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## Book Reviews

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### 'Act of piety' on behalf of Leibniz

by Nora Hamerman

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#### **G.W. Leibniz's Monadology: An Edition for Students**

by Nicholas Rescher

University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1991  
323 pages, hardbound, \$39.95;  
paperbound, \$19.95

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Professor Rescher, the former president of the American Leibniz Society, describes this book as "an act of piety in its attempt to compile on his behalf the book that Leibniz himself never wrote." Using the *Monadology*, a "telegraphic summary of Leibniz's system of philosophy" written near the end of his life in 1714, as an outline, the Rescher edition collects Leibniz's widely scattered discussions of his basic ideas.

The book will prove especially appealing to readers interested in deepening their understanding of the political and philosophical movement led today by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., a political prisoner of the Bush administration who has recently declared his candidacy for the 1992 U.S. presidential election. In an era in which American Presidents have been intellectual pygmies—Lyndon Johnson, for example, was incapable, according to testimony of associates, of reading more than a page at a time—LaRouche stands out as a true man of culture, who not only reads widely in science, music, history, philosophy, and other such topics, but has made, or inspired, extremely important breakthroughs in these fields. LaRouche's unique intellectual contribution began with his 1952 application of the mathematical physics of Bernhard Riemann and Georg Cantor, to the notion of "physical economy" first expressed by Leibniz. In all of his autobiographical writings, LaRouche cites his boyhood reading of Leibniz as the seminal influence on the development of his thought.

Leibniz was born on July 1, 1646, in Leipzig in Germany, where his father was a professor of moral philosophy. A child prodigy, at the age of 20 he rejected a university career in order to enter public service. According to Rescher's introduction, Leibniz published few books, but rather devoted

his writing activities to periodical articles and to an intense correspondence with the leading minds of his day. Many of his works were in French or Latin; even to this day, a good deal of his correspondence and sketches remain unpublished. Leibniz died in 1716.

#### **'Outstanding range of interests'**

To quote Rescher, "Leibniz possessed an outstanding range of interests and capacities. Mathematics, physics, geology, philosophy, logic, philology, theology, history, jurisprudence, politics, and economics, are all subjects to which he made original contributions of the first rank." He managed to be both a scholar, a courtier, and a public servant. He traveled all over Europe—to London, to Paris (where he devoted himself to mathematics and started the studies that led to his invention of integral calculus), all over Germany, Austria, and Italy. He urged the creation of the academy in St. Petersburg, in Russia.

The Introduction, besides a concise biography, includes an overview of the sources and available editions of Leibniz's work. This is followed by Rescher's own translation of the *Monadology* from an authoritative edition of the French original. Rescher then provides an outline of the thematic material of Leibniz's piece, and, as Chapter 4, he lists the analogies and principles used by Leibniz. With Chapter 5, "Text and Commentary," begins the core of the book. Each section of the *Monadology* is presented, followed by the original French text, followed by related selections from other works by Leibniz, such as his earlier book, *Theodicy*, the companion short work of 1714, *Principles of Reason Based on Nature and Grace*, and *Correspondence with Antoine Arnaud*, of 1686-90, a work of extraordinary importance which appears not to be available in full text in English, although a full German version does exist in print. At the end of each of the 90 sections, Rescher provides his own commentary.

#### **The power of optimism**

At the end, he interprets Leibniz's philosophical optimism, summarized in the famous assertion that we live in the "best of all possible worlds." Rescher shows how dishonestly it was lampooned by Voltaire in the Dr. Pangloss of *Candide*. As Rescher puts it, "Leibniz's closing strikes a powerfully optimistic note, setting out in strong terms his personal vision of what a genuine love of God demands—confident faith in a divinely ordained order of justice and benevolence. Leibniz does not, however, hold that this present state (or indeed any other particular state) of the world could not be better. On the contrary, he inclines toward a conception of progress that sees the world as always (or generally) getting better in the future than it was earlier on."

It would be a good sign for the future of the United States, if the demand for the book, arising out of the intellectual ferment around LaRouche's ideas, were to result in a larger run for this book and a lowering of the price.