

Leibniz to Nicolas Remond¹

Translated by Donald Rutherford

[Vienna, July 1714]

I have learned from M. Hugony that you find some difficulty with my unities or monads. I would like to know in what this consists. Nevertheless, I will try to explain myself. I believe that the entire universe of created things consists only in simple substances or monads, and in collections [*Assemblages*] of them. These simple substances are what one calls mind in us and in higher intelligences [*les Genies*], and soul in animals. They all have *perception* (which is nothing but the representation of a multitude in a unity), and *appetite* (which is nothing but the tendency from one perception to another), which is called *passion* in animals, and *will* where the perception is an act of understanding. One cannot even conceive of there being anything other than this in simple substances and, consequently, in all of nature. The collections are what we call bodies. In that mass, one calls matter, or rather passive force or primitive resistance, whatever is considered in the bodies as passive and as everywhere uniform; but primitive active force is what can be called entelechy, and by means of this the mass is differentiated. However, all these bodies and all that one attributes to them are not substances, but only well-founded phenomena, or the foundations of appearances, which are different in different observers, but which are related and come from the same foundation, like different appearances of the same one city from several sides. Space, far from being a substance, is not even a being. It is an order, like time—an order of coexistences, as time is an order among existences that are not together. Continuity is only² an ideal thing, but whatever is real is found in that order of continuity. In the ideal or continuum, the whole is prior to the parts, as arithmetical unity is prior to the fractions into which it is divided and which can be arbitrarily designated in it, the parts being only potential; but in the real, the simple is prior to collections, and the parts are actual and prior to the whole. These considerations remove the difficulties surrounding the continuum, which assume that the continuum is something real, that it has parts prior to any division, and that matter is a substance. It is not necessary, therefore, to conceive of the extended as a real continuous space, dotted with points. These are fictions suited to please the imagination, but in which reason is not satisfied. No more is it necessary to conceive monads as points in a real space, as moving each other, as pushing each other, or as touching each other; it suffices that the phenomena make it appear so, and this appearance has some truth to the extent that the phenomena are founded, that is, in

¹ GP III 622-24. This text is associated with Leibniz's letter to Remond of July 1714 (GP III 618-21). About it, Gerhardt writes: "In order to give Remond a more detailed explanation of his system, Leibniz drafted the following text. Although he himself, as can be gathered from the different handwriting, repeatedly reworked and improved it, he nonetheless finally put it aside with the remark 'is still not dispatched. Jul. 1714', and sent the preceding [i.e. the letter printed at GP III 618-21]."

² Reading 'n'est que' for Gerhardt's 'n'est pas'.

agreement. Motions and collisions are only appearances, but well-founded appearances that never contradict themselves, like exact and lasting dreams. Motion is the phenomenon of change according to location and time, body is the phenomenon that changes. The laws of motion, being founded in the perceptions of simple substances, come from final causes, which are immaterial and in each monad, or from fitness [*de convenance*]; but if matter were a substance, they would come from brute reasons or a geometrical necessity, and would be wholly other than they are. There are no actions of substances except perceptions and appetites, all other actions are phenomena, like all other acting things. Plato appears to have seen something of this; he considers material things as scarcely real, and the Academics have called into doubt whether they exist outside of us—what can be explained reasonably by saying that they are nothing outside of perceptions, and that they have their reality from the agreement of the perceptions of apperceiving substances. This agreement comes from the preestablished harmony among these substances, because each simple substance is a mirror of the same universe, as lasting and as ample as it, although these perceptions of created beings can only be distinct with respect to a few things at once and they are differentiated by the relations or, so to speak, by the points of view of the mirrors, which make it that the same universe is multiplied in an infinity of ways by as many living mirrors, each representing it in its own way. One can say, therefore, that each simple substance is a mirror of the universe, but that each mind is over and above this an image of God, having knowledge not only of facts and their experienced connections, like souls without reason which are only empirics, but also knowledge of the necessity of eternal truths, understanding the reasons for facts and imitating God's plan, and also capable by this means of entering into society with him and supplying a member of the city of God, the best governed state that is possible, just as the world, too, is the most perfect of all structures, and the best composed physically and the best composed morally.

But I fear that this letter, full of thoughts so abstract and far removed from received opinions, will repel you. I would not even want you to meditate for too long on the above; it is better to return to it. I have wanted you to note, however, how I esteem you and honor you, by writing to you what I would not readily write to others. Thus this letter must be only for you. Many others would find it either absurd or unintelligible.