherwise it would be reducible to minimal parts which are not found in numbers), but as there are assigned fractions. I say, therefore, that the matter which is something actual only results from monads, that is, indivisible simple substances, but that extension or geometrical magnitude is not composed from possible parts, except those that can be assigned in it, nor resolvable into points, and that points also are only boundaries and not at all parts or components of the line.

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[1] Dutens III, 499-500.