

On Leibniz, Expanded Edition

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Nicholas Rescher

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Nicholas Rescher (born 1928), a leading American philosopher, has much to say about Leibniz. Hence, in principle such a collection of twenty-one articles dealing with Leibniz's life and thought is praiseworthy. This paperback edition is an expanded version of the original.

Unfortunately, the book disappoints in several ways. For example, its structure is not quite clear. In his short preface (p. ix) Rescher speaks of eleven chapters into which the articles have been thematically organized; the reader will look in vain for such chapters. The articles are simply numbered all the way through, from one to twenty-one. Hence, there is no closing chapter 11 that "offers a case study of how current issues can be addressed on Leibnizian principles". In reality the last two papers deal with the question of whether Leibniz was ennobled (he was not!) and his difficult relationship with Johann Daniel Crafft.

According to Rescher's remark (p. ix) the articles are reprinted unrevised as originally published. However, on page 105 he explains that the fourth essay on Leibniz and the plurality of space-time frameworks is a "somewhat revised version of a paper of the same title that appeared" in 1977. Unfortunately in only eleven cases does he

mention the references to the original publications from 1977 through to 2006 (papers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14). Sometimes the reader gets this information from Rescher's homepage: www.pitt.edu/~rescher. There it is mentioned that paper 7 appeared in 2011 and paper 19 in 2003.

Worse than this editorial carelessness is the fact that the unrevised reprinted papers are riddled with mistakes. When Greek, Latin, German, or French words appear, the text is frequently distorted by incorrect spelling. For example, one finds substituti for substitui (p. 4, line -4), principe for princeps (p. 46, line -11), possibilatis for possibilitatis (p. 67, note 34), cilui for celui (p. 108, line -4), Veterorum for Veterum (p. 131, note 12), and, in many places, Die philosophische Schriften for Die philosophischen Schriften.

All other mistakes have been reprinted, too. For example, "the North American G. W. Leibniz Society was allegedly launched in 1900" (p. 298, line 9); "the meaning of apokalypsis is not destruction but revelation" (p. 177).

Such a reprint is indeed annoying, while a revised, corrected reprint would have been welcome, for Rescher's articles remain interesting and valuable contributions to the research on Leibniz. He is right in believing (p. ix) "that the points they make remain substantially tenable and intact in the face of subsequent investigations". We cite the following articles from the book as an indication of the range of Rescher's contributions. In his papers *Leibniz on possible worlds*, *Contingentia mundi*, and *Leibniz and the concept of a system*, Rescher rightly emphasizes that Leibniz drew his inspiration from mathematics, that Leibniz the philosopher was indebted to Leibniz the mathematician. The two papers *Leibniz on intermonadic relations* and *Leibniz and the plurality of space-time frameworks*

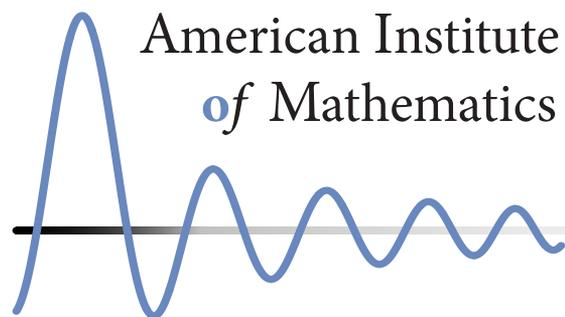
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refer to some principles Leibniz held, such as the notion that “everything is interconnected” and the principle of identity of indiscernibles. The papers *Leibniz and issues of eternal recurrence*, *Leibnizian Neo-platonism and rational mechanics*, and *Leibniz and the world’s improvability* discuss the influence of ancient philosophers on Leibniz’s thinking. *The epistemology of inductive reasoning in Leibniz* tries to demonstrate that Leibniz was an empiricist. Other papers discuss Leibniz’s interest in law, probability theory, combinatorics, and cryptography; his projects for the improvement of medical practice; and certain periods of Leibniz’s life (the Parisian period, his visit to Vienna, etc.).

Especially interesting for Europeans are the two papers that describe the American Leibnizian scholarship and Leibniz’s influence on American philosophy. The Austrian Kurt Gödel is dealt with as an American thinker.

This volume is a valuable resource on the life and thinking of Leibniz. And yet, this reviewer cannot avoid the conclusion that an opportunity has been missed. Had more attention been paid to the overall presentation and to correcting errors, the book could have been a truly outstanding contribution.



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