

# Dennis Speed Leibniz and America: The Best of All Possible Revolutions

This is the edited transcript of the presentation by Dennis Speed as part of Panel 4, “The Art of Optimism: Using the Classical Principle To Change the World,” of the Schiller Institute’s Sept. 10–11 Conference, “Inspiring Humanity To Survive the Greatest Crisis in World History.” The full video of Panel 4 is available [here](#).



Schiller Institute

Dennis Speed

I’m going to start today with a quote from Cotton Mather, one of the earliest of the Founding Fathers. He wrote “Things for a Distressed People To Think Upon,” in 1696, in which he says:

There seems to be a shameful shrink, of all sorts of men among us, from that greatness, and goodness, which adorned our ancestors: we grow little every way; little in our civil matters, little in our military matters, little in our ecclesiastical matters; we dwindle away, to nothing.

That’s what he thought in 1696.

We are in an important revolutionary era. Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche, many years ago, wrote a piece called “A Revolution Is a Question



EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

Lyndon LaRouche



MoD/Joel Rouse

Queen Elizabeth II

of Time.” Two recent, intersecting events—the Sept. 8 death of Queen Elizabeth II, the longest-reigning monarch in English and British history, and the 100th birthday of her nemesis, physical economist Lyndon LaRouche—represent a true coincidence of opposites: the close and fall of one era of history, and the opening and rise of another. In that coincidence of opposites is conjoined the true current and future history of the American Revolution.

In the year that Elizabeth became Queen, 1952, Lord Bertrand Russell, whom LaRouche once referred to as “the most evil man of the 20th century,” gave an interview, reflecting on his 80th birthday.

**Bertrand Russell** [video]: It’s very difficult for anybody born since 1914 to realize how *profoundly* different the world is now from what it was when I was a child. The change has been almost unbelievable. I try as best I can, in spite of my years, to get used to living in a world of atom bombs; a world where ancient empires vanish like morning mist, where we have to accustom ourselves to Asiatic self-ascension....

And the world where I was young was a *solid* world, a world where all kinds of things that have now disappeared were thought to be going to last forever. It didn’t dawn on people that they would cease. English people certainly regarded English naval supremacy as a sort of law of nature. “Britannia ruled the waves.” It didn’t occur to us that that might stop.

**Interviewer:** Even with Bismarck?

**Russell:** Bismarck was regarded as a rascal, and we thought of him as a sort of uneducated farmer. But it was assumed that the influence of Goethe and Schiller

would gradually bring Germany back to a more civilized point of view.... [end video]

Bertrand Russell's understanding of Friedrich Schiller, and of Germany, and of Bismarck, is not shared by the Schiller Institute. It should be pointed out that Schiller admired the American Revolution. Bertrand Russell did not. Today, there exists the peculiar idea that the American Revolution was a product of bad British management of disputes with a section of its colonies. Lyndon LaRouche thought otherwise. In a 1996 [essay](#), "Leibniz and the List Hypothesis," regarding the great German American economist, Friedrich List, LaRouche wrote:

The death of England's Queen Anne [in 1714] marked the victory of a Venice-directed, financier-oligarchical faction of the Duke of Marlborough and Hanover's George Ludwig, over England's patriots. In this circumstance, the defeated patriots turned their attention to the semi-autonomous colonies in North America, viewing those colonies as the only hope for a future return of England, Scotland, and Ireland, each to its own patriotic cause.

As the records show the historian, those English, Irish, and Scottish patriots, typified by Jonathan Swift, formed a joint international network, headed by Germany's Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

The American Revolution was, in fact, a deliberate attempt to establish the political governmental conditions in which the science of physical economy, essentially invented by Gottfried Leibniz in his 1671 [essay](#), "Society and Economy," would become the basis of human progress. Wrote Leibniz:

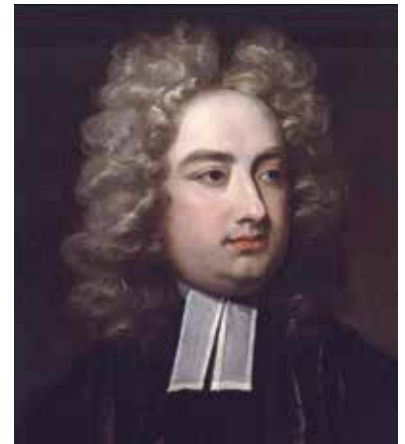
Monopoly is avoided, since this Society always desires to give commodities at their fair price, or even more cheaply in many cases, by causing manufactured goods to be produced locally rather than having them imported. It will especially preclude the formation of any monopoly of merchants or a cartel of artisans, along with any excessive accumulation of wealth by the merchants or excessive poverty of the artisans—which is particularly the case in Holland, where the majority of merchants are riding high,

whereas the artisans are kept in continual poverty and toil. This is harmful to the republic, since even Aristotle maintains that artisanship ought to be one of the worthiest occupations. *Nam Mercatura transfert tantum, Manufactura gignit.* [For trade can carry only as much as the factories produce.] And why, indeed, should so many people be poor and miserable for the benefit of such a small handful? After all, is not the entire purpose of Society to release the artisan from his misery?

Releasing the artisan, that is the worker, from his misery, did not mean that people gave up working. Leibniz contended that the very opposite would happen. As labor, through technological progress, elevated



Christoph Bernhard Francke  
Gottfried Leibniz



Charles Jervas  
Jonathan Swift

work from repetitive, monotonous activity, people would work more, precisely because they enjoyed being creative, as well as productive. As for agriculture, in that same essay, Leibniz wrote,

The farmer is not in need, since he is sure of his bread, and the merchant has more than enough. The remaining people are either destitute or government servants. Society can likewise satisfy all the farmer's own needs, providing it always buys from him at a reliably fair price, whether that be cheap or dear. We can thereby ensure for all eternity against natural food shortages, since Society can then have what amounts to a general grain reserve.

It was neither capitalism, nor socialism, nor any

other “ism” that Leibniz sought to establish. The idea of advancing labor away from plantation slavery to manufactures—what Alexander Hamilton would make, in his 1791 [Report on Manufactures](#), the basis for consolidating America’s revolution against Britain—was the *opposite* of what John Locke’s Bank of England and Royal African Company would practice, whatever words about liberty they preached. Leibniz’s groundbreaking work on the steam engine and “heat-powered machines” meant that he and his collaborator, Denis Papin, anticipated the work of Robert Fulton and others by 100 years.

It is in part because of the mistaken idea that Locke inspired the American Constitution, through writings like the “Second Treatise of Government,” that the Leibnizian design for “the best of all possible economies” has not been dominant in the United States. Consider these words from 1671, and how far short we in the United States fall from this view today. Again, from *Society and Economy*:

Through establishment of such a Society, we eliminate a deep-seated drawback within many republics, which consists in allowing each and all to sustain themselves as they please, allowing one individual to become rich at the expense of a hundred others, or allowing him to collapse, dragging down with him the hundreds who have put themselves under his care. An individual may or may not ruin his own family, and then may or may not run through his own and others’ funds.

... Each country shall ... supply itself with those necessary commodities and manufactured goods which previously came from abroad, so that it will not have to procure from others what it can have for itself; each country shall be shown how properly to use its own domestic resources. In a country which has sufficient wool, manufacturing shall be established for the preparation of cloth; a country with an abundance of flax shall occupy its populace with the production of clothing; and so forth. And thus, no country among those which permit Society the proper degree of freedom, will be favored over the other; rather, each shall be made to flourish in those areas in which God and Nature have allowed it to excel.

Although many know that John Locke’s formulation of “Life, Liberty, and Property” was rejected by

Franklin, Adams, and even Thomas Jefferson in their writing of the “Declaration of Independence,” in favor of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness,” most today no longer know why. The Founders explicitly rejected the outlook that Adam Smith put forward in his 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and of his later *The Wealth of Nations*, precisely because they understood Leibniz’s opposition to John Locke, who believed that Happiness was “the utmost pleasure we are capable of.” Leibniz thought differently. From his *New Essays on Human Understanding*:

I do not know whether the greatest pleasure is possible. I believe rather that it can grow *ad infinitum*....

I believe then that happiness is a lasting pleasure, which could not be so without there being a continual progress to new pleasures. Happiness is then, so to speak, a road through pleasures; and pleasure is merely a step and an advancement toward happiness, the shortest which can be made according to the present impressions, but not always the best. The right road may be missed in the desire to follow the shortest, as the stone which goes straight may encounter obstacles too soon, which prevent it from advancing quite to the center of the Earth. This shows that it is the reason and the will which transport us toward happiness, but that feeling and desire merely lead us to pleasure....

True happiness ought always to be the object of our desires, but there is ground for doubting whether it is. For often we hardly think of it, and I have remarked here more than once that the less desire is guided by reason, the more it tends to present pleasure and not to happiness, that is to say, to lasting pleasure.

Leibniz was the greatest scientific thinker of his age. He was the inventor of the calculus, in 1676, at the age of 30. His work on binary numbers anticipated the modern computer. We have already mentioned his collaboration on advancing the steam engine.

But Leibniz was also a master organizer. He finally met with Russia’s Peter the Great shortly before his own death in 1716. But 19 years before that meeting, Leibniz had expressed his great interest in working with Peter and Russia to discover whether there was a land-bridge connecting the American continent to Asia. In her [essay](#),

“Peter the Great’s Intermezzo with G.W. Leibniz and G. Delisle,” Author Kristina Küntzel-Witt writes:

The 52-year-old German Protestant scientist was fascinated by the idea of a young tsar traveling incognito through half of Europe. Leibniz tried hard to establish contact with Peter, but could only do so through François Lefort, the tsar’s influential old friend. A fixed point in Leibniz’s ideas was the question of whether there was a land-bridge between Asia and America: as early as 1697, he sent a detailed plan about his ideas to Lefort in order to have them presented to the tsar.

He wrote: “To make the maps, we must send engineers, observe the high points, longitudes, and variations of the compass, and determine the coasts, especially in the Northeast, as much as we can, to learn if Asia is joined to America, or if we can pass between them.”

In their meeting in 1716, Leibniz presented Peter with a plan for a system of educational institutions devoted to teaching the sciences to all people, but he also proposed how those institutions would help organize the state. Peter’s Russian Academy of Sciences was founded in 1724.

Leibniz’s interest in and respect for China has been well documented. As he [wrote](#) in the Preface to his *No-vissima Sinica*,

I consider it a singular plan of the fates that human civilization and refinement should today be concentrated, as it were, in the two extremes of our continent, in Europe and in China, which adorns the Orient as Europe does the opposite edge of the Earth. Perhaps Supreme Providence has ordained such an arrangement, so that as the most cultivated and distant peoples stretch out their arms to each other, those in between may gradually be brought to a better way of life.

As for his work in England, which was not exactly consummated, it is best to read the [work](#) by historian Graham Lowry, *How the Nation Was Won*. Lowry tells us:

As early as 1670, while serving the Elector of Mainz, and in touch with the French nation-building forces associated with Mazarin and later Colbert, Leibniz proposed a Grand Design

for an *harmonia universalis* (universal harmony) of sovereign republics, which included a crucial role for America.

Although historians have generally sought to minimize Leibniz’s significance and virtually obliterate his importance to America, he was no stranger to New England’s leaders. Among his correspondents was John Winthrop Jr. (1606-1676), the leading American astronomer, physicist, and industrial entrepreneur of his day. As Governor of Connecticut, he secured for it the virtually sovereign status his father [John Winthrop] had established for the Massachusetts Bay colony.

I should also add that John Winthrop Jr. was also the head of Harvard College for 20 years, from 1661 to 1681, I believe.

In England itself, a pro-republican faction had grouped itself around the then-reigning Queen Anne. England and France were then involved in a fratricidal war, draining both nations. Arrayed against those republican forces, such as Robert Harley, Lord High Treasurer, effectively chief minister to Queen Anne—were John Locke, Isaac Newton, and the newly-created Bank of England, a private entity that came into existence in 1694; and, by the way, remained private until 1946. To counter the Bank of England, Harley’s faction had proposed legislation to limit interest rates to 4%; establish a public accounts commission of the House of Commons to investigate corrupt practices of the City of London; and the creation of a national land bank in February 1696, which was to be a source of low-cost credit for improving farming. They also published Daniel Defoe’s *Essays Upon Several Projects*, which proposed that the bank itself be placed under public authority. All of those measures were rejected.

Then, the republicans of England looked to Leibniz. Partially with the assistance of Leibniz, that faction nearly pulled off a coup which would have meant that Leibniz would have become a decisive presence in England, and perhaps prime minister.

Through a change in what was called the Act of Settlement, in 1701, English republicans sought to install Princess Sophie of Hanover on the throne of England and were successful in having the Act of Settlement read such that a Hanover was, in fact, placed on the throne, but not Sophie. This would have meant that, together with Leibniz’s own scientific work, it would have made Leibniz, and his pro-development faction, hegemonic. But, it did not work. Before she could come

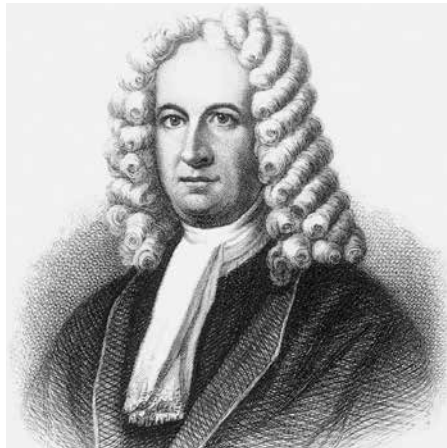
to power, Sophie died in June of 1714. Anne died in August, and Sophie’s brother Ludwig came to power. He was a much different entity, effectively ending these prospects. It would be the supporters of Leibniz in America, including Philadelphia’s James Logan and later, Benjamin Franklin, who would carry forward his Grand Design. That would be in the form of the American Revolution of 1776.

So, Leibniz did not win the battle for his world of universal harmony in his lifetime. So why did Leibniz believe, that “this is the best of all possible worlds,” an idea that is often satirized, as it was by Voltaire, and later, by Leonard Bernstein in his opera *Candide*? Why did he believe that the universe itself had a moral arc, and that the discovery of the universe’s laws by humanity provided the greatest of human pleasures?

In the last two months, as a result of the imaged transmissions received on Earth from the James Webb Space Telescope, our fundamental ideas about the origin, composition, and even destiny of the universe have been shaken—even including the sacred idea of “the Big Bang.” The image of the universe as a big pot stuck around and far above one’s head with stars and galaxies gleaming in one location or another, is shattered. The pot-head’s guide to the galaxy, Euclidean space time—up/down, right/left, forward/backward—as well as mere non-Euclidean space time—can no longer be said to map the real uni-

verse in which we actually live.

The very immensity of the universe now known to exist, just under 100 years after the American astronomer Edwin Hubble demonstrated that the Milky Way was just one of many galaxies, was discussed in a June 22 [article](#), “There are more galaxies in the Universe than even Carl Sagan ever imagined,” on the website [bigthink.com](#), which stated:



James Logan

(unknown artist)

Our most detailed observations of the distant universe, from the Hubble eXtreme Deep Field, gave us an estimate of 170 billion galaxies. A theoretical calculation from a few years ago—the first to account for galaxies too small, faint, and distant to be seen—put the estimate far higher, at 2 trillion. But even that estimate is too low. There ought to be at least 6 trillion, and perhaps more like 20 trillion galaxies, if we’re ever able to

count them all.

The immensity of the universe, though, is still smaller than the size of the human mind. Why? Because the mind contains the universe itself as an idea, because the mind has no size-measurement as such. The mind is not the same as the brain, which is of a definite physical size, weight, and shape. The mind is metaphysical. It has no place as such, but has its center everywhere, and its circumference nowhere. The mind has boundaries, but is without limit. If, as one thinker has said, “The universe is a thought of God,” then consider these words of Albert Einstein:

I want to know how God created this world. I’m not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know [God’s] thoughts; the rest are just details.

That was the outlook that Gottfried Leibniz and his American collaborators and fellow discoverers brought to lawful political practice in his time, for all people. His *was* the best of all possible revolutions and best of all possible worlds, because of his commitment to permanent creativity, which can only become a greater pleasure because more—and in fact—all of humanity is called upon to participate in it.



NASA/ESA/The Hubble Heritage Team (STScI/AURA)/CSA

*A portion of the Carina Nebula, imaged by the Hubble Space Telescope (left) and the James Webb Space Telescope (right).*