

Leibniz and the Two Sophies: The Philosophical Correspondence



Edited and translated by

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193

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Introduction

The Other Voice

It is a commonplace view among scholars who relate the history of early modern philosophy that in this history, both Sophie, Electress of Hanover (1630–1714), and her daughter, Queen Sophie Charlotte of Prussia (1668–1705), qualify for a footnote, which in both cases reads: patron and correspondent of the great philosopher Leibniz.¹ More munificent scholars expand this entry to include the claim that both women had an interest in philosophy.² By that what is usually meant is that they read philosophical works and encouraged others to do the same. The roots of such a view go back a long way. John Toland, who met Sophie in 1701 and 1702, wrote of her: “She has bin long admir’d by all the Learned World, as a Woman of incomparable Knowledge in Divinity, Philosophy, History, and the Subjects of all sorts of Books, of which she has read a prodigious quantity.”³ Two hundred years later, Adolphus Ward painted much the same picture:

Beyond a doubt, Sophia was distinguished by an intellectual curiosity that was still uncommon, though much less so than

1. See, for example, Marilyn Bailey Ogilvie, *Women in Science: A Biographical Dictionary with Annotated Bibliography* (London: MIT Press, 1986), 166–67; Patricia Fara, “Leibniz’s Women,” *Endeavour* 28 (2004): 146–48; Stuart Brown and N. J. Fox, *Historical Dictionary of Leibniz’s Philosophy* (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 213.

2. Ethel M. Kersey, *Women Philosophers: A Bio-Critical Source Book* (London: Greenwood Press, 1989), 189–90; Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, eds., *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2: 1464; Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16, 126–27. Some do not even grant Sophie and Sophie Charlotte the status of a minor footnote: in one large volume on the history of women philosophers, for instance, Sophie gets only a single, passing mention, as someone who may have had a conversation with George Burnet about Catharine Trotter’s *Defence* of Locke. See Mary Ellen Waithe, ed., *A History of Women Philosophers*, vol. 3, 1600–1900 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995), 123.

3. John Toland, *An account of the Courts of Prussia and Hanover; sent to a minister of state in Holland by Mr. Toland* (London, 1705), 67. See also John Toland, *Letters to Serena* (London, 1704), preface §7.

2 Introduction

is often supposed, among the women of her age... She certainly had a liking for moral theology and philosophy, which were, in general, more in the way of the ladies of the period than the historical sciences.⁴

And a contemporary writer tells us that Sophie “expressed an interest in philosophy” and “was extremely curious about intellectual matters, and encouraged the philosophical interests of her daughter, Sophie-Charlotte.”⁵ Such remarks give the impression that the extent of Sophie’s involvement with philosophy was to keep abreast of the philosophy of others and encourage others to do the same. Such an interest in philosophy would be, of course, essentially a passive one.⁶

The same story is told of Sophie Charlotte. Her enthusiasm for philosophy was legendary in her own time; for instance, John Toland wrote after meeting her: “Her Reading is infinit, and she is conversant in all manner of Subjects; nor is She more admir’d for her inimitable Wit, than for her exact Knowledg of the most abstruse parts of Philosophy.”⁷ Stories of her genius were also passed down to her grandson, Frederick II, who wrote of her:

She was a princess of distinguished merit, who combined all the charms of her sex with the graces of wit and the lights of reason... This princess brought to Prussia the spirit of good society, true politeness, and the love of arts and sciences... She summoned Leibniz and many other learned men to her court; her curiosity wanted to grasp the first principles of

4. Adolphus William Ward, *The Electress Sophia and the Hanoverian Succession* (London: Goupil & Co., 1903), 191–93.

5. Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, 16 and 126–27.

6. At times Leibniz himself likewise portrays Sophie’s interest in philosophy as essentially passive, for example when he claims that “Madam the Electress is a great genius. She loves rare and extraordinary thoughts in which there is something fine, curious and paradoxical.” Leibniz to Gabriel D’Artis, July 1695, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Akademie der Wissenschaften, multiple volumes in 8 series (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923-), I 11: 547 (cited hereafter as A, followed by series and volume).

7. Toland, *An account of the Courts of Prussia and Hanover*, 33. Toland also gushes in his *Letters to Serena* that Sophie Charlotte is a “Mistriss of a vast Compass of Knowledge.” Toland, *Letters to Serena*, preface §9.

things. One day she pressed Leibniz on this subject, and he said to her; “Madam, there is no way to satisfy you: you want to know the reason for the reason.”⁸

The picture painted by both Toland and Frederick II has long since become part of the philosophical landscape. For example, one contemporary writer describes Sophie Charlotte as “a ‘philosopher-Queen’ with a passion for learning,”⁹ while another opts for the blunt characterization as “German patroness and disciple of Leibniz.”¹⁰ As for her association with Leibniz, it has also been claimed that Sophie Charlotte “helped him by stimulating his philosophical thinking.”¹¹

It is of course true that both Sophie and Sophie Charlotte provided Leibniz with friendship, patronage, and intellectual stimulation. It is also true that both had an interest in philosophy. But it does both a disservice to suppose that their place in the history of philosophy can be secured only through the services they rendered to Leibniz. Likewise, it does both a disservice to depict (intentionally or otherwise) their interest in philosophy as a passive one, since there is clear evidence that both actively engaged in philosophical discussion proper, and had contributions to make to the philosophical debates of their day. This evidence is to be found in their respective writings for Leibniz, but unfortunately nowhere else.¹² By restricting their philosophical writing to their letters for Leibniz, Sophie and Sophie Charlotte elected to keep their philosophical views private. While it is

8. Frederick II, King of Prussia, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Brandebourg* (Berlin, 1750), 177–78.

9. Myriam Yardeni, “Huguenot Traces and Reminiscences in John Toland’s Conception of Tolerance,” in *The Religious Culture of the Huguenots 1660–1750*, ed. Anne Duncan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 175.

10. Kersey, *Women Philosophers*, 190.

11. Beatrice H. Zedler, “The Three Princesses,” *Hypatia* 4 (1989): 58.

12. In choosing to restrict their philosophical writing to their letters to Leibniz, Sophie and Sophie Charlotte took after Sophie’s sister, Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (1618–80), who wrote philosophy only in her correspondence with René Descartes (1596–1650). Sophie had a minor role in the Elizabeth-Descartes correspondence, being the intermediary for several of the exchanges while Elizabeth was in Berlin. For the correspondence see Princess Elizabeth and René Descartes, *The Correspondence between Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, ed. and trans. Lisa Shapiro (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007).

often true that letters were a semi-public form of communication in early modern times, this is not the case with the letters the two women wrote for Leibniz. These were personal, not for wider circulation, and certainly not for publication. On this matter they could count on Leibniz's discretion: their letters for him remained in his private collection, to which he alone had access. This effectively meant that their voices were not heard by anyone other than Leibniz until the latter half of the nineteenth century, when their letters to him were published for the first time.¹³ Yet the publication of their letters still did not lead to their voices being heard: scholars who studied the correspondences in depth, and wrote of them in detail, elected not to mention, let alone discuss, the philosophical contributions of the two women.¹⁴ No doubt part of the reason for this is the fact that scholarly interest in the contributions of women in early modern philosophy has developed only comparatively recently. Another factor is that the philosophical writings of Sophie and Sophie Charlotte are but a very small part of their respective correspondences with Leibniz, which are mostly filled with political news and court gossip. To find the philosophical material requires combing through volumes and volumes of writings, most of which are of no interest to philosophers. As a result, the voices of Sophie and Sophie Charlotte are much harder to detect than those of, for example, Anne Conway or Margaret Cavendish, who composed entire philosophical treatises. Nevertheless they are there. Sophie's voice is undoubtedly louder than that of her daughter, who lived less than half the years of her mother and so had considerably less time and opportunity to philosophize; for this reason, Sophie will occupy more of our attention in what follows.

13. In *Die Werke von Leibniz*, ed. Onno Klopp, 11 vols. (Hanover: Klindworth, 1864–84) (cited hereafter as Klopp). The correspondence with Sophie is to be found in vols. 7–9 (all published 1873), while the correspondence with Sophie Charlotte is to be found in vol. 10 (published 1877). In neither case is the correspondence complete, however.

14. See for example, Louis Alexandre Foucher de Careil, *Leibniz et les deux Sophies* (Paris: G. Bailliere, 1876); George MacDonald Ross, "Leibniz und Sophie Charlotte," in *Sophie Charlotte und ihr Schloß*, ed. S. Herz, C. M. Vogtherr, and F. Windt (London: 1999), 95–105; Michel Fichant, "Leibniz et Toland: philosophie pour princesses?" *Revue de Synthèse* 116 (1995): 421–39.

*Personal Relations: Sophie, Sophie Charlotte, and Leibniz*¹⁵

Among Anglophones, Sophie is and has always been best known as the German princess who was almost Queen of Great Britain. When she was born in 1630, Sophie's prospects did not seem particularly bright. She was the twelfth of thirteen children born to the exiled "Winter King" Frederick V (1596–1632), Elector Palatine of the Rhine, and Elizabeth Stuart (1596–1662). She relates in her memoirs that her name was chosen by lot, a method resorted to once it was realized that "all the kings and princes of consideration had already performed this office [i.e., finding a name] for the children that came before me."¹⁶ She was educated by private tutors in Leiden and then the Hague, her city of birth (brought up, she says, "according to the good doctrine of Calvin,"¹⁷ though her education also included history, philosophy, mathematics, and law), before going to live with her brother, Karl Ludwig (1617–80), following the restoration of the Palatinate. After a broken engagement to a Swedish prince and numerous marriage proposals from various nobles, in 1658 Sophie married Ernst August, son of George, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1582–1641). She had been briefly courted by Ernst August six years earlier but had not considered him a desirable match at the time because he was the youngest of four brothers and consequently had little prospect of inheriting a domain.¹⁸ She had instead become engaged to his elder brother Georg Wilhelm, but he quickly got cold feet, and in an effort to extract himself honorably from his betrothal he made a pact with Ernst August: should Ernst August marry Sophie in his place, Georg Wilhelm promised never to take a wife and so produce any legitimate heirs, ensuring that all land and titles due to him would instead devolve to Ernst August,¹⁹ an arrangement deemed acceptable both by Ernst August and Sophie. Four years after the marriage Ernst August was appointed

15. For full biographical details, I refer the reader to the bibliography.

16. Sophie, Electress of Hanover, *Memoirs*, ed. and trans. H. Forester (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1888), 2.

17. Sophie, *Memoirs*, 4.

18. Sophie, *Memoirs*, 46.

19. A copy of Georg Wilhelm's renunciation of marriage, including these promises, can be found in Sophie, *Memoirs*, 72–75.

bishop of Osnabrück; by this time he had fathered two children with Sophie, Georg Ludwig (1660–1727), and Friedrich August (1661–90). Five more children were to follow: Maximilian Wilhelm (1666–1726), Sophie Charlotte (1668–1705), Karl Philipp (1669–90), Christian Heinrich (1671–1703), and Ernst August (1674–1728). The status of the bishop prince once thought to be without prospects improved considerably with the death in 1679 of his elder brother, Johann Friedrich (1625–79), who had since 1665 ruled the duchy of Brunswick-Lüneburg (often referred to as Hanover after its principal town). As Georg Wilhelm had voluntarily relinquished his hereditary claim to the domain, Ernst August took over as duke upon Johann Friedrich's death. Three years earlier, Johann Friedrich had employed the services of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) as court counselor and librarian, and Leibniz's services, like those of other low-ranking officials, were retained by the incoming duke. Although relieved to have retained his job, the position was not the one that the young Leibniz had hoped for, or felt that his achievements deserved. And by the time he came into Hanover's employ his achievements were not inconsiderable: he had been awarded a bachelor's degree in philosophy in 1662, a master's degree in 1664, and a doctorate in law in 1666, and in 1668 began work on legal reform for the Elector of Mainz. In 1672 he was dispatched to Paris on a diplomatic mission on behalf of the elector. When his employer died shortly afterward, Leibniz decided to remain in France to take advantage of the superior opportunities for intellectual development and networking, and while there he started to attract attention for his writings on jurisprudence and mathematics, as well as for his calculating machine. Despite all this promise, job offers were few and far between, and when it became clear that no possibility of a position in Paris would emerge Leibniz accepted the only offer on the table—counselor and librarian at the court of Hanover.²⁰

Almost as soon as Ernst August had assumed the reins of power, Leibniz—keen to impress his new employer—bombarded him with various practical proposals, most of which would involve his promo-

20. For more information on Leibniz's early years in Hanover, see Nicholas Rescher, "Leibniz Finds a Niche (1676–1677)," in Nicholas Rescher, *On Leibniz* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 162–98.

tion from mere court counselor.²¹ While the majority of these proposals met with indifference, two in particular caught the new elector's eye: the first was to continue with efforts to improve mining technology so as to increase the output of the Harz mines;²² with various suggestions up his sleeve as to how this could be achieved, Leibniz assumed a role as mining engineer, which led him to spend almost three years in the Harz mines between 1680 and 1686, though success in the endeavor eluded him. The second proposal to meet with Ernst August's approval was the writing of the history of the House of Guelph (or Welf),²³ a European dynasty that included many monarchs and nobles from England and Germany, and detailing its links with the House of Este, an earlier European dynasty dating back to the time of Charlemagne. As a member of the Guelph line himself, and eager to establish his pedigree, albeit for dynastic rather than personal reasons, Ernst August saw the value of a well-researched Guelph history and needed little encouragement from his court counselor to give his blessing to the project.²⁴ From 1685 onward, writing the Guelph history was Leibniz's chief task for the Hanoverian court, and one that proved to be a burden under which he would labor for the rest of his life.

The duchy of Hanover and an eager young Leibniz were not the only things inherited by Ernst August from his predecessor: he also co-opted Johann Friedrich's desire to promote church reunion efforts. In the late 1670s Johann Friedrich had given a warm reception to the bishop of Tübingen, Cristobal de Rojas y Spinola (c.1626–95), who had met with Germany's various territorial leaders to gauge the possibility of church reunification. As the Hanoverians had been receptive to the idea, Spinola returned to the duchy again in 1683 and held further talks with a Protestant delegation headed by Gerhard Wolter Molanus (1633–1722), the Abbé of Loccum. As the negotiations proceeded other interested parties joined the fray, such as France's chief theologian and Bishop of Meaux Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704),

21. See for example, A IV 3: 332–40, and 370–5, both from 1680.

22. See "Resolution," Duke Ernst August for Leibniz, 14/24 April 1680, A I 3: 47–48.

23. See Leibniz for Franz Ernst von Platen?, end January (?) 1680, A I 3: 20, and Leibniz to Ernst August, May 1680, A I 3: 57.

24. See "Resolution," Duke Ernst August for Leibniz, 31 July/10 August 1685, A I 4: 205–6.

but Spinola's attempts to generate wider support among the heads of German states were coolly received.

Aside from hosting reunion efforts, European politics dominated the attention of Ernst August and Sophie throughout the 1680s. In 1684, the political need for closer ties with the court of Brandenburg resulted in the marriage of their daughter, Sophie Charlotte, to the recently widowed Electoral Prince Friedrich of Brandenburg (1657–1713). Four years later Friedrich became Elector Friedrich III of Brandenburg, with Sophie Charlotte correspondingly elevated to electress. An even more prestigious elevation of rank seemed to bode for Sophie, following negotiations in the English parliament to name her as future heir to the throne of England and Scotland. As a daughter of Elizabeth Stuart (who was in turn daughter of James I England/VI of Scotland), Sophie had some claim to the throne, though with Queen Mary II and King William III, as well as Princess Anne—all of whom were young enough to produce male heirs—standing between her and the crown, the likelihood of Sophie ever being heir apparent, let alone crowned queen, seemed slim at best. The lack of promise in such a prospect was underlined in 1689 when Anne gave birth to a son, William, Duke of Gloucester. As if to ensure that the prospect of Hanoverian rule over England remained a dim one, Parliament subsequently passed the Bill of Rights (1689) which laid down the succession to the English throne but made no mention of Sophie or her children.

While Sophie's chances of becoming queen of England were being thrashed out by Parliament, Leibniz was away collecting documents pertaining to the Guelph history. After setting out from Hanover in October 1687, his grand tour took him through Southern Germany, Austria, and Italy, where he combed the libraries of Rome, Venice, Modena, and Florence, eventually returning in June 1690. By then the talks aimed at reuniting the Catholic and Protestant churches had resumed. The initial promise of the reunion effort had faded until Spinola returned to Hanover in 1688 to breathe new life into it. Leibniz himself had no official role in any of the proceedings or in the documents they produced, and his input in the reunion effort was limited to behind-the-scenes advising and counseling, and attempting to generate support for the enterprise through his acquaintances and cor-

respondents. Sophie likewise had no official role in the proceedings, but she was also able to claim some minor involvement as the hostess to the negotiating parties, and (more importantly) as their occasional intermediary, which led her to draw a light-hearted parallel between Mary—from whom Christianity had originated—and herself, through whom, she hoped, the reunion of the churches could be effected.²⁵ (Sophie's initial hope for the enterprise gradually faded, however, as she believed that there would always be some on both the Catholic and Protestant sides who would impose obstacles to reunion.)²⁶ Leibniz's time away from Hanover ensured that he remained on the fringes of the discussions, having to make do with second-hand reports, but upon his return in 1690 he assumed a more active role, albeit still an unofficial one. In the fall of that year, Sophie's sister, Louise Hollandine (1622–1709), sent a copy of a book by the court historian of Louis XIV, Paul Pelisson, *Reflexions sur les différends de la religion* (Paris, 1686) to Sophie, in the hope that it would inspire her to convert to Catholicism. It had no such effect, however, and Sophie merely passed the book to Leibniz together with an instruction that he draw up a response.²⁷ Leibniz obliged, and a cordial correspondence with Pelisson ensued, conducted through the channels of Sophie and Marie de Brinon, Louise Hollandine's secretary. A year later Bossuet joined in the epistolary exchanges, which until then had largely concerned matters of Catholic doctrine, giving Leibniz the opportunity to press the case for reunion. Bossuet, however, was unsympathetic to Leibniz's suggestion that the Council of Trent be superseded by a new council acceptable to all sides,²⁸ insisting that Trent was not up for negotiation.²⁹ The impasse could not be broken, and further setbacks, such as Pelisson's death in January 1693, Spinola's death in 1695, and Bossuet's with-

25. "As Christianity came into the world through a woman, it would be glorious for me if the union occurred through me." Sophie to Leibniz, 27 January/6 February 1689, A I 5: 401.

26. See Sophie to Louise Hollandine, 10 September 1691, in G. W. Leibniz, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Ludovic Dutens (Geneva, 1768), 1: 512.

27. See Leibniz to Landgrave Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, 3/13 October 1690, A I 6: 114.

28. See Leibniz's "Remarks on the authority of the Council of Trent," 15 June 1693, A I 9: 116–45.

29. See Bossuet to Leibniz, 15 August 1693, A I 9: 153.

drawal from the correspondence with Leibniz the same year, turned church reunion into little more than a distant hope once again.³⁰

Although Sophie and Leibniz were unable to celebrate any progress on the matter of church reunion, they did find some cheer in the elevation of Hanover to the status of an electorate with the Empire. Leibniz had championed Hanover's cause in this regard for many years, and had authored a series of documents that detailed various arguments in favor of Hanover becoming an electorate (the most pressing of which was the need for greater balance in the Electoral College, which at the time comprised three Protestant electors and five Catholic).³¹ Emperor Leopold granted Hanover the status of an electorate of 23 March 1692, and Ernst August was officially invested on 19 December of the same year, following which he took the title of elector and his wife, Sophie, that of electress.

At this time Leibniz's stock was rising almost as fast as the court for which he worked. In May 1691 he received an offer to work for Louis XIV. Although tempted, Leibniz ultimately turned it down, partly due to his belief that taking a position in Louis' court would require him to convert to Catholicism. Although Leibniz had maintained friendly relations with many prominent Catholics, among them Landgrave Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels (1623–93), he had held firm against all attempts to lure him away from Lutheranism.³² Sophie had likewise faced pressures to change her religion, most notably from her sister, Louise Hollandine, who had long wished for Sophie to convert to Catholicism, and took every opportunity presented to her to press her case. In September 1679, during a visit to her sister at Maubisson (the abbey to which Louise Hollandine had fled following her own conversion in 1658), Sophie remained steadfast in the face of

30. The correspondence between Leibniz and Bossuet resumed in 1699, but again foundered on the differing views of the two men on the validity of the Council of Trent. For more information on the reunion effort, see Karin Masser, *Christobal de Gentil de Rojas y Spinola O. F. M. und der lutherische Abt Gerardus Wolterius Molanus: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Unionsbestrebungen der katholischen und evangelischen Kirche im 17. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2002).

31. See, for example, his document "Considerations sur les interests de Bronsvic," A IV 4: 338–58.

32. See for example, Landgrave Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels to Leibniz, 11 September 1687, A II 2: 226.

a sustained conversion attempt mounted by her sister in tandem with Bossuet and Prince William of Fürstenberg.³³ Louise Hollandine's desire for Sophie to convert was also shared by her secretary, Marie de Brinon, who expressed her wish to see Sophie Catholic during the exchanges surrounding church reunion in the early 1690s.³⁴ In the summer of 1697 de Brinon tried her hand at converting Sophie once more, insisting that her salvation could only be assured if she chose the path of Rome,³⁵ but with a practiced hand Sophie diplomatically and gracefully deflected de Brinon's overtures.³⁶

It is not unlikely that de Brinon's repeated conversion attempts were galvanized in part by the common perception of Sophie as one "sitting lightly in her religion."³⁷ Although ostensibly a Calvinist, certain aspects of Sophie's behavior led others to doubt her convictions. For one thing, she was tolerant of other Protestant confessions: her husband was a Lutheran, as were many members of the court, and she regularly attended Lutheran ceremonies with Ernst August.³⁸ Moreover, in the early 1680s she was reported to have been of the view that, as far as she was concerned, her daughter Sophie Charlotte, then a teenager, was not yet of any religion, and which religion she would

33. "I enjoyed their conversation, but thought little of their arguments for my conversion." Sophie, *Memoirs*, 238.

34. See Marie de Brinon to Leibniz, 5 October 1691, A I 7: 159, and 16 July 1691, A I 6: 231, 232. See also Marie de Brinon to Sophie, 18 December 1698 in *Œuvres de Leibniz*, ed. Louis Alexandre Foucher de Careil (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1858–75), 2: 214.

35. See Marie de Brinon to Sophie, 2 July 1697.

36. See Sophie to Marie de Brinon, 13/23 August 1697. Sophie's diplomacy in this matter is all the more remarkable given her personal view of the Roman Church. In the matter of religions, she confided to the Earl of Strafford, "There is none that I abhor so much as the Popish: for there is none so contrary to Christianity." Sophie to the Earl of Strafford, 4 August 1713, in James Macpherson, ed., *Original Papers; containing the Secret History of Great Britain, from the Restoration, to the Accession of the House of Hannover* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1775), 2: 500.

37. Quoted in Maria Kroll, *Sophie, Electress of Hanover: A Personal Portrait* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), 156, and in a slightly different form in Hester W. Chapman, *Privileged Persons* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), 171. Kroll attributes the quotation to James Stuart.

38. See Toland, *An Account of the Courts of Prussia and Hanover*, 56.

eventually adopt would be determined by whether she married a Protestant or a Catholic.³⁹

Further question marks over Sophie's religious convictions were raised as a result of her willingness to associate with heterodox thinkers such as Francis Mercury van Helmont and, later, John Toland. Van Helmont, a Quaker turned proponent of the Kabbalah, had been held by the Inquisition for more than a year in the early 1660s for teaching metempsychosis (the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul) and universal salvation, and was widely considered to be a heretic. In 1696 he visited Hanover twice, and on both occasions was welcomed by Sophie and by Leibniz, who had met him at least twice before. During both these visits both Sophie and Leibniz had extensive discussions with van Helmont about the latter's philosophy, several of them taking place in Sophie's apartments in the palace of Herrenhausen.⁴⁰ Such was Sophie's interest in van Helmont's ideas that she included reports of them in her regular correspondence with her niece, Duchess Elizabeth Charlotte of Orléans, who in return ventured her own thoughts on van Helmont's doctrines and arguments.⁴¹ Yet the time both Sophie and Leibniz devoted to van Helmont during his stay was due more to the quality of the man than to that of his thought; both Leibniz and Sophie admired van Helmont's character, but neither found his philosophy particularly convincing, or at times even intelligible.⁴² Leibniz was, however, happy to arrange at van Hel-

39. "One day I asked the Duchess what the religion of her daughter [Sophie Charlotte] was, who may be thirteen or fourteen years old and was very obliging. She replied that she did not yet have one, that it would be a case of waiting to see what would be the religion of the person she married in order to instruct her in the religion of her husband, whether he be Protestant or Catholic." Jean-Herault de Gourville, *Mémoires de Gourville*, tome second 1670–1702, ed. Léon Lecestre (Paris: Renouard, 1895), 127.

40. See Leibniz to Thomas Burnett, 7/17 March 1696, A I 12: 478.

41. See Elizabeth Charlotte to Sophie, 2 August 1696.

42. See Leibniz, "Thoughts on van Helmont's doctrines," first half of October (?), 1696. After reading van Helmont's book *Two Hundred Queries concerning the Doctrine of the Revolution of Humane Souls* (London, 1684), which contains numerous proofs of metempsychosis drawn from scripture, Sophie instructed Leibniz to ask van Helmont to come up with a similar number of proofs based on reason: "As nearly all of your two hundred queries are based on Holy Scripture, Madam the Electress, who would rather see how your views could be confirmed even further by reason, would like one or two hundred proofs based on reason,

mont's request the reprinting of a German translation of Boëthius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*,⁴³ which van Helmont had originally published in 1667 and which had won the admiration of both Sophie and Sophie Charlotte; Leibniz even added a preface to the new edition extolling the virtues of Sophie and Sophie Charlotte as much as those of the translator's work.⁴⁴ Although van Helmont did not return to Hanover again before his death in December 1698, he did pay a visit to Sophie Charlotte in Berlin in the spring of his final year, where he expounded his Kabbalistic interpretation of the first four chapters of Genesis,⁴⁵ much to Sophie Charlotte's bemusement.⁴⁶

As it happened, 1698 was also the final year of Sophie's husband and Leibniz's employer, Ernst August. He had been sick since the previous fall, and in spite of Sophie's devoted care he died on 23 January/2 February 1698.⁴⁷ As her eldest son, Georg Ludwig, took over the reins of power, Sophie began to spend more time in the palace of Herrenhausen to restore her spirits, taking long walks through the gardens. Georg Ludwig's accession to the pinnacle of government also marked a change in Leibniz's fortunes: whereas Ernst August had indulged

order and experience." Leibniz to Francis Mercury van Helmont, 18 October 1696, *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek* LBr. 389, 53. Van Helmont did not oblige.

43. Boëthius, *Christlich-vernunftgemesser Trost und Unterricht in Widerwertigkeit und Bestützung über den vermeinten Wohl- oder Übelstand der Bösen und Frommen*, ed. and trans. Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (Sulzbach, 1667). The reprinted version was published as Boëthius, *Des fürtrefflichen hochweisen Severini Boetti Christlich-vernunftgemesser Trost and Unterricht in Widerwertigkeit und Bestützung über dem vermeinten Wohl- oder Uebelstand der Bösen und Frommen verteutschet, und mit beygefügtten kurzen Anmerkungen über etliche Ort desselben, zum andermahl aufgelegt*, ed. and trans. Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (Lüneburg, 1697).

44. See Leibniz (and Francis Mercury van Helmont?), "Preface to the Second Edition of Boëthius's *Consolation of Philosophy*," 9 June 1696.

45. The work in question is *Quaedam praemeditatae et consideratae cogitationes super Quatuor priora Capita Libri primi Moysis Genesis nominati* (Amsterdam, 1697). Leibniz had ghost-written this book for van Helmont during the latter's stay in Hanover in 1696. For more information on Leibniz's role in this work, see Anne Becco, "Leibniz et François-Mercure van Helmont: bagatelle pour des monades," in *Magis Naturalis und die Entstehung der modernen Naturwissenschaften*, ed. Albert Heinekamp (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1978): 127–29.

46. See Sophie Charlotte to Leibniz, May 1698.

47. See Leibniz to Sophie Charlotte, 2/12 February 1698, A I 15: 21.

Leibniz's penchant for taking on numerous outside projects, Georg Ludwig was keen for Leibniz to focus on the task for which he was being paid, namely, producing the Guelph history. That the reins had been tightened became increasingly clear to Leibniz when opportunities and invitations to travel came his way, as they increasingly did. In the years immediately following Ernst August's death, many of these invitations came from Sophie Charlotte. In October 1697 Leibniz received word that she proposed to construct an observatory in Berlin.⁴⁸ Leibniz took the opportunity to urge her to pursue a more ambitious plan—the establishment of a scientific academy.⁴⁹ Leibniz had nursed hopes of founding such an academy for years, even proposing the establishment of an imperial scientific academy in Germany, but all of his plans and appeals had fallen on deaf ears. Seizing the opportunity Sophie Charlotte had presented to him, Leibniz offered whatever assistance was required, which resulted in her issuing numerous invitations for him to visit Berlin, and just as many refusals from his new employer, Georg Ludwig, for permission to undertake such a trip. Undeterred, Leibniz made what contributions he could from a distance, one of the most important of which was a recommendation that the fledgling academy be funded by a monopoly on the production of calendars, to tie in with the switch from the Julian to Gregorian calendar due to take place in Germany's Protestant states on 1 March 1700.⁵⁰ With a source of funding now identified, in March 1700 the Elector of Brandenburg decided to approve the founding of what was to be the Berlin Society of Sciences, and invited Leibniz to assist in its establishment.⁵¹ Now able to cite business rather than pleasure as his motive for travel, Leibniz once again approached his employer for permission to take “a short trip” to Berlin.⁵² This time Georg Ludwig relented, and in April 1700 Leibniz made the first of what would turn out to be many visits to Berlin, staying in the palace which Sophie Charlotte dubbed “Lustenburg,”⁵³ i.e., castle of pleasures, a name which Leibniz thought

48. See Johann Jacob Julius Chuno to Leibniz, 2/12 October 1697, A I 14: 597.

49. See Leibniz to Sophie Charlotte, end November 1697, A I 14: 771–73.

50. See Leibniz's paper to the Academy of Sciences of 8 February 1700, A I 18: 346.

51. See Daniel Ernst Jablonski to Leibniz, 23 March 1700, A I 18: 467–68.

52. Leibniz to Georg Ludwig, 28 March 1700, A I 18: 41.

53. Sophie Charlotte to Leibniz, 4 August 1700, A I 18: 179.

fitting not least because of the presence there of Sophie Charlotte herself.⁵⁴ This marked the start of an especially close relationship with Sophie Charlotte, which was to last until her death five years later.

For several months in the spring and summer of 1700 Leibniz played a key role in drawing up the charter for the newly formed Berlin Society of Sciences. The Society itself was officially founded on 11 July 1700, with Leibniz appointed president for life. At its inception, however, and for some time thereafter, it was little more than an institution that existed on paper, and Leibniz's energies often focused on the matter of how the society would be funded, since no contributions would be forthcoming from the Elector of Brandenburg. Leibniz often enlisted Sophie Charlotte's help in the matter of the Society's funding, for example requesting a patent, i.e., exclusive rights of production, on silk.⁵⁵ Although this request was granted, Leibniz's other schemes, such as imposing taxes on wine and paper and seeking donations from the church, were less successful.⁵⁶

While attempting to ensure the financial security of the fledgling Society, Leibniz received word that Princess Anne's last surviving child, William, the Duke of Gloucester, had died, which at that time left only William III and Anne herself between Sophie and the English throne.⁵⁷ This prompted Leibniz to consider how best the Hanoverian succession could be secured, and to this end he drew up various documents detailing not only the right of the House of Hanover to inherit the English throne, but also the strategy to achieve it.⁵⁸ Yet Leibniz's

54. See Leibniz to Bartolomeo Ortensio Mauro, 10 August 1700, A I 18: 800.

55. See Leibniz to Sophie Charlotte, 18 May 1704, Klopp 10: 246.

56. For further information on the Berlin Society of Sciences and Leibniz's role in its establishment, see Jürgen Mittelstrass, "Der Philosoph und die Königin – Leibniz und Sophie Charlotte," in *Leibniz in Berlin, Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft 16*, ed. Hans Poser and Albert Heinekamp (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), 21–24. Ayval Ramati, "Harmony at a Distance: Leibniz's Scientific Academies," *Isis* 87 (1996): 430–52.

57. See Leibniz to Sophie, 21 August 1700, A I 18: 192. Sophie was already aware of the death of William, the Duke of Gloucester, as she had notified Leibniz of it several days earlier; see Sophie to Leibniz, 18 August 1700, A I 18: 190.

58. See, for example, his "Reflexions sur un écrit anglais," 2 January 1701, A I 19: 24–31, and "Considerations sur le droit de la Maison de Bronsvic, à l'égard de la succession d'Angleterre," 17 (?) January 1701, A I 19: 37–48.

enthusiasm for a Hanoverian succession did not rub off on Sophie,⁵⁹ who in his view needed cajoling from courtiers to make a more vigorous assertion of her claims.⁶⁰ Unlike Leibniz, Sophie was aware that asserting her claims too forcefully would likely be counterproductive, and although she did not share Leibniz's view that the English throne was a prize to be secured at any cost, neither did she consider herself to be indifferent to it; in fact she felt aggrieved at what she perceived to be indifference on the part of her son, Georg Ludwig, with regard to Hanover's claims.⁶¹

Although it is a commonplace to refer to Leibniz's involvement in the matter of succession, it is important not to overstate the part he played. At no stage did he have an official role in the proceedings, and the contributions he did make to the Hanoverian cause were, at best, in the capacity of unofficial advisor, and at worst, the well-intentioned interventions of a behind-the-scenes busybody eager to assist in any way he thought he could.⁶² In the 1690s, when Sophie's path to the throne was by no means certain, Leibniz actively promoted her claims via his English correspondents, and when prospects for the Hanoverian succession had brightened, following the death of Queen Anne's son, he suggested the dissemination of pro-Hanover pamphlets in England and if required, his journeying to London to argue the Hanoverian cause.⁶³ Leibniz was advised by the Hanoverian Resident in London that such schemes were unnecessary, since

59. "[I]f I were younger I would have good reason to flatter myself with a crown, but now, if I had the choice, I would prefer to increase my years rather than my grandeur." Sophie to Leibniz, 18 August 1700, A I 18: 190. In her letter Sophie actually wrote "I would prefer to decrease my years"; Leibniz corrected her mistake on his copy of her letter.

60. See Leibniz to George Stepney, 18 January 1701, A I 19: 354.

61. See Sophie to Baron von Schüß, 22 April 1701, in Richard Doebner, ed., *Briefe der Königin Sophie Charlotte von Preußen und der Kurfürstin Sophie von Hannover* (Leipzig: Preußischen Staatsarchiven, 1905), 147 (hereafter cited as Doebner).

62. The fact that Leibniz was not a key player is given weight by the contents of Macpherson, *Original Papers*, which in two large volumes rounds up the key letters and papers connected with the Hanoverian succession. It is telling that Macpherson includes not a single letter of Leibniz's. For an analysis of many of the key papers relating to the Hanoverian succession, see Percy Thornton, "The Hanover papers," *The English Historical Review* 1 (1886): 756–77. Leibniz is not mentioned once in this paper.

63. See Leibniz's letter to George Stepney, 18 January 1701, A I 19: 355.

England was already sufficiently well-disposed toward the prospect of Hanoverian succession.⁶⁴ This proved to be correct, and events in England unfolded to the outcome Leibniz desired without need for his planned intervention.

While Leibniz busied himself with ways to further the Hanoverian cause, moves were afoot that would ultimately result in Sophie Charlotte attaining the same rank in Prussia as Leibniz hoped Sophie would attain in England, namely, that of queen. In the fall of 1700 Sophie and Sophie Charlotte journeyed to Aachen, and then to Brussels and Holland, where they intended to press the case for the latter's husband, Friedrich III, to be elevated to the status of King in his territory of Prussia. Although mother and daughter had invited Leibniz, he had already made plans to travel to Töplitz,⁶⁵ and therefore missed out on the lobbying that resulted in Friedrich being crowned Friedrich I, king in Prussia, on 18 January 1701.

That events could take a positive turn without Leibniz's involvement was demonstrated again six months later when, in June 1701, the English parliament passed the Act of Settlement, which named Sophie as the rightful heir to the English throne should either William III or Anne not bear further issue. On 14 August of that year, Sophie received the English delegation led by Lord Macclesfield, who delivered to Sophie a copy of the Act of Settlement, which was to secure her dynasty. Arriving just ahead of the main delegation was the Irish-born freethinker John Toland,⁶⁶ who had caused much consternation in England with his *Christianity not Mysterious* (London, 1696). Toland had booked his ticket to Hanover by openly supporting the Hanoverian succession to the English throne in his book *Anglia Libera*,⁶⁷ a copy of which he personally presented to Sophie during his stay. By all accounts Toland appears to have made a good impression

64. See George Stepney to Leibniz, 1 May 1701, A I 19: 640.

65. See Leibniz to Johann Jacob Julius Chuno, 31 December 1700, A I 19: 319, and Leibniz to Johann von Besser, 4 January 1701, A I 19: 324.

66. See Leibniz to Claude Nicaise, 24 August 1701, in *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–1890), 2: 593 (hereafter cited as G).

67. John Toland, *Anglia Libera: or, the Limitation and Succession of the Crown of England explain'd and asserted* (London, 1701).

on both Sophie and Sophie Charlotte, having met the latter during a trip to Berlin later the same year,⁶⁸ and he often accompanied Sophie during her walks in the garden of Herrenhausen.⁶⁹ Yet when Toland's travels brought him back to Germany in July 1702, Sophie's willingness to associate with him had cooled: although she had personally enjoyed Toland's company during his earlier visit, she had subsequently been advised that, for the sake of her own reputation in England and of not jeopardizing the Hanoverian succession, it would be better to give a wide berth to someone widely suspected to be, at best, a man of questionable character, and at worst, an atheist.⁷⁰ Sophie reluctantly heeded this advice, and let it be known that Toland was no longer welcome in her court.⁷¹ Toland acquiesced to Sophie's wishes, and when his travel plans took him through Hanover in November of 1702, he ensured that his path did not cross that of the court, leading Sophie to quip that by avoiding anyone he had done her a kindness.⁷² Sophie

68. "I always find his intention to be right and proper, despite the fury of his enemies." Sophie to Leibniz, 29 October 1701, A I 20: 51. See also A. N., "Some Memoirs of the Life and Writings of John Toland in a letter to S*** B*** L***, May 26th 1722," in *A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Toland now first publish'd from his Original Manuscripts: with some memoirs of his life and writings*, ed. Pierre Desmaizeaux (London: J. Peele, 1726) 1: lvi–lvii.

69. "As Madam the Electress likes conversing with intelligent people, she took pleasure in hearing Mr. Toland's discourses and in walking with him in the garden of Herrenhausen in the company of other Englishmen, some of whom, unfamiliar with the nature of Madam the Electress, imagined that they spoke together of important matters of State and that Her Electoral Highness took him into her trust, whereas I, who very often witnessed their discussions, know that they usually talked about sublime and curious matters." Leibniz to Thomas Burnett, 27 February 1702, A I 20: 809.

70. See for example an official report on Toland's character prepared at the end of May 1702 by Ludwig Justus Sinold, *Niedersächsische Landesarchiv* Hann. 93, 485, 3–4. According to the report, both the Archbishop of Canterbury (Thomas Tenison) and the Bishop of Salisbury (Gilbert Burnet) had warned against associating with Toland.

71. "I received so many letters against Toland as being a person whose conversation could do me harm in England, that I found myself obliged to make him know through Braun that I think it would be better for him not to come, although his conversation pleases the Queen as well as me." Sophie to Hans Caspar von Bothmer, 24 June 1702, Doebner 219. The warning letter to Toland was written by Georg Christoph von Braun, groom of the chamber to Sophie.

72. See Sophie to Leibniz, 27 November 1702, Klopp 8: 402.

was nevertheless bemused at the fuss surrounding Toland, which in her view he had done little to deserve.⁷³

Toland found a warmer welcome in Berlin, where Sophie Charlotte invited him to stay as her guest. Sophie was there when he arrived, on 26 July 1702,⁷⁴ though she was careful not to grant him a private audience.⁷⁵ Leibniz too was present in Berlin at the time of Toland's arrival, having himself traveled there a little over six weeks earlier at Sophie Charlotte's request.⁷⁶ Sophie Charlotte wasted little time in getting Leibniz and Toland to dazzle her with their philosophical insights, and in pitting the two philosophers against each other in debates,⁷⁷ though Toland's conduct in them was sometimes a source of exasperation for Leibniz.⁷⁸ But despite (or perhaps because

73. "I...do not have any commerce with him since such a fuss has been made over him. Yet when I ask what he has done that is so horrible, only his religion is mentioned. It would be good if he were the only one in England without one." Sophie to Hans Caspar von Bothmer, 5 August 1702, Doebner 220. See also Sophie to Baron von Schüß, 23 May 1702, Doebner 157, and 12 September 1702, Doebner 164.

74. See Leibniz to Franz Ernst von Platen, 29 July 1702, Klopp 8: 357–58, and Sophie Charlotte to Hans Caspar von Bothmer, 29 July 1702, Doebner 16.

75. "He has come here [Berlin], and seeing Madam the Electress in the garden, he immediately went to present her with a harangue printed by the Archbishop of York, written for the coronation of the Queen [Anne], and said that this prelate had given it to him for this purpose... Afterwards he walked around the promenade with the Queen [Sophie Charlotte] and Madam the Electress, and the rest of the company. Madam the Electress seems in no way inclined to speak very much to him in private, for she rightly thinks that he will not be able to give her any great insights or be of much help any more, and that putting much trust in him would be injurious to some people." Leibniz to Franz Ernst von Platen, 29 July 1702, Klopp 8: 358. The "harangue" Leibniz refers to here is John Sharp's *A Sermon Preach'd at the Coronation of Queen Anne, in the Abby-Church of Westminster, April XXIII, MDCCII* (London, 1702).

76. "I assure you that it would be an act of charity to come here, for the Queen has no living soul with whom she can speak." Henriette Charlotte von Pöllnitz to Leibniz, 2 May 1702, Klopp 10: 146.

77. "Mr Leibniz is the only company I have here at present. I make him argue a bit with Toland." Sophie Charlotte to Hans Caspar von Bothmer, 30 September 1702, Doebner 21.

78. For example, in a report to Sophie of Toland's denial of cannibalism in America (reports of which had been invented by the Spanish, according to Toland), Leibniz expressed bewilderment that such an apparently intelligent man could deny such a well-established fact, which led him to the conclusion that Toland was only interested in advancing paradoxes and contradicting received wisdom. See Leibniz to Sophie, 29 September 1702, Klopp 8: 371–72.

of) the differing views of the two men, this was a very productive time for both Leibniz and Toland, in no small part due to the encouragement of Sophie Charlotte, who frequently asked both men to commit their thoughts to writing for her benefit. A number of the essays Toland wrote at Sophie Charlotte's behest during his stay in Berlin were later collected together and published under the title *Letters to Serena* (London, 1704),⁷⁹ in the preface to which he praised Serena (i.e., Sophie Charlotte) as "Mistriss of a vast Compass of Knowledge."⁸⁰ Many of Leibniz's essays from this time were a mixture of written-to-order responses to Toland's work,⁸¹ and pieces written in response to views Toland had aired.⁸² However, Toland was not the only stimulus Leibniz had to take up his pen. Shortly before his departure for Berlin he had received a copy of the second edition of Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1702), which contained a critique of the philosophical doctrine for which he was most widely known at the time—that of pre-established harmony, which holds that soul and body do not causally interact but independently follow parallel courses pre-established in the beginning by God. Following his arrival in Berlin Leibniz occupied himself with preparing a response to Bayle's critique.⁸³ The content of Leibniz's response provided material for discussion during his audiences with Sophie Charlotte, though

For her part, Sophie mused that it was little surprise Toland would take the side of cannibals, as he had made so many enemies that one day cannibals would be the only supporters he had left. See Sophie to Leibniz, 4 October 1702, Klopp 8: 376.

79. Another pairing of essays written while Sophie Charlotte's guest in Berlin was later published as *An account of the Courts of Prussia and Hanover; sent to a minister of state in Holland by Mr. Toland* (London, 1705). These were written in August and September 1702, though not for Sophie Charlotte, as is clear from the title.

80. Toland, *Letters to Serena*, preface §9.

81. See Leibniz to Sophie Charlotte, August–early November (?) 1702.

82. See Leibniz, "Reflections on the Doctrine of a Single Universal Spirit," August–early November (?) 1702.

83. "Réponse aux réflexions contenues dans la seconde édition du Dictionnaire critique de M. Bayle, article Rorarius, sur le système de l'harmonie préétablie." Although the paper was completed in 1702, it did not appear in print until 1716, when it was published in the journal *Histoire critique de la République des lettres* 11 (1716): 78–114. Reprinted in G 4: 554–71. English translation in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969), 575–85 (hereafter cited as L).