CHAPTER I.

LEIBNIZ’S PREMISES.

1. THE philosophy of Leibniz, though never presented to
the world as a systematic whole, was nevertheless, as a careful
examination shows, an unusually complete and coherent system.
As the method of studying his views must be largely dependent
upon his method of presenting them, it seems essential to say
something, however brief, as to his character and circumstances,
and as to the ways of estimating how far any given work repres-
ents his true opinions.

The reasons why Leibniz did not embody his system in one
great work are not to be found in the nature of that system.
On the contrary, it would have lent itself far better than
Spinoza’s philosophy to geometrical deduction from definitions
and axioms. It is in the character and circumstances of the
man, not of his theories, that the explanation of his way of
writing is to be found. For everything that he wrote he seems
to have required some immediate stimulus, some near and
pressing incentive. To please a prince, to refute a rival philo-
sopher, or to escape the censures of a theologian, he would
take any pains. It is to such motives that we owe the Théodicée,
the Principles of Nature and of Grace, the New Essays, and
the Letters to Arnauld. But for the sole purposes of exposition
he seems to have cared little. Few of his works are free from
reference to some particular person, and almost all are more
concerned to persuade readers than to provide the most valid

1 Accepting Gerhardt’s opinion that this work, and not the Monadology,
was written for Prince Eugene (G. vi. 483).

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arguments. This desire for persuasiveness must always be borne in mind in reading Leibniz's works, as it led him to give prominence to popular and pictorial arguments at the expense of the more solid reasons which he buried in obscure writings. And for this reason we often find the best statement of his view on some point in short papers discovered among his manuscripts, and published for the first time by modern students, such as Erdmann or Gerhardt. In these papers we find, as a rule, far less rhetoric and far more logic than in his public manifestoes, which give a very inadequate conception of his philosophic depth and acumen.

Another cause which contributed to the dissipation of his immense energies was the necessity for giving satisfaction to his princely employers. At an early age, he refused a professorship at the University of Altdorf, and deliberately preferred a courtly to an academic career. Although this choice, by leading to his travels in France and England, and making him acquainted with the great men and the great ideas of his age, had certainly a most useful result, it yet led, in the end, to an undue deference for princes and a lamentable waste of time in the endeavour to please them. He seems to have held himself amply compensated for laborious researches into the genealogy of the illustrious House of Hanover by the opportunities which such researches afforded for the society of the great. But the labours and the compensations alike absorbed time, and robbed him of the leisure which might have been devoted to the composition of a magnum opus. Thus ambition, versatility, and the desire to influence particular men and women, all combined to prevent Leibniz from doing himself justice in a connected exposition of his system.

2. By this neglect, the functions of the commentator are rendered at once more arduous and more important than in the case of most philosophers. What is first of all required in a commentator is to attempt a reconstruction of the system which Leibniz should have written— to discover what is the beginning, and what the end, of his chains of reasoning, to exhibit the interconnections of his various opinions, and to fill in from his other writings the bare outlines of such works as

1 Guhrauer, Leibnitz: Eine Biographie, Vol. 1, p. 44.
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the Monadology or the Discours de Métaphysique. This unavoidable but somewhat ambitious attempt forms one part—perhaps the chief part—of my purpose in the present work. To fulfil it satisfactorily would be scarcely possible, and its necessity is my only excuse for the attempt. As I wish to exhibit a coherent whole, I have confined myself, as far as possible, to Leibniz’s mature views—to the views, that is, which he held, with but slight modifications, from January 1686 till his death in 1716. His earlier views, and the influence of other philosophers, have been considered only in so far as they seemed essential to the comprehension of his final system.

But, in addition to the purely historical purpose, the present work is designed also, if possible, to throw light on the truth or falsity of Leibniz’s opinions. Having set forth the opinions which were actually held, we can hardly avoid considering how far they are mutually consistent, and hence—since philosophic error chiefly appears in the shape of inconsistency—how far the views held were true. Indeed, where there is inconsistency, a mere exposition must point it out, since, in general, passages may be found in the author supporting each of two opposing views. Thus unless the inconsistency is pointed out, any view of the philosopher’s meaning may be refuted out of his own mouth. Exposition and criticism, therefore, are almost inseparable, and each, I believe, suffers greatly from the attempt at separation.

3. The philosophy of Leibniz, I shall contend, contains inconsistencies of two kinds. One of these kinds is easily removed, while the other is essential to any philosophy resembling that of the Monadology. The first kind arises solely through the fear of admitting consequences shocking to the prevailing opinions of Leibniz’s time—such are the maintenance of sin and of the ontological argument for God’s existence. Where such inconsistencies are found, we, who do not depend upon the smiles of princes, may simply draw the consequences which Leibniz shunned. And when we have done this, we shall find that Leibniz’s philosophy follows almost entirely from a small number of premisses. The proof that his system does follow, correctly and necessarily,
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from these premisses, is the evidence of Leibniz’s philosophical excellence, and the permanent contribution which he made to philosophy. But it is in the course of this deduction that we become aware of the second and greater class of inconsistencies. The premisses themselves, though at first sight compatible, will be found, in the course of argument, to lead to contradictory results. We are therefore forced to hold that one or more of the premisses are false. I shall attempt to prove this from Leibniz’s own words, and to give grounds for deciding, in part at least, which of his premisses are erroneous. In this way we may hope, by examining a system so careful and so thorough as his, to establish independent philosophical conclusions which, but for his skill in drawing deductions, might have been very difficult to discover.

4. The principal premisses of Leibniz’s philosophy appear to me to be five. Of these some were by him definitely laid down, while others were so fundamental that he was scarcely conscious of them. I shall now enumerate these premisses, and shall endeavour to show, in subsequent chapters, how the rest of Leibniz follows from them. The premisses in question are as follows:

I. Every proposition has a subject and a predicate.
II. A subject may have predicates which are qualities existing at various times. (Such a subject is called a substance.)
III. True propositions not asserting existence at particular times are necessary and analytic, but such as assert existence at particular times are contingent and synthetic. The latter depend upon final causes.
IV. The Ego is a substance.
V. Perception yields knowledge of an external world, i.e. of existents other than myself and my states.

The fundamental objection to Leibniz’s philosophy will be found to be the inconsistency of the first premiss with the fourth and fifth; and in this inconsistency we shall find a general objection to Monadism.

5. The course of the present work will be as follows: Chapters II.—V. will discuss the consequences of the first four of the above premisses, and will show that they lead to the
whole, or nearly the whole, of the necessary propositions of the system. Chapters VI.—XI. will be concerned with the proof and description of Leibniz’s Monadism, in so far as it is independent of final causes and the idea of the good. The remaining chapters will take account of these, and will discuss Soul and Body, the doctrine of God, and Ethics. In these last chapters we shall find that Leibniz no longer shows great originality, but tends, with slight alterations of phraseology, to adopt (without acknowledgment) the views of the decried Spinoza. We shall find also many more minor inconsistencies than in the earlier part of the system, these being due chiefly to the desire to avoid the impieties of the Jewish Atheist, and the still greater impieties to which Leibniz’s own logic should have led him. Hence, although the subjects dealt with in the last five chapters occupy a large part of Leibniz’s writings, they are less interesting, and will be treated more briefly, than the earlier and more original portions of his reasoning. For this there is the additional reason that the subjects are less fundamental and less difficult than the subjects of the earlier chapters.

6. The influences which helped to form Leibniz’s philosophy are not directly relevant to the purpose of the present work, and have, besides, been far better treated by commentators than the actual exposition of his final system. Nevertheless, a few words on this subject may not be amiss. Four successive schools of philosophy seem to have contributed to his education; in all he found something good, and from each, without being at any time a mere disciple, he derived a part of his views. To this extent, he was an eclectic; but he differed from the usual type of eclectic by his power of transmuting what he borrowed, and of forming, in the end, a singularly harmonious whole. The four successive influences were: Scholasticism, Materialism, Cartesianism, and Spinozism. To these we ought to add a careful study, at a critical period, of some of Plato’s Dialogues.

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Leibniz was educated in the scholastic tradition, then still unbroken at most of the German universities. He obtained a competent knowledge of the schoolmen, and of the scholastic Aristotle¹, while still a boy; and in his graduation thesis, De Princípio Individuali, written in 1663, he still employs the diction and methods of scholasticism. But he had already, two years before this time (if his later reminiscences are to be trusted), emancipated himself from what he calls the "trivial schools"² and thrown himself into the mathematical materialism of the day. Gassendi and Hobbes began to attract him, and continued (it would seem) greatly to influence his speculations until his all-important journey to Paris. In Paris (with two brief visits to England) he lived from 1672 to 1676, and here he became acquainted, more intimately than he could in Germany, with Cartesianism both in mathematics and philosophy—with Malebranche, with Arnauld the Jansenist theologian, with Huygens, with Robert Boyle, and with Oldenburg the Secretary of the Royal Society. With these men he carried on correspondence, and through Oldenburg some letters (the source of 150 years of controversy³) passed between him and Newton. It was during his stay in Paris that he invented the Infinitesimal Calculus, and acquired that breadth of learning, and that acquaintance with the whole republic of letters, which afterwards characterized him. But it was only on his way back from Paris that he learnt to know the greatest man of the older generation. He spent about a month of the year 1676 at the Hague, apparently in constant intercourse with Spinoza; he discussed with him the laws of motion and the proof of the existence of God, and he obtained a sight of part (at any rate) of the Ethics in manuscript⁴. When the Ethics soon afterwards was posthumously published, Leibniz made notes of it, and undoubtedly bestowed very careful thought

¹ Leibniz appears, in spite of the great influence which Aristotle exerted upon him, to have never studied him carefully in the original. See Stein, op. cit. p. 168 ff.
² Gehringer, Leibnitz, Vol. i. pp. 25, 26; G. m. 606.
³ These letters were said, by Newton's friends, to have given Leibniz the opportunity for plagiarizing the Calculus—a charge now known to be absolutely groundless.
⁴ See Stein, Leibniz und Spinoza, Chapter iv.
upon its demonstrations. Of his thoughts during the years which followed, down to 1684 or even 1686 (since the *Thoughts on Knowledge, Truth and Ideas* deal only with one special subject), only slight traces remain, and it seems probable that, like Kant in the years from 1770 to 1781, he was in too much doubt to be able to write much. He certainly read Plato¹, and he certainly desired to refute Spinoza. At any rate, by the beginning of 1686 he had framed his notion of an individual substance, and had sufficiently perfected his philosophy to send Arnauld what is perhaps the best account he ever wrote of it—I mean the *Discours de Métaphysique* (G. iv. 427—463). With this and the letters to Arnauld his mature philosophy begins; and not only the temporal, but the logical beginning also is, in my opinion, to be sought here. The argument which forms the logical beginning, and gives the definition of substance, will be found in the four following chapters.

CHAPTER II.

NECESSARY PROPOSITIONS AND THE LAW OF CONTRADICTION.

7. That all sound philosophy should begin with an analysis of propositions, is a truth too evident, perhaps, to demand a proof. That Leibniz’s philosophy began with such an analysis, is less evident, but seems to be no less true. The system, which he afterwards uniformly maintained, was completed, in all essentials, by the beginning of the year 1686. In his writings during this year, when the grounds of his new opinions were still freshly present to his mind, there occurs an argument of great importance, derived, as he himself says (G. II. 73), from the general nature of propositions, and capable, in his opinion, if the plurality of substances be admitted, of alone establishing the remainder of his system. This argument is to be found in the letters to Arnauld, in the Discours de Métaphysique, written for Arnauld in January, 1686 (G. iv. 427—463), and in a short undated paper, entitled Specimen Inventorum de Admirandis naturae generalis arcanis (G. vii. 309—318). Although the same reasoning does not, so far as I am aware, occur explicitly in any other passages, it is often suggested, and is alone capable of explaining why Leibniz held that substances do not interact. That Leibniz did not repeat, in his published works, this purely logical argument, is explained, in view of his invariable habit of choosing the reasons most likely to convince his readers, by a passage in one of his letters to Arnauld (G. II. 73, 74). “I expected,” he writes, “that the argument drawn

1 See G. ii. 11 ff; also iv. 409, 410.
2 e.g. L. 396; G. iv. 496.
from the general nature of propositions would make some impression on your mind; but I confess also that few people are capable of appreciating such abstract truths, and that perhaps no one but you would have so easily perceived its force.” We know, however, that Leibniz often expressed an intention of publishing his correspondence with Arnauld (G. II. 10), and must, consequently, have regarded this correspondence as adequately expressing his philosophical opinions. There is thus no reason to suppose that, after the date of these letters, his views on fundamental points underwent any serious alteration.

The argument in question, whose examination will occupy the present and the three following chapters, yields the whole, or nearly the whole, of the necessary part of Leibniz’s philosophy—of the propositions, that is to say, which are true of all possible worlds. In order to obtain further the propositions describing the actual world, we need the premiss that perception gives knowledge of an external world, whence follow space and matter and the plurality of substances. This premiss is derived, apparently, from no better basis than common sense, and with its introduction, in Chapter VI., we shall pass to a new division of Leibniz’s philosophy. But since the meaning of substance is logically prior to the discussion of the plurality or the perceptions of substances, it is plain that the present argument, from which the meaning of substance is derived, must first be expounded and examined. I shall first state the argument quite briefly, and then proceed to set forth its various parts in detail.

8. Every proposition is ultimately reducible to one which attributes a predicate to a subject. In any such proposition, unless existence be the predicate in question, the predicate is somehow contained in the subject. The subject is defined by its predicates, and would be a different subject if these were different. Thus every true judgment of subject and predicate is analytic—i.e. the predicate forms part of the notion of the subject—unless actual existence is asserted. Existence, alone among predicates, is not contained in the notions of subjects which exist. Thus existential propositions, except in the case of God’s existence, are synthetic, i.e. there would be no contra-
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diction if the subjects which actually do exist did not exist. Necessary propositions are such as are analytic, and synthetic propositions are always contingent.

When many predicates can be attributed to one and the same subject, while this subject cannot be made the predicate of any other subject, then the subject in question is called an individual substance. Such subjects involve, sub ratione possibilitatis, a reference to existence and time; they are possible existents, and they have predicates expressing their states at different times. Such predicates are called contingent or concrete predicates, and they have the peculiarity that no one of them follows analytically from any others, as rational follows from human. Thus when a subject is defined by means of a certain number of such predicates, there is no contradiction in supposing it to be without the remainder. Nevertheless, in the subject which has these predicates, they are all contained, so that a perfect knowledge of the subject would enable us to deduce all its predicates. Moreover there is a connection, though not a necessary one, between the various concrete predicates; sequences have reasons, though these incline without necessitating. The need of such reasons is the principle of sufficient reason. Subjects whose notion involves a reference to time are required by the idea of persistence. Thus in order to say that I am the same person as I was, we require, not merely internal experience, but some à priori reason. This reason can only be that I am the same subject, that my present and past attributes all belong to one and the same substance. Hence attributes which exist in different parts of time must be conceived, in such a case, as attributes of the same subject, and must therefore be contained, somehow, in the notion of the subject. Hence the notion of me, which is timeless, involves eternally all my states and their connections. Thus to say, all my states are involved in the notion of me, is merely to say, the predicate is in the subject. Every predicate, necessary or contingent, past, present or future, is comprised in the notion of the subject. From this proposition it follows, says Leibniz, that every soul is a world apart; for every soul, as a subject, has eternally, as predicates, all the states which time will bring it; and thus these states follow