

# The Correspondence between Leibniz and Arnauld

G. W. Leibniz and Antoine Arnauld

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Each four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth.—Leibniz was 34 years Arnauld’s junior. Arnauld had had a distinguished exchange of views with Descartes 48 years before the time of the present exchange.—The nobleman through whom Leibniz and Arnauld communicated was a landgrave, German *Landgraf*, meaning a Count who ruled over his County—a kind of minor king.—In this version most of the polite modes of address and reference are replaced by pronouns and surnames.—Except for very short bits, anything by Arnauld, whether said directly or quoted by Leibniz, is in a slanted type similar to italics.

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## 1. Leibniz to Count Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, 1.ii.1686

I recently composed a short discourse on metaphysics, and would very much like to have Monseigneur Arnauld's opinion of it. Its way of dealing with the questions about

- grace,
- the concourse of God and creatures [= 'how God's actions are related to those of creatures'],
- the nature of miracles,
- the cause of sin and the origin of evil,
- the immortality of the soul,
- ideas,

and other such topics are dealt with in a way that seems to open up new possibilities for clarifying very great difficulties. I have enclosed herewith the summary of its theses; ·I can't send you the whole thing· because I haven't yet been able to have a fair copy made. Please will you have this summary sent to Arnauld with a request to give it a little consideration and to state his opinion? I can't think of anyone more fit to judge it than he is, given his excellence in theology and in philosophy, in reading and in meditation. I want to have a critic as careful, clear-headed and reasonable as Arnauld is, because I am always ready—no-one is readier!—to back down when I am given reason to. He himself has recently been absorbed in some of these same topics, which is my main reason for thinking that he may find this trifle not entirely unworthy of his consideration. If he finds some obscurity I shall explain my ideas sincerely and openly, and ·quite generally· if he finds me worthy to be taught by him I shan't give him any cause for dissatisfaction. I beg you to enclose this note with the summary below, and to send them both to Monseigneur Arnauld.

[The 'short discourse' or 'trifle' in question is Leibniz's *Discourse on*

*Metaphysics*, which Arnauld never saw. This 'summary' of it is the one that was printed along with the complete work. Before we embark on it, a translation matter has to be tackled. In article 24 the phrase 'vivid or dark, clear or confused' translates *claire ou obscure, distincte ou confuse*, which everyone else wrongly translates as 'clear or obscure, distinct or confused'. The crucial point concerns *clair(e)*, which often means 'bright' or 'vivid' or the like, as in *lumière claire* = 'bright light'. It can also mean 'clear', but Descartes took it away from that meaning by his use of the phrase *clair et distinct* and his use of **pain** as an example of something *clair* but not *distinct*! It is impossible that he meant 'clear'. Once *clair* is handled properly, the English word 'clear' is freed up to serve as a translation of *distinct*. The point about pain is that it is vivid, up-front, not shady or obscure, but at the same time not clear. Article 24 is itself good evidence that Leibniz followed Descartes in this usage, and there is more on page 37.]

\* \* \* \* \*

1. God is perfect, and does everything in the most desirable way.
2. Against those who maintain that there is no goodness in God's works, and that the rules of goodness and beauty are arbitrary.
3. Against those who think that God could have done better.
4. Love for God requires complete contentment and acceptance regarding what he does.
5. What the rules of perfection of God's conduct consist in; the simplicity of means is balanced against the richness of ends.

6. God does nothing disorderly, and it isn't possible even to *feign* events that are not regular.
7. Miracles conform to the general order, although they run counter to subordinate rules. What God wills and what he allows; general and particular will.
8. To distinguish God's actions from those of created things, it is explained what the notion of an individual substance consists in.
9. Each substance expresses the whole universe in its own way; and everything that happens to it is included in its notion, with all the circumstances and ·because it expresses everything else· the whole series of external things.
10. The doctrine of substantial forms has some value, but such forms make no difference to observable events, and shouldn't be used to explain particular effects.
11. The reflections of the so-called Scholastic theologians and philosophers should not be completely despised.
12. The notions that make up extension involve something imaginary, and can't constitute the substance of body.
13. Because the individual notion of each person contains once and for all everything that will ever happen to him, we can see in that notion the a priori proofs or reasons for the occurrence of every event—seeing why one thing happens rather than another. But although these truths are certain, they are still contingent, for they are based on the free will of God and of created things. It is true that there are always reasons for their choices, but those reasons incline without necessitating.
14. God produces a variety of substances according to his different views of the universe; and he intervenes so as to bring it about that the particular nature of each substance makes what happens to it •correspond to what happens to all the others, without their directly •acting on one another.
15. When one finite substance 'acts on' another, all that happens is that the first undergoes an increase in the degree of ·clarity of· its expression while the other undergoes a decrease, which happens because God formed them in advance so that they would fit together.
16. Our essence expresses everything, so it expresses God's extraordinary concourse. But our nature or clear expression is finite, and follows certain subordinate rules; it doesn't extend far enough to take in God's extraordinary concourse [= 'God's (rare) miracles'].
17. An example of a subordinate rule of natural law, which shows that God always systematically conserves the same *force*, but not (contrary to the Cartesians and others) the same quantity of *motion*.
18. The distinction between force and quantity of motion is important. For one thing, it shows that to explain how bodies behave we must bring in metaphysical considerations apart from extension.
19. The usefulness of final causes in physical science.
20. A memorable passage by Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* against over-materialist philosophers.
21. If mechanical rules depended only on geometry and not on metaphysics, the observed facts would be quite different.

22. Reconciliation of two methods, one working through final causes and the other through efficient ones, in order to satisfy both sides: those who explain Nature mechanically, and those who appeal to immaterial natures. [An efficient cause of an event *x* is something that *makes x* happen; its final cause is what *x* happens *for*, what the *purpose* is of *x*'s happening.]
23. Returning to immaterial substances, I explain how God acts on the mind's understanding, and discuss whether we always have an idea of what we are thinking about.
24. What it is for knowledge to be vivid or dark, clear or confused, adequate or inadequate, intuitive or suppositive; three kinds of definition—nominal, real, and causal.
25. In what cases our knowledge is combined with the contemplation of an idea.
26. We have within us all ideas; Plato's doctrine of reminiscence.
27. How our soul can be compared with a blank tablet, and in what way our notions come from the senses.
28. God is the only immediate object of our perceptions that exists outside us, and he is our only light.
29. However, we think directly through our own ideas and not through God's.
30. How God inclines our soul without necessitating it; we have no right to complain; we should not ask why Judas sinned, since that free act is included in his notion; we should only ask why Judas the sinner was admitted into existence in preference to some other possible people. Original imperfection or limitation, prior to sin; the different levels of grace.
31. The reasons for election, foreseen faith, middle knowledge, absolute decrees. Everything comes down to God's reason for deciding to admit into existence a certain possible person, whose notion contains a certain series of graces and free actions. This removes the difficulties at a stroke.
32. The usefulness of these principles in matters of piety and religion.  
Explaining the communication between the soul and the body, which has been taken to be inexplicable or miraculous. The origin of confused perceptions.
33. How minds differ from other substances, souls or substantial forms. The immortality that we want implies memory.
34. The excellence of minds; God attends to them ahead of other creatures; minds express God rather than the world, and other simple substances express the world rather than God.
35. God is the monarch of the most perfect republic, composed of all minds, and the happiness of this city of God is his main aim.
36. Jesus Christ revealed to men the wonderful mystery and laws of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the splendour of the supreme happiness that God prepares for those who love him.

## 2. Arnauld to Count Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, 13.iii.1686

[The angle-bracketed passage below was omitted from the copy that was sent to Leibniz. The importance of this will appear in the three-item display on page 6.] *I have received what you have sent me of the metaphysical thoughts of M. Leibniz as a demonstration of his affection and esteem, for which I am much obliged to him; but I have been so busy since then that I wasn't able to read his work until three days ago. And now I have such a bad cold that I can't write much, and will only say that I find in these thoughts so many things that alarm me—things that I believe nearly everyone will find shocking—that I don't see what use such a work can be when nearly everyone will reject it. To take just one example, article 13: 'The individual notion of each person involves once and for all everything that will ever happen to him' and so on. If that is so, <God was free to create Adam or not create him; but given that he did create him, everything that has happened to the human race since then—and everything that ever will happen to it—was or will be compelled to happen through a more than fatal necessity.> [‘Fatal necessity’ means ‘the certain-to-happen status of something that is *fated* to happen’; ‘more than fatal’ seems to be mere exaggeration.] ·The whole human race comes into this· because the individual notion of Adam contained the consequence that he would have so many children, and the individual notion of each of these children contained everything they would do and all the children they would*

*have, and so on. ·Think what this implies about God's freedom·! Given that God chose to create ·Adam, he wasn't free in the choice regarding any aspect of the history of the human race; just as, given that God chose to create ·me, he wasn't free in the choice of whether to create ·a nature capable of thought. ·With my cold·, I'm in no condition to take the argument further; but Leibniz will understand me well enough, and perhaps he won't see any drawback in the consequence I draw from article 13. But if he doesn't, he has good cause to fear that he'll be alone in his opinion. And if I'm wrong about that, ·and other people do believe what he says·, my objection to him is even more strenuous. But I can't hide from you how sad I am that his apparent attachment to these opinions, which he rightly thinks would get a bad reception from ·the Catholic Church, prevents him from entering ·it; although, if I remember clearly, you once forced him to acknowledge that there is no reasonable basis for doubting that it is the true Church. [I have never accepted that—note by Leibniz in the margin of his copy.] Wouldn't it be better if he abandoned these metaphysical speculations, which can't be useful to him or to anyone else, in order to apply himself seriously to the greatest business that he can ever have, namely the assurance of his salvation by returning to the Church. . . . ?*

### 3. Leibniz to the Count, to be passed on to Arnauld, 12.iv.1686

I don't know what to say to Arnauld's letter, and I should never have believed that someone who has such a deservedly great reputation, and who has given us such fine reflections on morality and logic, would rush to judgment in this way. I'm no longer surprised that some people have lost their temper with him! Still, I maintain that we should occasionally put up with the ill humour of a person of extraordinary merit, provided that •his behaviour has no •practical• consequences, and that •he returns to fair-mindedness once the illusions caused by ill-founded prejudice are blown away. I'm still waiting for this justice from Arnauld. But whatever reason I may have for complaint, I'll suppress any reflections that aren't essential to the subject and that might make trouble between us; and I hope he will do the same, if he is kind enough to instruct me. I can assure him only that •certain conjectures of his are in fact wrong, that •some judicious people have expressed an opinion different opinion •from his•, and that •despite their approval I'm not in too much of a hurry to publish something on abstract subjects that are to the liking of a few, especially because the public has still heard almost nothing of some more plausible discoveries that I made years ago. When I wrote down these present meditations [i.e. the *Discourse on Metaphysics*] it was •not for publication but• only so as to profit privately from the opinions of the ablest people, and to confirm or correct my exploration of the most important truths. . . . If Arnauld will do me the favour of freeing me from the errors that he thinks dangerous—opinions that (I say in good faith) I can't yet see any harm in—I shall certainly be greatly obliged to him. But I hope that he will act with some moderation and will do me justice, because *that* much is owed even to the least of men

by someone who has wronged him by hasty judgment.

He chooses one of my theses to show that it is dangerous. But I don't see the danger, or else I •see it but• am temporarily unable to see that it *is* a danger; and this has enabled me to recover from jolt that Arnauld gave me, and made me think that what he says •about the thesis in question• is a result of mere prejudice. So I shall try to rid him of this strange opinion, which he has formed a little too hastily.

I had said in article 13 that 'the individual notion of each person involves once and for all everything that will ever happen to him'; from which Arnauld draws the consequence that everything that happens to a person and even to the whole of the human race must happen through a more than fatal necessity. As though notions made things necessary, and the complete notion that God has of a person couldn't *include* the person's acting freely! (Similarly, God has a prevision—an advance view—of the whole truth about a person; and Arnauld's mistake is like thinking that a person's acting freely couldn't be among the things that God sees in advance.) And he adds that perhaps I won't object to the conclusion that he draws. Yet I had explicitly declared in article 13 that I did *not* accept such a consequence. So either he doubts my sincerity, and I've given him no reason for that, or he didn't examine carefully enough the thesis that he was rejecting. I shan't find fault with this, though, . . . when I remember that he was writing at a time when illness left his mind not fully free, as his letter itself indicates. And I want him to know how much respect I have for him. [Leibniz, aged 26 and trying to start a career, first met the famous Arnauld in Paris in 1672. In a letter to his employer at that time Leibniz boasted of being on friendly terms with 'the world-famous M. Arnauld. . . . a man of the

deepest and profoundest thoughts that a true philosopher can have.] I come to the proof of his inference, and in order to do it full justice I'll give Arnauld's own words.

*If the individual notion of each person contains once for all everything that will ever happen to him,*

**what Arnauld wrote next:** *God was free to create or not create him; but given that he did create him, everything that has happened to the human race since then was or will be compelled to happen through a more than fatal necessity.*

**what appeared in the letter as sent to Leibniz:** *God was free to create everything that has happened to the human race since then was or will be compelled to happen through a more than fatal necessity.*

**the passage as wrongly 'repaired' by Leibniz:** God was not free to create everything that has happened to the human race since then, and everything that will ever happen to it is compelled to happen through a more than fatal necessity.

(There was some fault in the copy, but I think I have repaired it correctly.) *·The whole human race comes into this· because the individual notion of Adam contained the consequence that he would have so many children (I agree), and the individual notion of each of these children contained everything they would do and all the children they would have, and so on (I agree to this too, for it is only my thesis applied to a particular case). Given that God chose to create •Adam, he wasn't free in the choice regarding any aspect of the history of the human race; just as, given that God chose to create •me, he wasn't free in the choice of whether to create •a nature capable of thought.'*

Those last words must contain properly the proof of the inference, but it's obvious that they confuse hypothetical necessity with absolute necessity. There has always been a distinction between **(1)** what God is free to do absolutely

and **(2)** what he has bound himself to do by virtue of certain decisions already taken (and nearly every decision he makes has a universal import). Some of the Socinians offend against God's dignity by likening him to a man who makes a decision at a given time in the light of what is going on right then; and they try to preserve God's freedom by contending that his first decisions regarding Adam or others *don't* have implications for their posterity, because if they did have such implications, God might now think it would be good to do something that he *can't* do—·isn't now *free* to do· because it is ruled out by an earlier decision. In contrast with this, everyone ·else· agrees that God has regulated the whole successive course of the universe from all eternity, without his liberty's being in any way lessened by that.

It's obvious too that this objection ·of Arnauld's· separates God's acts of will from one another, though really they are all interrelated. God's decision to create a particular Adam shouldn't be thought of as separate from all the other decisions that he makes regarding Adam's children and the whole of the human race. Thinking of it in that way—i.e. thinking of it as God's decree *that Adam should be created*, without his decree's bringing in anything concerning Adam's posterity—is to think of God as depriving himself of the freedom to create Adam's posterity as he thinks fit, which is a very strange way of thinking! [This is a typical Leibniz flourish: the Socinians say that they are **keeping God free** to manage Adam's posterity at various points in its history, whereas Leibniz says they are **depriving God of the freedom** to make any decisions he likes about Adam's posterity right from the outset.]

The right way to look at this matter is to think of God as choosing *not* a vague Adam but an Adam who is *completely* represented in God's mind along with all his ideas of other possible beings, this being a representation that includes all the individual details including 'eventually having such-

and-such a particular posterity'. I'll say it again: in choosing •Adam, God already has •Adam's posterity in mind; he is choosing both at the same time. I don't see how there can be any harm in this thesis; and any other view about God's decisions would have him acting out of character, acting in an un-God-like way. Consider this parallel: A wise monarch, when he chooses a general whose connections •within the army• he knows, is in effect choosing at the same time a number of colonels and captains whom he knows this general will want; the monarch has prudential reasons for letting the general have the officers he wants; but these reasons don't destroy the monarch's freedom or his absolute *power* •to appoint whatever officers *he* wants•. All that holds even more strongly in the case of God. To be more exact about the parallel, think of God as performing a more general and more comprehensive act of will •than the human monarch can perform•, an act of will that relates to the whole order of the universe (God can do that because the universe is like a totality that he takes in, in all its detail, at a glance). This act of will implicitly includes the other acts of will concerning what is to come into existence in this universe, amongst them the act of creating a particular Adam whose series of descendants will be thus and so, all this having also been chosen by God. One could put it like this: between **(1)** these particular acts of will and **(2)** the initial general one there's a simple relation that is pretty much like the relation between **(1)** the facts about a town that are captured by a view of it from one viewpoint and **(2)** the facts captured by the ground plan of the town. •The relation I have in mind is that of *expressing*•: the particular acts of will all *express* the whole universe, just as each set-of-facts-seen-from-one-viewpoint *express* the town. [Leibniz really does say that certain items 'all express' (*expriment toutes*) the universe, whereas of certain other items he says that 'each expresses' (*chaque exprime*) the town; but that seems

to be a mere stylistic accident. The comparison he is offering would collapse if he really meant something by the difference between 'all' (plural) and 'each' (singular).]

Indeed the wiser one is the fewer *separate* acts of will one has and the more one's views and acts of will are comprehensive and *linked together*. And each particular act of will contains a connection with all the others, so that they may be as much in harmony as possible. Far from finding something shocking in this, I would have thought that the denial of it would destroy God's perfection. I think someone would have to be *very* hard to please or *very* set in his views to find in such innocent—indeed such *reasonable*—opinions any basis for such exaggerated statements as the weird ones that were sent to you •by Arnauld•. Anyone who gives the least *thought* to what I am saying will find that its truth is evident from the •very meanings of the• terms themselves. By 'the individual notion of Adam' I definitely mean to refer to a *complete* representation of a *particular* Adam who has such-and-such individual qualities that him from an infinity of other possible persons who are very like him but yet different from him (just as every ellipse is different from the circle, however closely it approximates to it). God preferred Adam •to any of those other possible persons•, because it pleased him to choose precisely *this* particular order of the universe, •the one that includes Adam•; and anything that follows from his •initial• decision is necessary only by a hypothetical necessity and does not at all destroy God's liberty or that of created minds. There is a possible Adam whose posterity is thus-and-so, and an infinity of other Adams whose posterity would be different; isn't it true that these possible Adams (if they can be called that) differ from one another, and that God has chosen just one of them—our Adam?

There are so many reasons to prove the impossibility—indeed the absurdity and even the impiety—of the contrary view that I believe that all men are basically of the same opinion when they *think* a little about what they are saying. If Arnauld hadn't *immediately* formed a prejudice about me, perhaps he wouldn't have found my propositions so strange and wouldn't have drawn such conclusions from them.

I sincerely believe that I have satisfactorily met Arnauld's objection, and I'm glad to see that the passage he chose as one of the most shocking is (in my opinion) so very *unshocking!* But I don't know if I'll be fortunate enough to get him to see this my way. Among the thousand advantages of great merit there is one small defect, namely that •highly meritorious people—rightly having great faith in their own opinions—are not easily cured of their mistakes. I myself, not being one of •them, would take pride in admitting that I had learned something ·from a critic·; I would even *enjoy* this, provided I could say it sincerely and without flattery.

The other thing I have to say is this: I want Arnauld to know that I don't lay the least claim to the glory of being an innovator [here = 'intellectual revolutionary'], as he seems to have thought. On the contrary I find that the oldest and most commonly received opinions are usually the best. And I don't think it can be right to accuse someone of being an innovator when he has produced only a few new truths, without overturning any received opinions. After all, that's what geometers do; it's what happens when someone digs deeper ·into ground that is already being cultivated·. As for authorized opinions that mine oppose, I wonder if Arnauld will find it easy to produce some! That's why what he says about the Church has nothing in common with these meditations ·of mine·, and I hope he isn't willing or able to say that *anything* in them could be called heretical in any Church at all.

However, if the church he belongs to were so quick to censure, that would be a warning to us to be on our guard. 'As soon as you want to produce some meditation having the slightest connection with religion and going a little beyond what is taught to children', ·the warning would say·, 'you'll be in danger of getting into trouble unless you have some Father of the Church as an authority who explicitly says the same thing.' And even the agreement of such an authority might not completely remove the sense of being in danger, especially when one doesn't have the means to ensure that one will be dealt with gently.

[In a postscript sent two days later, Leibniz asked the Count to remove the passage indented here, before sending the letter on to Arnauld. He was afraid, he wrote, that Arnauld might think that the Roman Catholic church was being attacked, which was not all Leibniz's intention. He asked the Count to replace that passage by this:]

And least of all in Arnauld's communion, where the Council of Trent as well as the Popes have very wisely settled for •censuring opinions that seem *clearly* to *contain* things contrary to faith and morals, and •not attending in detail to any *philosophical consequences* of the opinion. If the censure of opinions *did* bring in their ·remote· philosophical consequences, •the Thomists would appear to be Calvinists (according to the Jesuits), •the Jesuits would appear to be Semi-Pelagians (according to the Thomists). . . . and •both groups would be destroying liberty (according to certain other theologians) [Leibniz names them], and quite generally •every absurdity would appear to be an atheistic proposition, because one can demonstrate that it would destroy the nature of God.

END OF REPLACEMENT PASSAGE

If you weren't a ruler whose learning is as great as his moderation, I'd have taken good care not to tell you of these things; but as things are you are the best person for this role, and since you have been good enough to act as the •intermediary in this exchange, it would be imprudent of us to choose another •referee. [Leibniz is saying: 'You have accepted •one role in this debate, please now accept •another.'] When what's at issue concerning a few propositions is not 'Are they true'

but rather 'What do they imply?' and 'Could the Catholic Church allow them?', I don't think you will approve of people being crushed for so little reason. But perhaps Arnauld •spoke in these harsh terms only because he thought I would admit the consequence that he rightly considers terrifying, and •will change his language after my clarification. His fair-mindedness can contribute to this as can your authority.

#### 4. Leibniz to the Count, for the Count's eyes only, 12.iv.1686

I have received Arnauld's opinion, and I think it is worthwhile to *try* to cure him of his mistake by means of the enclosed paper in the form of a letter to you; but I confess that in writing it I had to fight hard not to laugh at him—or to express pity for him, when I saw that the poor old chap seems to have lost part of his understanding and can't help exaggerating everything, just like depressed people for whom everything they see or imagine appears black. Although I have dealt with him very moderately, I have let him know gently that he is wrong. If he is kind enough to rescue me from the errors that he thinks he sees in my writings, I would like him to omit the personal reflections and harsh expressions that I haven't repeated in this letter out of the respect that I have for *you* and the regard that I have had for the good man's ability. Yet I wonder at the difference that exists between our self-appointed ascetics and the men of the world

**what Leibniz wrote next:** *qui n'en affectent point l'opinion et en possèdent bien d'avantage l'effect.*

**what that means:** who don't parade an opinion about it and have more of its effect.

**perhaps his point is:** who don't announce any views about the world (as the ascetics do) and who are affected by the world in better ways than the ascetics are.

You are a sovereign prince, •a monarch•, yet you have shown for me an admirable moderation. Arnauld is a famous theologian whose meditations on divine matters should have made him gentle and charitable, yet he often comes across as proud, unsociable and harsh. I'm not astonished *now* that he has quarrelled so easily with Father Malebranche and others who were close friends of his. Malebranche had published writings that Arnauld attacked wildly, pretty much as he is doing with me; but the world hasn't always agreed with him. Still, I should take care not to stir up his bad temper. That would deprive us of all the pleasure and satisfaction

that I had expected from a mild, reasonable exchange of views. I think he was already in a bad mood when my paper reached him, so that he felt the paper to be an imposition, and replied to it with a flat rejection as a way of punishing me for giving him trouble. If you had time to think about the objection he is raising to my work, I'm sure you couldn't help laughing when you saw how little reason there is for his tragic exclamations—very much as one might laugh at an orator who keeps saying, 'O sky, O earth, O seas of Neptune!' [quoted (in Latin) from the early Roman comic poet Terence]. If my thoughts contain nothing more shocking or difficult than the point that Arnauld finds objectionable, I am happy! Let me explain why.

From my thesis that the individual notion or thought of Adam contains everything that will happen to him and to his posterity, Arnauld infers that God doesn't *now* have any freedom where the human race is concerned. So he pictures God as being like a man who makes each decision in the light of the state of affairs right then; whereas really God foresaw and regulated everything from all eternity, and chose from the outset the whole successive course of events and the causal links amongst them; so that he didn't merely decide that there would be

an Adam,

with that being the whole content of his decision, but rather decided that there would be

*this* Adam,

whom he foresaw as doing such-and-such things and having such-and-such children, so that all these later developments were included in the scope of the initial divine decision. And this divine providence, regulated through the whole of time, *doesn't* interfere with God's freedom. On this point all theologians (except for some Socinians, who conceive of God along human lines) are in agreement. Arnauld

had a prejudice against my work, a prejudice that gave him a confused and ill-digested idea of it; and this made him anxious to find something—*anything*—shocking in my thoughts. There's nothing very surprising in all that, but I *am* surprised that this scholarly man has been led by it to say things that conflict with his own insights and opinions. In the heat of the debate he seems almost to lean towards the dangerous Socinian dogma that destroys God's sovereign perfection; but I am too fair-minded to think that he actually accepts it!

Every man who acts wisely considers all the circumstances and relationships of the decision he is taking—or as many of them as he can foresee. Won't the same thing be true of God? He sees everything perfectly and at a single glance; can he have made any of his decisions without taking into account everything that he foresees, *i.e. everything*? And can he have chosen an Adam who is thus-and-so without also considering and deciding everything that is connected with him? So it is *ridiculous* to say that this free decision of God's deprives him of his liberty. Otherwise one could be free only by being constantly undecided!

So there are the thoughts that Arnauld imagines to be 'shocking'. We'll see whether he can *infer* from them something worse! But my most important thought on the subject is that a couple of years ago he wrote to you explicitly stating that one wouldn't give a man a bad time over his philosophical opinions if he belonged to their Church or who wanted to join it; and now we see him forgetting this moderate attitude and getting worked up over a trifle. So it is dangerous to throw in one's lot with such people, and you'll see how necessary it is to take precautions. It was partly with that in mind that I communicated these things to Arnauld, to sound him out and see how he would react; but 'touch the hills and they will smoke!' [This is a joking reference

to Psalm 104:32—likening the irritable Arnauld to a hill that God merely *touches* and turns it into a volcano.]. . . . Perhaps you'll have an opportunity to advise him that acting in this way rebuffs

people unnecessarily, so that from then on he may behave a little more moderately. . . .

### 5. Arnauld to Leibniz, 13.v.1686

*I thought I should write to you directly to beg your pardon for giving you cause to be annoyed with my using unduly harsh terms to express what I thought of one of your theses. But I protest to you before God •that if I did something wrong it wasn't because of any prejudice against you, because I've never had reason to hold anything but a very favourable opinion of you (apart from the religion to which you have found yourself committed by your birth); •that I wasn't in a bad mood when I wrote the letter that upset you, because nothing is further from my character than the irritability that some people choose to ascribe to me; and •that it wasn't that I am too wedded to my thoughts and therefore shocked to see that you had opposing ones, because—I assure you—I have spent so little time thinking about these topics that I don't have fixed opinions on them. I beg you not to believe any of those explanations of my conduct, but to accept the real explanation of my tactlessness: it's simply that I am used to writing informally to the Count, because he kindly forgives me all my faults, and •on this latest occasion• I had imagined that I could tell him frankly what I hadn't been able to accept with in one of your thoughts, because I was sure •that this wouldn't be spread abroad, and •that if I had misunderstood your meaning you could correct me without its going any further.*

*But I hope that this same nobleman will consent to make peace for me. [Arnauld tells a story in which Augustine of Hippo offended a bishop by something he had written to someone else, robustly rejecting a theological opinion that the bishop happened to accept. Augustine sent him a message admitting that he had gone too far, and saying:] 'I beg him to forgive me; let him remember our former friendship and forget the recent offence. . . . Let him show, in pardoning me, the moderation that I lacked when I wrote that letter.'*

*I thought of dropping the issue between us, for fear of starting up our quarrel again; but against that I feared that it wouldn't do justice to your fair-mindedness. So I shall simply state the difficulties that I still have with this proposition: The individual notion of each person contains once for all everything that will ever happen to him.*

*I thought one could infer from this that the individual notion of Adam contained having-such-and-such-a-number-of-children, that the individual notion of each of these children contained everything he would do and all the children he would have, and so on. And from this I thought it could be inferred that although God was free to create or not to create Adam, given that he did choose to create him, everything that has happened to the human race since then had to and has to happen through a fatal necessity; or at*

least that God has no more liberty regarding all that, given that he chose to create Adam, than he had liberty not to create a nature capable of thought, given that he chose to create me.

It does not seem to me that in saying this I have confused hypothetical necessity with absolute necessity. For on the contrary I never talk about anything there except hypothetical necessity [Arnauld's emphasis]. ·Of course it would be utterly weird to suggest that the history of the human race is absolutely necessary; but I even find it strange that all human events are as necessary (by hypothetical necessity from the single supposition that God chose to create Adam) as is the world's containing a creature that can think (by hypothetical necessity from the single supposition that God chose to create me). On this subject you say various things about God that don't seem to me to be enough to resolve my difficulty.

- (1) There has always been a distinction between •what God is free to do absolutely and •what he has bound himself to do by virtue of certain decisions already taken.
- (2) Socinians offend against God's dignity when, on the pretext of upholding God's liberty, they liken him to a man who makes a decision at a given time in the light of what is going on right then.
- (3) God's acts of the will are all inter-related, and shouldn't be thought of as separate from one another. So we shouldn't think of God's decision to create Adam as separate from all the other decisions he makes regarding Adam's children and the whole of the human race.

I agree with this too. But I still don't see that this—these three agreements—can help to resolve my difficulty. ·Here is a *prima facie* possible route towards agreement between

us. I honestly didn't take in that by 'the individual notion' of a person (e.g. of Adam), which you say contains once for all everything that will ever happen to him, you had meant this person considered as existing in the divine understanding; I thought you meant this person considered as existing in himself. It seems to me that we don't ordinarily think of the species-notion of sphere in terms of •what is represented • in the divine understanding, but in terms of •what it is •in itself; and I thought that this was the case for the individual notion of each person or of each thing.

However, now that I know that this is how you are thinking, I shall go along with it and explore whether this clears up the whole difficulty I have on the subject; but so far I can't see that it does. For I agree that the knowledge God had of Adam when he decided to create him included the knowledge of everything that has happened to him, and of everything that did or will happen to his posterity; and so taking the individual notion of Adam in this sense, ·namely as defined by what is in God's mind·, what you say about it is quite certainly true.

I likewise admit that the act of God's will that went into creating Adam was not separate from the act of will that went into all of Adam's history and that of the whole of his posterity.

But it seems to me that I am still left with the question that creates my difficulty:

Concerning the connection between •Adam and •everything that was to happen to him and his posterity—does that connection exist of itself, independently of all the free decrees of God or does it depend on those decrees?

How did God know everything that would happen to Adam and his posterity? Was this knowledge a consequence of (a) God's own free decrees ordering

everything that would happen to Adam and his posterity? Or was it rather a result of **(b)** •God's knowing all about •an intrinsic and necessary connection by which •Adam is linked, independently of God's decrees, with •what did and will happen to him and his posterity?

Unless your answer is **(b)**, I don't see how you can be right when you say that the individual notion of each person contains once for all everything that will ever happen to him, even when this notion is understood in terms of the contents of God's mind.

And it seems to me that you do take your stand on **(b)**. That's because I think it's your view that, in our way of understanding things, possible things are possible prior to all the free decrees of God; from which it follows that what is contained in the notion of any possible thing is contained there independently of all the free decrees of God. Now you suppose that God found among possible things a possible Adam along with individual details including, among other predicates, '... will in the course of time have a such-and-such a posterity'. Thus in your opinion there exists an intrinsic connection, so to speak, independently of all God's free decrees, between this possible Adam and all the individuals comprising the whole of his posterity—and not only •the people but in general •everything that was to happen to them. Now this, to be quite open about it, is what I can't understand. For it seems to me that according to you •the possible Adam whom God chose in preference to other possible Adams was linked to all the selfsame posterity as •the created Adam; because you hold—so far as I can judge—that •these are the very same Adam considered now as possible and now as created. Now, if that supposition is true, here is my difficulty.

Ever so many men—Isaac, Samson, Samuel, and so on—have come into the world only through God's very free decrees. So when God knew them along with knowing Adam, this knowledge didn't come from **(a)** their being contained in the individual notion of the possible Adam, independently of God's decrees. So it isn't true that all Adam's descendants were contained in the individual notion of possible Adam, since they would have had to be contained in it independently of God's decrees. Why? Because what is considered as possible must have all that one conceives of as belonging to it under this notion independently of the divine decrees.

This holds also for an infinity of human events that have occurred because of very particular orders of God—e.g. the Judeo-Christian religion and above all the Incarnation of the Divine Word [= 'God's coming into our world as a man']. I don't know how it could be said that all this was contained in the individual notion of the possible Adam.

And another point: I don't know how, when you take Adam as the example of a singular nature, you can conceive of many possible Adams. It's like my conceiving of many possible myselfs, which I certainly can't do. For I can't think of myself without considering myself as a singular nature, so distinct from anything else—actual or possible—that I can no more conceive of different myselfs than I can conceive of a circle whose diameters are not all of equal length. Why? Because these different myselfs would all be distinct one from another, otherwise there wouldn't be many of them. So one of these myselfs would necessarily not be me—which is plainly a contradiction.

Let me now apply to this myself what you say about Adam, and judge for yourself whether that is tenable. Among the possible beings that God found in his ideas there were many myselfs, one of which has the predicate •'is a family man and a physician' and another has •'is a celibate

theologian'. Having been chosen for creation, •the latter of those—the myself that now exists—contains in its individual notion 'is a celibate theologian', whereas •the former would have had in its individual notion 'is a family man and a physician'. [Arnauld ought to have written 'the former *has* in its individual notion' etc. The thesis he wants to engage with holds that possible individuals *have* notions with such-and-such content, whether or not they come to be actual through creation.] *Isn't it clear that there would be no sense in this way of talking? Because my myself is necessarily such-and-such an individual nature, i.e. has such-and-such an individual notion, it is no more possible to conceive of contradictory predicates in the individual notion of myself than it is to conceive of a myself distinct from myself. Here is the right inference for us to conduct:*

•If I had married instead of living in celibacy, I couldn't possibly have not been myself; therefore •the individual notion of myself doesn't contain either of these two states.

•This block of marble is the same whether at rest or in motion; therefore •neither rest nor motion is contained in its individual notion.

So it seems to me that I mustn't consider anything *x* as contained in the individual notion of myself unless

I would no longer be myself if *x* were not in me;

and anything *y* such that

*y* could be in me or not be in me without my ceasing to be myself

can't be regarded as being contained in my individual notion; even if God has so organized the world that *y* cannot not be in me. That's how I see this matter, and I think it squares with everything that any philosopher in the world has ever believed. What encourages me to hold onto this view is that I find it hard to believe that it's good philosophi-

cal procedure to try to find out what we should think about •things' specific or individual natures by investigating how God knows •them. Divine understanding is the rule of the truth of things as they are in themselves [Latin *quoad se*], but while we are in this life it doesn't seem to me that it can be the rule of truth as far as we are concerned [Latin: *quoad nos*]. For what do we know at present regarding God's knowledge? We know that he knows all things, and knows them all by a single and very simple act that is his essence. When I say that we know this, I mean that we're assured that it must be so. But do we understand it? Don't we have to accept that however assured we are that it is the case, it's impossible for us to conceive how it can be the case? Or consider this:

God's knowledge is his very essence, wholly necessary and unchangeable; and yet he knows an infinity of things that he might not have known, because these things might not have been

- can we get our minds around that? The same holds true for his will, which is also his very essence and contains nothing that isn't necessary. And yet he wills and has willed from all eternity things that he might not have willed. [Arnauld's point would have gone through as well if he had said that God's knowledge is contained in his essence rather than that it is his essence, and similarly with God's will. But in each case the French is clear about it.] I also find many uncertainties in how we normally represent God as acting. Our picture of God's activity goes like this:

Before he willed the creation of the world, God surveyed an infinity of possible things of which he chose some and rejected others—many possible Adams, each with a long series of resulting people and events with which he is intrinsically connected. Any one of these possible Adams is connected with the items in his series in just the way that the created Adam is (as

we know) connected with the whole of his posterity. So this is the one among all the possible Adams that God chose; he didn't want any of the others.

I have already objected to the idea of many Adams, which is no better than the idea of many myselfs; but I shan't go into that again because I have a more fundamental difficulty. I declare that I honestly have no conception of these purely possible substances, i.e. the ones that God will never create. And I'm strongly drawn to the view that they are figments of the imagination that we create, and that when we talk about 'purely possible' substances—i.e. ones that are possible but not actual—all we can be talking about is God's omnipotence. [Arnauld's point seems to be: when we say that there is in God's mind a purely possible person who knows the works of Dante by heart, all we ought to mean by this is that God, being omnipotent, could have created such a person.] [Arnauld ends this paragraph with some difficult theological ideas, which amount to something like this: God's essence is *purely active*, which being a pure act doesn't permit there to be any possibility within it. The things he has created are not like God in that respect; in thinking about them we can find work for the distinction between 'what could happen' and 'what does happen'; and this gives us a notion of possible things that aren't actual, namely the notion of how an actual thing might have been different from how it actually is. Arnauld winds up:] I am convinced that although there is so much talk about these 'purely possible substances', no-one ever conceives of any of them except guided by the thought of one of the substances that God has created. . . .

Be that as it may, all that I want to infer from this obscurity and difficulty. . . . is this: If we want to discover the true notions, specific or individual, of the things that we know, we must look •not to God, who dwells in a light inaccessible to us, but •to the notions of them that we find in

ourselves. Now, I find in myself the notion of an individual nature, since I find there the notion of myself. To know what is contained in this individual notion I have only to consult it, just as I need only consult the species-notion of sphere to know what is contained in it. How do I consult it? By looking for •the properties that a sphere **couldn't** lack while still being a sphere (e.g. **(i)** having all the points of its circumference equidistant from the centre) and •the properties that a sphere **could** lack while still being a sphere (e.g. **(ii)** being ten feet wide). That leads me to judge that **(i)** is contained in the species-notion of sphere and that **(ii)** is not. I apply the same rule to the individual notion of myself. I'm assured that as long as I think, I am myself. For I can't

think that I don't exist, or  
exist without being myself.

But I can think that I'll •take a particular journey, or that •I won't, while remaining quite sure that I shall continue to be myself in either case. So I am quite sure that neither of •those options is included in the individual notion of myself. 'But didn't God foresee that you will take this journey?' Agreed. 'So it is beyond doubt that you will take it!' Agreed again. But that doesn't change my certainty that I shall always be myself, whether or not I take that journey. So I have to conclude that neither option enters into my myself [entre dans mon moi], i.e. into the individual notion of me. It seems to me that that is where one must stop, without resorting to God's knowledge to learn what the individual notion of each thing contains.

Those are the thoughts I have had about the proposition that had troubled me and about your explanation of it. I don't know if I have properly understood your thought, but at least I have tried. It is easy to go wrong in dealing with such an abstract subject; but I would be really sorry if you formed the unkind opinion of me that some people

have—they portray me as an irascible writer who can never refute people without pouring abuse on them and deliberately misrepresenting their opinions. That is certainly not my nature. I may sometimes express my thoughts too frankly. I may also sometimes not properly understand the thoughts of others (for I certainly don't think that I am infallible; and anyone who can go wrong sometimes does go wrong). But if only because of self-respect I wouldn't ever deliberately get them wrong; I regard it as utterly low

to bring dishonesty and trickery to bear in disputes over doctrinal matters, even with people we have no reason to be fond of, let alone disputes with friends. I think you want me to count you me among your friends. I can't doubt that you do me the honour of your friendship—you have given me too many signs of it. And on my side, I assure you that the fault of mine that I beg you once again to forgive results purely from •the affection that God has given me for you and •my perhaps immoderate zeal for your salvation.

## 6. Arnauld to the Count, 13.v.1686

I am very sorry to have given Leibniz cause to be so angry with me. If I had seen this coming I'd have taken great care not to say so frankly what I thought of one of his metaphysical propositions; but I ought to have seen it coming, and I was wrong to use such harsh language, not against him but against his opinion. So I thought I was obliged to ask his pardon, and I have done so very sincerely in the letter that I enclose, unsealed, with this. I really beg you to make my peace with this former friend whom I would be sorry to have turned into an enemy through my imprudence; but I'll be glad if it stops there and I'm no longer obliged to tell him what I think of his opinions. I am so overwhelmed

with other affairs that it would be hard for me to satisfy him, because these abstract topics require hard and lengthy concentration. [The rest of the letter—two book-pages—is mostly high-toned theological gossip, followed by a suggestion about a good tutor for the Count's grandsons. One part of the theological stuff is noteworthy:] This Lutheran minister that you speak of must have good qualities, but it's incomprehensible and reveals a truly blind prejudice that he can look on Luther as a man destined by God for the reformation of the Christian religion. He must have a low idea of what piety is if he finds it in a man like that—a wild-talking glutton. . . .

## 7. Leibniz's notes on Arnauld's letter about article 13, vi.1686

Arnauld writes:

*I thought it could be inferred that although God was free to create or not to create Adam, given that he did choose to create him, everything that has happened to the human race since then had to and has to happen through a fatal necessity; or at least that God has no more liberty regarding all that, given that he chose to create Adam, than he had liberty not to create a nature capable of thought, given that he chose to create me.* [page 12]

I had replied first of all that we need to distinguish absolute necessity from hypothetical necessity. Arnauld replies here—i.e. in his letter that I have in front of me as I compose these notes—that he is talking only about hypothetical necessity. This announcement changes the shape of the discussion. The term ‘fatal necessity’ that he had used is ordinarily taken to refer only to absolute necessity, which is why I was forced to bring in the hypothetical/absolute distinction; but now we can let that drop out of the discussion because of Arnauld’s announcement, especially since he doesn’t insist on ‘fatal necessity’ and allows an alternative: ‘through a fatal necessity, or at least . . .’ and so on. So it would be useless to argue over the **word**; but with regard to the **thing** we still have an argument to conduct. Arnauld finds ‘strange’ something that I seem to him to maintain, namely that

all human events are necessary by hypothetical necessity from the single supposition that God chose to create Adam, [page 12]

I have two replies to this. (1) I am supposing that what God chose to create was not an Adam whose notion is vague

and incomplete, but rather an Adam who is thus-and-so—determinate enough to be an individual. My view is that this complete individual notion—i.e. the complete notion of this utterly detailed and determinate Adam—includes relationships with the whole series of things and events. And this should seem all the more reasonable because Arnauld grants me here the connection that exists amongst God’s decisions, namely that when God decides to create such-and-such an Adam, he takes into consideration all the decisions that he is making concerning the whole sequence of the universe. . . .

(2) The *following-from* relation through which the events follow from the hypothesis is indeed always certain but it isn’t always metaphysically necessary in the way that (to take Arnauld’s example) it is metaphysically necessary that God in deciding to create me creates a nature capable of thought. Often the *following-from* is only physical—only a following-according-to-the-laws-of-nature—and rests upon some free decrees of God. That’s what is involved when something follows from something else according to the laws of motion or the moral principle that every mind will be drawn to what seems to it to be the greatest good. [In that passage, ‘physical’ means quite generally ‘having to do with how things go in the world’; its scope includes mental events even if they aren’t ‘physical’ in our sense. And ‘moral’ here means about the same as ‘psychological’.]

It’s true that when you put together the initial assumption of God’s decision to create Adam along with the divine decrees that bring about the less-than-metaphysical-following-from, turning all this material into a single antecedent, then all the upshots *do* follow absolutely from *that*.

Arnauld makes rejoinders here to these two replies (which I had already hinted at in my letter to the Count ·that he saw·); what he says should be considered. He assures me •that he thought my view was that all the events happening to an individual were inferred from his individual notion, in the same way and with the same necessity as the derivation of the properties of the sphere follow from its species-notion or definition, and •that I had been working with the notion of the individual in himself, without bringing in how he is present in God's understanding or will:

*It seems to me that we don't ordinarily think of the species-notion of sphere in terms of •what is represented in the divine understanding, but in terms of •what it is in itself; and I thought that this was the case for the individual notion of each person or of each thing. However, now that I know that this is how you are thinking, I shall go along with it and explore whether this clears up the whole difficulty I have on the subject; but so far I can't see that it does.*

[page 12]

... Let me explain why I think it necessary to philosophize in one way about •the notion of an individual substance and another way about •the species-notion of *sphere*. It is because the notion of a species contains only eternal or necessary truths, whereas the notion of an individual contains (viewed as possibilities) contingent states of affairs, ones involving the existence of things and ·what is the case at this or that particular· time; so that this notion depends on (viewed as possibilities) some free decrees of God, because such states of affairs all depend on God's decrees. Compare these two notions:

•The general notion of *sphere* is incomplete or abstract; i.e. it takes our thought only to the essence of the sphere in general, or the essence of the sphere in

theory, ignoring all particular circumstances; so that it comes nowhere near to containing what is needed for the existence of one individual sphere.

•The notion of the sphere that Archimedes arranged to have placed on his tomb is complete, and must contain everything that is true of that particular sphere.

That's why in individual or practical considerations we are concerned not only with •the thing's form, sphericalness, but also with •the material it is made of, •where and when it was made, and all the other details which, if fully followed out, would eventually take in the whole history of the universe. For the notion of the portion of matter from which this sphere is made includes all the changes that it ever did or ever will undergo. And in my view every individual substance always bears traces of everything that has ever happened to it and signs of whatever will happen to it. But what I have just said may suffice to explain my method of approach.

Now, Arnauld •declares that what I say about the individual notion of a person is certainly true if this 'notion' is understood in terms of what God knew about that person when he decided to create him; and he likewise •admits that the act of will to create Adam was not separate from the act of will God performed concerning what has happened to Adam and his posterity. But now he asks whether the connection between Adam and what has occurred to his posterity depends on God's free decrees or is independent of them. He puts it like this:

*How did God know everything that would happen to Adam and his posterity? Was this knowledge a consequence of (a) God's own free decrees ordering everything that would happen to Adam and his posterity? Or was it rather a result of (b) an intrinsic and necessary connection by which •Adam is linked,*

*independently of God's decrees, with •what did and will happen to him and his posterity?*

He doesn't doubt that I choose **(b)**; and indeed I can't choose **(a)** when this is put the way Arnauld puts it; but it seems to me that there's a middle way between these. He argues however that I must choose **(b)** because I consider the individual notion of Adam as possible—one of an infinity of possible notions from which God selected that one; and notions that are possible in themselves don't depend on the free decrees of God.

But here is where I need to express my thoughts a little better, as follows: The connection between •Adam and •the subsequent history of his posterity isn't independent of all God's free decrees, but it doesn't completely depend on them either—or anyway not in such a way that the explanation for each event's happening or being foreseen is a primary particular decree that God made concerning that one event. What I think is that there are a few free primary decrees—ones we could call 'laws of the universe'—which regulate the flow of events and which, when combined with the free decree to create Adam, are sufficient to bring about the consequence •of the subsequent history of the human race.... As for the objection that possible things are independent of God's decrees, I agree (though the Cartesians don't) that possibilities don't depend on God's *actual* decrees, but I maintain that possible individual notions contain possible free decrees. Suppose that our world were only possible and not actual; the full story of it would include

movements of bodies, regulated by  
laws of nature, each of which depends on  
free decrees of God;

and because those are features merely of a *possible* world, each of them is also merely possible—possible movements, possible laws, possible decrees. Because there is an infinity

of possible worlds, there is also an infinity of laws, some for one world and some for another, and included in the notion of each possible individual in each world are the laws of his world. The same thing can be said of miracles. These operations of God are out of the ordinary, but they nevertheless •fit into the general order, •conform to God's over-all plans, and consequently •are contained in the notion of this universe. That is because

- this universe is a result of those plans; just as
- the idea of a building results from the aims or plans of the man who undertakes it, and
- the idea or notion of this world is a result of God's plans considered as possibilities.

For everything must be explained by its cause, and the cause of the universe is God's aims. Now each individual substance (according to me) expresses the whole universe in accordance with a certain viewpoint, so it also expresses the miracles I have mentioned. All this holds for the general order, for God's plans, for the sequence of events in this universe, for •any• individual substance, and for miracles, whether they are being thought of as they actually are or only as possibilities. The whole scheme will also fit any other possible world, although the plans for our world have been preferred •by God•.

What I have just said about God's plans and about the primary laws clears the way for us to believe—*without eliminating freedom and contingency*—that this universe has a principal or primary notion of which particular events are merely consequences. Whatever has happened was certainly going to happen, but that fact doesn't rule out freedom, because the certainty of events is partly *based on* free acts. Now, every individual substance of this universe expresses in its notion the universe it belongs to. And God's decisions regarding everything else are included not only in the premise

•God decided to create this particular Adam,  
but also any premise of the form

•God decided to create individual substance x,  
where x can be any substance you like. That's because it is  
in the nature of an individual substance to have a notion so  
complete that it implies everything one can attribute to that  
substance, and indeed, because of the connections among  
things, implies everything one can attribute to *anything* in  
the universe. Still, if we are to be accurate about this we  
should say that this is not right:

•All God's other decisions are consequences of his  
decision to create this Adam;  
and that this *is* right:

•God's decisions regarding Adam *and* other particular  
things are all consequences of his *one* decision  
regarding the whole universe and of *the* main aims  
that determine the primary notion of the universe and  
establish within it the general and inviolable order to  
which everything conforms.

(And there's no need to leave miracles out of this. They are  
undoubtedly in harmony with God's main aims, although  
they sometimes conflict with the restricted maxims that are  
called 'laws of nature'.)

I had said that the premise from which all human events  
can be deduced is not simply the proposition that God  
created a vague Adam, but rather the proposition that God  
created a particular Adam fully equipped with details and  
chosen from amongst 'an infinity of possible Adams' [page 7].  
That gave Arnauld an opening for the not unreasonable  
objection that it's as impossible to conceive of many *Adams*,  
taking Adam as an individual nature, as to conceive of many  
*myself*s. I agree; but in speaking of many Adams I wasn't  
taking Adam as one determinate individual. Let me explain.  
When we think about *some* of Adam's predicates, for instance

- is the first man,
- is placed in a garden of pleasure,
- has one of his ribs used by God to make a woman,

and other such things conceived of in a general way (i.e.  
without mentioning Eve, Eden or other details that complete  
his individuality), we may call the person to whom these  
predicates are attributed 'Adam', but we haven't done enough  
to determine the individual. Why not? Because there can be  
an infinity of Adams, i.e. of possible people who differ one  
from another but all fit the description we have given. Far  
from disagreeing with Arnauld's objections to this plurality  
of one and the same individual, I had myself these very  
objections in an effort to make it better understood that the  
nature of an individual must be complete and determinate.  
Indeed, what Aquinas taught regarding *intelligences* is  
something that I am convinced is true of *everything*, namely  
that there can't possibly be two individuals that are entirely  
alike, differing only in number [i.e. differing only in that there  
are two of them—*one* and *the other*]. So when we are considering  
whether all human events follow from the assumption of the  
existence of Adam, we mustn't think about this in terms of an  
indeterminate Adam, i.e. a person having certain of Adam's  
attributes; rather, we must attribute to Adam a notion so  
complete that everything that can be attributed to him can  
be deduced from it. And there's no reason to doubt that *God*  
can form such a notion of him, or rather that *God* finds it  
already formed in the domain of possible things, i.e. in his  
understanding.

It also follows that if someone had a different life-history  
he wouldn't have been our Adam, but someone else. . . . It  
seems clear to us that this block of marble brought from  
Genoa would have been exactly the same if it had been left  
there, but that is because our senses permit us to make only  
*superficial* judgments. But *deep* down the truth is that,

because of how things are inter-connected,

if the least thing had happened differently from how it actually did, the whole universe with all its parts would have been different—it would have been another universe right from the outset.

This doesn't imply that events are •necessary; but that they are •certain, given the choice that God made of this possible universe, the notion of which includes this sequence of events. I hope that what I'm about to say will be able to win even Arnauld's agreement. [Leibniz proceeds, rather elaborately, to make a simple point: A period of my life when I was in Paris was followed by one when I was in Germany; something has to *make it the case* that this was *one* person who was first in one place and then in the other, i.e. serve as a *reason* why this was the same person all through. Because:] if there is no reason, one would be as justified in saying that it is another person. I can answer the question

‘*Why am I convinced* that this was a single person all through?’

by saying that my subjective experience has convinced me of this. But we also want an answer to the question

‘What *makes it the case* that this was a single person all through?’

[Leibniz characterizes these questions as *a posteriori* and *a priori* respectively, using these terms in now-obsolete senses, marking the difference between reasons for believing that P and reasons for P's being true. On page 33 he associates that with the difference between the ‘marks’ and the ‘causes’ of something's being the case.] Now, the only possible answer to the second question is that my attributes in the ‘Paris’ period as well as those in the subsequent ‘Germany’ period are predicates of one and the same subject, and are therefore present in the same subject. Now, what does it mean to say that the predicate ‘is in the subject’ if not that the notion of the predicate is in some sense contained in

the notion of the subject? And seeing that from the start of my existence it could truly be said of me that •this or •that was going to happen to me, it must be accepted that •these predicates were laws contained in the subject, or in the complete notion of me which

- makes what is called *myself*,
- is the basis of the connection amongst all my different states, and
- God had perfect knowledge of from all eternity.

I think that should dispose of all the doubts, because when I say that the individual notion of Adam contains everything that will ever happen to him, I mean only what all philosophers mean when they say that *the predicate is present in the subject of a true proposition* [Leibniz says this in Latin]. It is true that the consequences of this doctrine—evident as it is—are paradoxes; but that is the fault of philosophers who do not take far enough the clearest notions.

... I agree with what Arnauld judiciously says about how cautious we should be in consulting divine knowledge as a way to learn what we should think of the notions of things. But what I have been saying here, rightly considered, would be valid even if we kept God out of it as far as we possibly can. It's enough that I can prove that there must exist a complete notion of Adam that contains all the events that occur to him; I don't have to say *also* that when God thinks about the Adam that he is deciding to create he sees these events in that notion. ·Here is the proof: Each of Adam's predicates either depends on others of his predicates or it doesn't; set aside all the predicates that do depend on others; the remainder—the basic predicates—make up the complete notion of Adam from which can be deduced, and thus explained, everything that is ever to happen to him. Obviously God *can* and indeed *does* form ·in his mind· a notion that is full enough to account for all the phenomena

concerning Adam; but equally obviously such a notion is possible in itself.

It's true that we shouldn't dig too deeply into questions about what God knows and wills, because of the great difficulties they involve; but we can expound the material that I have inferred relative concerning the present problem without getting into the difficulties that Arnauld has mentioned, e.g. the problem [page 14] of understanding how God's simplicity is compatible with the distinctions we must note in him—e.g. in distinguishing his understanding from his will. It is also very difficult [Arnauld on page 14] to give a full account of how God has knowledge that he might have *not* had, that is—to use a technical term—knowledge of vision. The point is that if future contingent acts didn't exist or happen, God would have no 'vision' of them. Even then, however, he would have **simple** knowledge of such items, and this knowledge would become **vision** when his will was added to it; so perhaps this difficulty comes down to the problem raised by God's will, namely the problem of how God is free to will. This certainly passes our understanding, but it's not something we need to understand in order to resolve our present problem. [For God to have 'simple' knowledge of future event E is for him to be aware of E as a possibility. For him to have 'vision'-knowledge of E is for him to know that it will in fact happen, and he'll know this when he decides to make E happen.] As for the way we conceive of God as acting in choosing the best from among many possibilities, Arnauld is right to find this unclear. Regarding this account—

There is an infinity of possible first men, each with a great succession of persons and events; and God chooses for creation the one who pleases him, along with his succession—

Arnauld seems to recognize that we are driven to adopt this, so it isn't as strange as he initially found it to be! To be

sure, he indicates that he is strongly drawn to the view that these purely possible substances are mere chimeras [*chimeres* = 'figments of the imagination']. I don't want to dispute this, but I hope that he will still grant me what I require. I agree that there's no reality in purely possible things except what they have in the divine understanding; so that Arnauld is, after all, visibly committed to expounding them in terms of God's knowledge, though he seemed earlier to think that to learn about them we should look into *them*, not into the mind of God. Even if I concede—this being something that Arnauld is convinced of and I don't deny—that our only way of conceiving something possible is through the ideas that do in fact exist in the things that God has created, that wouldn't hurt my position. [Leibniz does say *choses* = 'things', but presumably he means 'things' such as you and me.] For when I talk of possibilities I am satisfied if one can form true propositions from them. For instance, even if there were no perfect square in the world, we would nevertheless see that no contradiction is implied by the notion *perfect square*. If we totally rejected purely possible things, we would be destroying contingency; because if nothing is possible except what God has in fact created, what God has created is necessary given that he decided to create something; i.e. there is nothing that God could have created but didn't. [The phrase 'purely possible things' translates Leibniz's *purs possibles* = 'pure possibles', which has promoted an adjective to the rank of a noun, and correspondingly promoted an adverb to an adjective. Such promotions are much commoner in French than in English. On the other hand, 'purely possible substances' translates *substances purement possibles*, which hasn't promoted anything.] Finally, I agree that a good way to reach judgments about the notion of *individual substance* is to consider the notion I have of *myself*; just as in reaching judgments about the properties of a sphere it is necessary to consider the specific notion of *sphere*. [This

seems to involve a switch: from •studying a general notion by examining one instance of it to •studying a particular item by examining a general notion that it falls under.] However, the difference is great, for the notion of *myself*—like the notion of any other individual substance—is infinitely more extensive and hard to grasp than a species-notion such as that of *sphere*, which is merely incomplete. It is not enough for me to sense myself as a thinking substance; I would have to grasp firmly and clearly what distinguishes me from all other minds; but I have only a confused experience of that. This has the result that although it's easy to judge that the size of a sphere's diameter is not contained in the general notion of *sphere*, it is harder to judge whether the journey that I plan to take is contained in the notion of *me*. If the two tasks were equally easy, it would be as easy for us to be prophets as to be geometers! I'm not sure whether I shall take the journey, but I *am* sure that whether I take it or not I shall always be *myself*. What we are up against here, ·in the conviction that many questions about one's own future conduct are not yet *settled*·, is an old familiar opinion that shouldn't be confused with a clear notion or item of knowledge. These things appear to us to be not-yet-settled only because we can't recognise the advance indications of them in our substance. ·Here's an analogy·:

People who are guided only by their senses will brand as a fool anyone who tells them that the smallest movement starts a causal chain that runs as far as matter extends, because experience alone can't demonstrate this; though one becomes convinced of it when one considers the nature of motion and of matter.

It is the same here: if I pay heed only to my confused experience of *my* individual notion, I am staying away from any awareness of this connected chain of events; but when I consider the clear, general notions that are involved in it,

I find the chain. Indeed, when I pay attention to the notion that I have of *true proposition*, I find that every predicate—necessary or contingent; past, present or future—is included in the notion of the subject, and that's all I am asking for.

I even believe that this will open up a path to bring us together. That is because I think that the only reason why Arnauld was reluctant to accept this proposition is that he thought I was standing up for a connection that is •intrinsic and at the same time •necessary, whereas my actual view is that it is •intrinsic but not at all •necessary. It isn't necessary because, as I have by now sufficiently explained, it is based on free acts and decrees. The only subject-predicate link that I am talking about here is the one that occurs in the most contingent truths, namely:

There is always something to be conceived in the subject that serves to explain why this predicate or event pertains to it, or why this has happened rather than not.

But these reasons for contingent truths *incline without necessitating*. So it is true that I *could* not-take-this-journey, but it is certain that I *shall* take it. This predicate or event is not unbreakably linked with my other predicates conceived of incompletely or in a general way; but it is unbreakably linked with the complete individual notion of me, because I am supposing that this notion was created precisely so everything that happens to me can be deduced from it. This notion is certainly found objectively [Latin: *a parte rei* = (roughly) 'out there in the world'], and it is the only notion that picks out *myself* in its various states, because it's the only notion that can embrace them all.

I have such a high opinion of Arnauld's judgment, that I easily mistrust my own opinions or at least my expression of them when he finds fault with them. That is why I have closely tracked the difficulties he has raised; and having

made a good-faith effort to answer them, I feel that I'm not too far away from where he stands.

The proposition in question is extremely important and deserves to be solidly established. What's so important about it? Well, it implies that every soul is like a world apart, independent of everything else except God; that it is immortal and incapable of being acted on; and that everything that happens to it leaves a trace in its substance. This proposition also implies the truth about the nature of the commerce between substances, and particularly that of the union of soul with body. [In this context, 'commerce' and the French *commerce* don't refer to *commercial* dealings. One could speak of 'the interactions between substances', but be careful: that sounds causal, and Leibniz is on the point of saying that the *commerce* in question isn't causal.] This commerce doesn't conform to the ordinary hypothesis of the **physical influence** of the soul on the body, for every state of a substance occurs to it spontaneously; it is only a consequence of its preceding state and therefore not a consequence of any influence from anything outside it. It doesn't conform either to the hypothesis of **occasional causes**—i.e. the theory that when a change occurs in the soul it doesn't cause a change in the body but is the *occasion* of God's causing such a change. [Leibniz briefly attacks

'occasionalism' for its implication that God keeps fussily interfering with the course of events. Then:] But the soul-body commerce I have described does conform to the hypothesis of **concomitance**, which to me appears certain. What it says is that each substance expresses the entire sequence of events in the universe according to its particular view or relationship, which brings it about that they—the individual substance and the rest of the universe—exist in perfect harmony with one another, although there is no causal interaction between them. We do sometimes say that one substance 'acts on' another; but what is going on in those cases is not real causal influence, but just changes in the two substances of such a kind that the one that is 'acted on' comes to express the universe less clearly while the one that 'acts' comes to express the universe more clearly—each of these being part of the total event-series that is included in the substance's notion changes happening in conformity with the succession of thoughts embraced by its notion. . . .

These explanations will, I think, make the propositions in the summary I sent to Arnauld seem more intelligible, and perhaps even more solid and important, than they could have been thought to be at first.