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2. LEIBNIZ AND MYSTICISM

Leibniz's scattered remarks about mysticism sound a consistent theme: there is something right in what the mystics say, but it is often badly or confusedly expressed. Never prepared to accept uncritically the claims of mystical writers, Leibniz also is unwilling to reject them entirely: "I strongly approve of applying oneself to correcting the abuses of the mystics, but as there is sometimes an excellent point mixed in with the errors. . . I would not want to lose the wheat with the chaff."¹ Remarks such as this go beyond a simple profession of tolerance or acceptance of the right of mystics to advance views that might be seen as heretical or inimical to the interests of established religion. In the case of at least some mystics, Leibniz voices support for the content of their teachings and suggests that despite the obscurity of their utterances, mystics are to be praised for their ability to arouse piety in their followers.

Although it is difficult to identify precisely whom Leibniz has in mind when he speaks of "mystics" or a "mystical theology," we may assume that he had a fairly good knowledge of the Christian mystical tradition, from its beginnings in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa up to its seventeenth-century flowering in the quietism of Miguel de Molinos, Jeanne Guyon and Fénelon.² Characteristic of Christian mysticism is the emphasis it gives to the possibility of a direct and unmediated apprehension of God, one free of the limits intrinsic to ordinary forms of sensory and rational knowledge. This relationship is typically described as a "union with God," and is often understood as based on an all-encompassing love between God and his creatures.³

Leibniz's cautious support for mystical writers has been seen by some as corroborative of a deep mystical current within his own thought. In the wake of the influential studies of Bertrand Russell⁴ and Louis Couturat,⁵ both of whom downplayed the importance of religious elements in Leibniz's philosophy, there appeared two books by Jean Baruzi making the case for Leibniz as a mystic.⁶ In Baruzi's view, the emphasis placed by Russell and Couturat on the logical underpinnings of Leibniz's system is entirely appropriate; yet this approach, he claimed, neglects the deeper

inspiration for Leibniz's philosophy, which is "essentially mystical."⁷ The core of Leibniz's mysticism, for Baruzi, is his conception of the absolute independence of substance, its isolation from every other being except God.⁸ This "theoretical mysticism," in turn, provides the foundation for a type of "mystical practice" in which we strive to come ever closer to God and to achieve union with him. Again, Baruzi stressed the continuity between this practice and Leibniz's rationalism: "it is not a question of an annihilation or an ecstasy, but of a repose, an interior silence. In this way God will be found within us at the end of an endeavor toward our most profound self. But we will only reach this end through a rational inquiry, and so one formula would summarize Leibnizian mysticism rather well: *a rational search for a mystical reality.*"⁹

Baruzi's interpretation found an important ally in Dieter Mahnke, who likewise emphasized Leibniz's attempt to arrive at "a synthesis of mystical irrationalism and logico-mathematical rationalism."¹⁰ Recent commentators, by contrast, have been decisive in their rejection of this thesis, seeing little connection between Leibniz's philosophy and mysticism. In her study of the Fénelon-Bossuet debate, Émilienne Naert argues that Leibniz's rationalism effectively insulates him from the influence of mystical ideas: "his tendency to confound the reality of things with their degree of intelligibility is too one-dimensional. . . to be penetrable by mysticism."¹¹ Much the same conclusion is reached by Albert Heinekamp. Paying due respect to Leibniz's interest in mystical thinkers, Heinekamp contends that Leibniz's philosophy can "only be described as mysticism or as approaching mysticism, if – like, e.g., Baruzi and Mahnke – one assumes a very broad and unspecific conception of mysticism." To suggest that Leibniz "integrated the true concerns of the mystics into his philosophy," Heinekamp concludes, is "a thesis that can scarcely be defended. His intellectualistic philosophy is at many points the exact negation of mysticism."¹²

As an assessment of Leibniz's debt to mysticism, Heinekamp's judgment stands as definitive: Leibniz advances a philosophy and theology which are at odds with many of the central claims of mysticism.¹³ Nevertheless, there remain real and important parallels between Leibniz's views and those of mystical thinkers, parallels that motivate Baruzi's interpretation. It is the aim of this paper to explore these parallels in more detail, tracing them back to a common intellectual heritage which inspires much of the Christian mystical tradition and much of Leibniz's own philosophy. Leibniz's appropriation of this heritage leads him on a path

that runs parallel at many points to those of mystics but rarely converges with them. At the end of the paper I shall return to the question of why, despite the distance that separates them, Leibniz's attitude toward mystical thinkers is on the whole highly conciliatory and even sympathetic. This will raise some important points about his broader conception of philosophy and philosophy's method.

I

Whatever mystical resonances exist in Leibniz's philosophy, they reflect less his influence by contemporary or near-contemporary figures such as Jacob Boehme, Miguel de Molinos, or Valentin Weigel than the pervasive and formative influence of Platonism and Neoplatonism on his thought. When it comes to contemporary thinkers whom he regards as mystics, Leibniz generally shows considerable interest in their writings and a willingness to take them seriously. However, he is not always well-informed about their views and his reaction to them most often reflects the stance of someone who has quite definite opinions about where such authors fall short of the truth.¹⁴ Leibniz's debt to the Platonic tradition – to Plato himself, Plotinus, Proclus, the Neoplatonic strains in Augustine and other patristic writers – is of a quite different order. Although his system reflects the synthesis of a range of philosophical positions, Platonism forms the core of Leibniz's self-understanding as a philosopher.¹⁵ From this perspective we can gain some insight into his relationship to mysticism.

The Christian mystical tradition is, in its roots, a development of Neoplatonism, and in particular the doctrines of Plotinus.¹⁶ Leibniz is the first to acknowledge the substantial points of contact between his views and those of Plotinus. Yet he is also concerned to stress where his system diverges from Plotinus's, aligning himself with a purer version of Plato's own doctrines, elaborated so as to reflect the revelation of Christianity.¹⁷ The crucial points of disagreement reflect the mystical elements in Plotinus and his successors, including seventeenth-century mystics such as Boehme and Weigel. To put the point succinctly, Leibniz is keen to portray himself as the defender of an authentic Christianized Platonism as opposed to a mystically-corrupted Neoplatonism. And so, he writes in a text from the 1680s, Plato should be studied from his own writings, “not from Plotinus or Marsilio Ficino, who, desiring all the time to say marvelous and mystical things, corrupted the teachings of this great man” (GP VII:147).¹⁸

Leibniz's philosophy incorporates many Platonic and Neoplatonic themes. Three of these are especially important for understanding his relationship to the mystical tradition.¹⁹

Appearance and Reality. The most general of Leibniz's Platonic commitments is to a fundamental division between appearance and reality. Although associated with the distinction between what is perceived and what exists independently of being perceived, this division is primarily motivated by ontological considerations concerning the necessary conditions for a self-sufficient existence. On the basis of these, Leibniz concludes that the truly real is restricted to simple, soul-like substances (monads) and that all material things are only phenomenal, or "semi-real." Continuing this line of thought, he maintains that the division between appearance and reality involves a type of grounding of the phenomenal in the real. Material things exist in virtue of their participation in the real; whatever reality they possess, they derive it from the prior reality of soul-like substances. Finally, like Plato, Leibniz associates the division between appearance and reality with two distinct modes of knowing. Through our senses we are apprised of the confused appearances of things, through reason we are capable of comprehending reality as it is in itself.²⁰ It is the last point that is of greatest importance for us. A persistent refrain of Leibniz's mature writings is that philosophical enlightenment demands a rejection of the deceptive evidence of the senses in favor of the trustworthy testimony of reason. On this depends the possibility of our comprehending God's providential plan for this as the best of all possible worlds, as well as our cultivation of the piety we owe God as a supremely just creator. Accordingly, Leibniz defends a version of the Platonic doctrine of an ascent from the vain illusions of the senses to a more perfect state of knowing, in which we grasp the order and harmony underlying the appearances of things:

We discover in numbers, figures, forces, and all measurable things of which we have an adequate conception that they are not only just and perfect but also quite harmonious and beautiful, in short, that they cannot be improved nor can anything conceivably better be hoped for. To be sure, we cannot see such a harmony so long as we do not enjoy the right point of view, just as a picture in perspective is best appreciated only from certain standpoints and cannot be seen properly from another angle. It is only with the eyes of the understanding that we can place ourselves in a point of view

which the eyes of the body do not and cannot occupy (BC II:131/W 572).²¹

Innate Ideas and Divine Illumination. Leibniz takes for granted the Neoplatonic doctrine of divine ideas: that “there is an intelligible world in the divine mind,” a “region of ideas” comprising the contents of God’s understanding of himself and of the possibilities of creation, any such possibility being conceived as a limitation of God’s own perfection or being.²² He further holds that, as the highest representatives of creation, rational minds are produced as “images of the divinity.” Leibniz credits Plotinus with interpreting this as the claim that “every mind contains a kind of intelligible world within itself,” or a representation of the divine ideas:

There is an infinite difference between our intellect and the divine, for God sees all things adequately and at once, while very few things are known distinctly by us; the rest lie hidden confusedly, as it were, in the chaos of our perceptions. Yet the seeds of the things we learn are within us – the ideas and the eternal truths which arise from them. Since we discover *being, the one, substance, action,* and the like within ourselves, and since we are conscious of ourselves, we need not wonder that their ideas are within us. The innate concepts of Plato, which he concealed by the term “reminiscence,” are therefore by far to be preferred to the blank tablets of Aristotle, Locke, and other recent exoteric philosophers (D II, 1:223/L 593).

It is not always sufficiently appreciated that the doctrine of innate ideas, which Leibniz defends against Locke in the *New Essays*, has a substantial metaphysical component. As Leibniz understands it, the crux of the view is not simply that we have ideas that are not received from the senses but also that these innate ideas correspond in their structure and content to the divine ideas that are the paradigms for creation. There is thus a strong presumption on Leibniz’s part that the innate ideas within us provide a sufficient basis for at least a partial understanding of reality as it is understood by God.²³

In support of this position, Leibniz appeals to another Neoplatonic doctrine. Our intellect, or reason, corresponds to God’s intellect because we have received – and continue to receive – our understanding as a “diffus-

ion" or "emanation" of the divine understanding: "Since our understanding comes from God, and must be regarded as a ray of that sun, we must judge that what is most in conformity with our own understanding (when it proceeds by order, as the very nature of understanding demands) is in conformity with divine wisdom" (GP III 353). In general, Leibniz agrees with Plotinus and Proclus that finite beings rely for their existence on an emanation of perfection from God. Although Leibniz qualifies this emanation as a "continuous creation," and maintains that it is consistent with the exercise of God's free will, it remains a point on which he is crucially indebted to Neoplatonism.²⁴ It is on the basis of this doctrine that Leibniz assents to the theory of divine illumination, defended by Augustine and later revived by Malebranche: "Because of the divine concourse which continuously confers upon each creature whatever perfection there is in it, the external object of the soul is God alone, and in this sense God is to the mind what light is to the eye. This is that divine truth which shines forth in us, about which Augustine says so much and on which Malebranche follows him" (D II 1, 224/L 593). To the extent that our minds are emanations of the divine understanding, we can say that in contemplating the innate ideas within us, we are, in effect, illuminated by the light that is God's own intelligence. Thus, although we think through our own ideas, the immediate objects of our ideas are not other created things but the divine mind itself.²⁵

Piety and the Love of God. The ascent of the knower from appearance to reality is paralleled in Leibniz's philosophy by a moral ascent. Once again, this view has deep Platonic roots. According to Leibniz, virtue is the habit of acting in accordance with the dictates of wisdom, or knowledge of the good (Grua 579/R 83). It follows that we cannot knowingly do wrong and that wisdom is necessarily correlated with virtue: we are able to make progress morally to the extent that we are enlightened as to the true nature of goodness – both the metaphysical goodness of created things in general, and the moral and physical goodness of rational creatures.

Leibniz labels the highest state of virtue "piety." The pious person is principally defined by the degree to which her will is identified with the divine will, a will that is motivated by goodness alone.²⁶ As someone who wills the good wherever possible, the pious person is a representative of perfect charity, where charity is defined as "a universal benevolence, and benevolence the habit of loving or esteeming" (GP III:387/R 171). Critical to Leibniz's account of piety is his conception of "disinterested love." One is motivated to act charitably because of the love felt for others, and it is

this love in turn which guarantees that virtuous action is intrinsically pleasing. With this account, Leibniz aims to undermine the assumption, common to both sides in the quietist debate, that there is a fundamental conflict between self-interested and disinterested love. "To love truly and in a disinterested manner," he writes to Claude Nicaise, "is nothing other than to be led to find pleasure in the perfection or happiness of the beloved" (GP II:581/W 566). Thus, it is apparent "how we seek at the same time our good for ourselves and the good of the beloved object for itself, when the good of this object is immediately, ultimately and in itself our end, our pleasure and our good, as happens with regard to all the things wished for because they are pleasing to us in themselves, and are consequently good of themselves, without regard to consequences; these are ends and not means (GP II 578/W 565).²⁷

As a consequence of her virtue, the pious person makes every effort to realize the ideal of charity: the disinterested love of all rational creatures. She thus finds immediate pleasure in the perfection and happiness of others, and seeks wherever possible to increase these qualities. In Leibniz's view, however, piety involves more than just an expression of benevolence toward one's fellow human beings. A pious person is one who accepts that her fullest happiness is to be found only in the love of God.²⁸ This emerges as a consistent development of Leibniz's account of the connection between perfection, love, and happiness. Whoever is inclined by love to find her pleasure in the perfection and happiness of others, cannot help but find in God the source of her greatest happiness: "Since God is the most perfect and happiest, and consequently, the substance most worthy of love, and since *genuinely pure love* consists in the state that allows one to take pleasure in the perfections and happiness of the beloved, this love must give us the greatest pleasure of which we are capable whenever God is its object" (*Principles of Nature and of Grace* §16; GP VI:605/AG 212). Neither the highest degree of virtue nor the highest degree of happiness, therefore, is attainable by human beings without a redirection of their attention and love toward the supreme perfections of God.²⁹

II

The views sketched above reflect some of the main tenets of Leibniz's philosophy: the ascent of the knower from the confused images of the senses to an understanding of reality as it is in itself; the presumption that this higher form of knowledge demands an inward turn toward the clarity

of innate ideas, which reflect the contents of the divine understanding; finally, the claim that this ascent in theoretical understanding is matched by an ascent in virtue and happiness, which culminates in the realization that our most complete contentment – the state of blessedness – is found only in the knowledge and love of God. I have stressed that these views are ones Leibniz draws from the Platonic tradition, which is also the source for much of the Christian mystical tradition. It is not surprising, therefore, that we find versions of these same doctrines being developed by mystical writers. The theme of a retreat from the vanity of the senses is so widespread, among mystical and nonmystical thinkers, that it needs no further comment. The accompanying inward turn toward God offers a more fruitful comparison. A significant part of Baruzi's case for Leibniz's mysticism rests on Leibniz's approval in *Discourse on Metaphysics* §32 of St. Teresa of Avila's saying that "the soul should often think as if there were only God and it in the world" (GP IV:458).³⁰ This dictum is supported by Leibniz's thesis that the immediate object of our intellectual ideas is God rather than external things, as well as by his theory of the spontaneity of substance, whereby whatever is perceived by the soul is perceived independently of any outside influence, as if only it and God existed.³¹

The equation of an inward knowledge of self and knowledge of God is a pervasive theme in mystical writers from Plotinus through Origen, Augustine and St. Teresa.³² Furthermore, there is a close connection between this theme and Leibniz's view that as rational minds we find our most complete happiness in the love of God's perfections. In turning inward we come to know God, and this knowledge is itself the basis of the love we feel for him. Taken together, the three Leibnizian views I have sketched suggest the outlines of a mystic's quest for union with the divine. As Plotinus poetically expresses this quest: "The soul in its nature loves God and longs to be at one with Him in the noble love of a daughter for a noble father; but coming to human birth and lured by the courtships of this sphere, she takes up with another love, a mortal, leaves her father and falls. But one day coming to hate her shame, she puts away the evil of earth, once more seeks the father, and finds her peace."³³

The parallels between Leibniz's philosophy and the mystic's quest for union with God are indisputable. No less significant, however, are the divergences. In Leibniz's account of the state of blessedness attained through our knowledge and love of God, there is an important affective element. Our love of God is defined in terms of the pleasure we derive from his unlimited perfection and happiness. Leibniz is adamant, however,

that this love must have an intellectual basis. It must be an "enlightened love," whose ardor is accompanied by understanding: "One cannot love God without knowing his perfections, and this knowledge contains the principles of true piety."³⁴ In this he distances himself from an important strain in Christian mysticism, which emphasizes God's essential unknowability and denies that our union with God depends on our having positive knowledge of his perfections.³⁵ The split with mysticism, though, goes even deeper than this. Leibniz insists that the way in which we know God is ultimately no different than the way in which we know ordinary truths of reason. Implicitly at least, he rejects the distinction – integral to mystical writers – between discursive rational knowledge and a higher form of knowing (*theoria, contemplatio*), by which we are able to apprehend God directly in an act of intellectual vision.³⁶ Despite the attention he pays to the theme of the pious person's love of God above all else, Leibniz makes no claim for such a person's having any special cognitive access to God. Our knowledge of God's perfections, the basis of our love of him, is strictly limited to, on the one hand, our knowledge of eternal truths, wherein our understanding partakes of the divine understanding, and on other hand, our knowledge of the order and harmony of the created world, which are the surest signs we have of the goodness and wisdom God has exercised in creation:

One cannot love God without knowing his perfections, or his beauty. And since we can know him only in his emanations, there are two means of seeing his beauty, namely in the knowledge of eternal truths (which explain their reasons in themselves), and in the knowledge of the harmony of the universe (in applying reason to facts). That is to say, one must know the marvels of reason and the marvels of nature (Grua 580/R 84).³⁷

While affirming the mystic's description of the state of blessedness as a "spiritual union" with God, Leibniz is anxious to highlight what he sees as the dangers attending this idea. Against those mystical writers who interpret this union as an all-encompassing embrace of the divine, in which the individual soul merges with God, Leibniz insists on the preservation of individual agency:

You may reject the quietists, false mystics, who deny individuality and action to the mind of the blessed, as if our highest perfection

consisted in a kind of passive state, when on the contrary, love and knowledge are operations of the mind and will. Blessedness of the soul does indeed consist in union with God, but we must not think that the soul is absorbed in God, having lost its individuality and activity, which alone constitute its distinct substance, for this would be an evil enthusiasm, an undesirable deification (D II:1, 225/L 594).³⁸

In defending the integrity of individual souls, Leibniz cites Plato against his mystically-minded followers: "I observe nothing in Plato that would lead me to conclude that minds do not conserve their own substance. This, moreover, is beyond argument for those who philosophize carefully" (D II, 1:225/L 595). The point is supported in several ways. There are metaphysical considerations concerning the nature of substance in general: a principle of action that preserves its identity through all change, including the appearance of death. There are appeals to a proper understanding of the disinterested love that unites us to God. We may reject the opinions of those who command us "to love God without any consideration of ourselves," Leibniz argues, for "it is impossible, by the nature of things, for anyone to have no thought for his own happiness. But for those who love God, their own happiness arises from that love" (D II, 1:224/L 594). Finally, the culmination of Leibniz's case against mystics like Valentin Weigel who aspire to a "deification" of the soul is that such a view is incompatible with Christian piety. It is not the goal of enlightened minds to lose their identity in the oneness of God; rather, they seek to fulfill their duties of citizenship in that state or commonwealth of which God is the sovereign ruler and minds his loving subjects. To enter into such a society with God is to recognize him as a supremely perfect sovereign, who rules over rational beings with unflinching justice:

[M]inds are . . . images of the divinity itself, or the author of nature. . . . That is what makes minds capable of entering into a kind of society with God, and allows him to be, in relation to them, not only what an inventor is to his machine (as God is in relation to the other creatures) but also what a prince is to his subjects, and even what a father is to his children. From this it is easy to conclude that the collection of all minds must make up the city of God, that is, the most perfect possible state under the most perfect of monarchs. This city of God, this truly universal monarchy, is a moral world within the natural world, and the highest and most

divine of God's works. . . . [U]nder this perfect government, there will be no good action that is unrewarded, no bad action that goes unpunished, and everything must result in the well-being of the good, that is, of those who are not dissatisfied in this great state, those who trust in providence, after having done their duty, and who love and imitate the author of all good (*Monadology* §§83, 84, 85, 87, 90; GP VI: 621-2/AG 223-4).

Given his understanding of the moral community that unites rational minds and God, Leibniz rejects any account of our union with the divine that emphasizes our "deification," or the merging of our soul with God. "The mind is not a part but an image of divinity," he writes, "a citizen of the divine kingdom" (D II, 1:225/L.595). To fulfill its duties, and to receive the rewards and punishments that are the right of divine justice, a mind must – regardless of its state of enlightenment – retain its individual identity and its capacity for moral action.

Leibniz's insistence on the mind's capacity for action sets him against those mystics and quietists who stress an attitude of resignation or withdrawal from the world. Indeed, although for him the pious person necessarily orients herself with respect to God, loving God as the source of her most complete happiness, her life will almost certainly not be a purely contemplative one. Instead, she demonstrates her love of God by executing to her fullest ability what she understands to be God's plan for the best of all possible worlds: a plan in which the greatest possible perfection is achieved through the progressive enlightenment of rational creatures and their continued growth in knowledge, virtue, and happiness.³⁹ To this end, the pious person seeks to understand the order and harmony of nature, for this activity is pleasing in itself and confirms us in our belief in God's wisdom; and she seeks to improve the common welfare of human beings through their intellectual and moral development, for this too is pleasing in itself and serves as the engine which drives the increased perfection of creation as a whole:

[E]very enlightened person must judge that the true means of guaranteeing forever his own individual happiness is to seek his satisfaction in occupations which tend toward the general good; for the love of God, above all, and the necessary enlightenment, will not be denied to a mind which is animated in this way. . . . Now this general good, insofar as we can contribute to it, is the advancement toward perfection of men, as much by enlightening

them so that they can know the marvels of the sovereign substance, as by helping them to remove the obstacles which stop the progress of our enlightenment.⁴⁰

Leibniz holds that the greatest happiness is reserved for those human beings whose love has for its object God's supreme perfections; however, he is equally clear that one only truly possesses this love of God if one's actions are guided by charity, or the disinterested love of all rational creatures. Only by working tirelessly to increase the well-being of humanity does one demonstrate one's understanding of God's wisdom and goodness as they are revealed in his creation of the best of all possible worlds.

III

Despite the substantive points of disagreement between his philosophy and the teachings of mystical writers, Leibniz is usually keen to minimize these differences, preferring to stress the common purpose that unites them: "to contribute as much as possible to the glory of God and to the general good" (A I,13:399). This conciliatory attitude is typical of Leibniz. It is but one more manifestation of the central role played by charity in his philosophy – a charity he extends to philosophical and religious debate.

In reflecting on his own practice, Leibniz consistently portrays himself as a synthesizer and a proponent of intellectual tolerance. "Our greatest failure," he writes in his first reply to Pierre Bayle, "has been the sectarian spirit which imposes limits on itself by rejecting others." Within his own system, he contends, are combined the insights of the skeptics, the Pythagoreans and Platonists, Parmenides and Plotinus, the Stoics, the Kabbalists and hermetic philosophers, Aristotle and the scholastics, Democritus and the moderns: "all are found united as if in a single perspective center from which the object, which is obscured when considered from any other approach, reveals its regularity and the agreement of its parts" (GP IV:523-4/L 496).⁴¹ In highlighting the synthetic character of his system, Leibniz is in part making an epistemic point: the most efficient way of making progress in philosophy is not to feign an attitude of novelty, razing philosophy's past in an effort to begin anew on solid foundations; rather, it is to appropriate from the past, looking so far as possible to reconcile the differences of previous philosophers, differences which all too often can be attributed to human

quarrelsomeness rather than genuine intellectual disagreement.⁴² But Leibniz is also making an ethical point. As he sees it, if one is inspired by charity for other human beings, one does everything one can to interpret their utterances in such a way as to maximize agreement. One looks for what can be praised in their remarks rather than for what must be criticized. Leibniz sums up his own attitude in the motto "*je ne meprise rien*": "I scorn nothing, and I find very often that what the world scorns merits being esteemed."⁴³

These features of Leibniz's method provide us with some guidance in interpreting his ambivalent remarks about mysticism. As in the case of the views of the Pythagoreans and Platonists, the Aristotelians and mechanists, there is some truth in the writings of the mystics; however, this truth must be considered in the proper light if we are to understand its significance. In his comments on contemporary mystics, Leibniz is unyielding in his opinion that such thinkers are worthy of being esteemed only to the extent that there can be found expressed within them the core commitments of his own philosophy:

It is true that the Weigelians, Boehmists, Quakers, Quietists, Labadists, and others of this sort also appear to work for detachment from the vanities of the world, but everything that they say about abnegation, annihilation, silence – while supplying a thousand pretty words – can only be sound inasmuch as it reduces to a preference for the general good and the greatest expression of the divine perfections relative to every consideration of the things of this world. If there is anything else, it is caprice and chimera. The true mark of the spirit and grace of God is to enlighten and to bring about the best. Several among these persons appear to have good views, but they lack genuine enlightenment; expressing themselves in extraordinary ways which affect more than they instruct. It is a shame that their zeal is not accompanied by more science, and perhaps also more universal charity (Grua 92-3).⁴⁴

Wherever possible, Leibniz strives to give a positive interpretation to the writings of mystics.⁴⁵ In some cases, he admits, this is no easy task, for the works of such authors as Boehme and Weigel are extremely difficult to penetrate, containing "a thousand allegorical expressions, which have more sparkle than solidity" (Grua 79).⁴⁶ Nevertheless, even on this point, Leibniz finds grounds for praise. While the language of mystics

can often be criticized as obscure, their words remain valuable for the power they have to move the soul in the direction of piety. Leibniz is realistic in his assessment of the ability of ordinary human beings to assimilate a philosophy based on reason alone. More often than not, we must be seduced to the truth through poetical language, which excites the emotions.⁴⁷ It is in this capacity that mystical writers serve a vital purpose, and on one occasion Leibniz himself tried his hand at composing a "true *theologica mystica*."⁴⁸

For all of this, however, Leibniz cannot ignore the real differences between his philosophy and mysticism. Despite his efforts to harmonize the two, he has to accept that some mystics do not share his conception of piety and of the union attainable with God. In limiting our experience of the divine to a rational knowledge of God's perfections as they are manifested in the created world, Leibniz opposes himself to those who claim as a defining feature of mysticism the possibility of a direct and unmediated apprehension of God, or union with a God who is "beyond all being and knowledge."⁴⁹ A similar discrepancy attends his account of the love of God. In a letter to Morell, Leibniz complains of how this emotion has been misunderstood:

Many people speak of the love of God, but I see by the results that few people truly have it, even those who are most absorbed with mysticism. The touchstone of the love of God is what St. John gave us. And when I see a true fervor for obtaining the general good, one is not far from the love of God (A I,14:202-3).

In a subsequent letter, he goes even further, maintaining that a genuine love of God is present "only in those who display a fervor to obtain the general good" (A I,14:255). In insisting that the love of God have practical consequences, that it be a love that manifests itself in charity toward other human beings, Leibniz distances himself from contemplative mystics who aspire to a devotional or even ecstatic love of the divine, one distinguished by its orientation away from created things.⁵⁰

As much as Leibniz might like to claim that the differences separating him from mystical writers are no more than verbal ones, this is a position that can be maintained only at the cost of glossing over genuine theological disagreement. Is Leibniz willing to pay this price for the perception of harmony? The possibility should not be dismissed too quickly. Given the force of his conciliatory rhetoric, it is not inconceivable that Leibniz might be prepared to sacrifice an honest assessment of the

teachings of mystical writers for the sake of thinking well of them. Fortunately, though, he does not have to make this choice. Leibniz succeeds in preserving the balance between charity and sound interpretation through a doctrine of intellectual tolerance. In some cases, he has to admit, it is not possible to give a "good sense" to the utterances of mystics. Nevertheless, provided that they do not represent a threat to the public order, more harm is done by censoring their writings and persecuting their followers than by allowing them their fantasies.⁵¹ In general, charity demands a tolerant attitude toward the views of others – a recognition of their right to think for themselves – even when one cannot approve of the content of their opinions: "One does not have the right to condemn all errors or to force men always to retract them. . . . One must be very circumspect when it comes to matters of retraction, so as not to oblige anyone to act against his conscience" (A, I, 5:182).⁵²

The one case in which Leibniz does not hesitate to criticize mystics is when they themselves repudiate the principle of charity, encouraging in their followers an attitude of intolerance toward the religious beliefs of others. "Those who are of a sectarian or schismatic spirit," he writes to Andreas Morell, "that is, who are far removed from those of good intention and do not tend to be just in their opinions, can have neither charity nor enlightenment in its true purity. It seems to me that the late M. Labadie, the late Mlle. de Bourignon, and William Penn and his brethren have had this defect of being sectarian and condemnatory" (A I,13:400).⁵³ It is no coincidence that the figures for whom Leibniz reserves his sharpest rebuke are also those who make the strongest claims for their direct inspiration by the word of God. Over and above his skepticism concerning the veracity of their claims, Leibniz is most critical of these "enthusiasts" (as he calls them in the *New Essays*) for the fact that their religious zeal so rarely finds expression in true Christian virtue: a charity imitative of Christ's love for all humanity.⁵⁴

This charity is the foundation of Leibniz's theology and ethics. It lies at the heart of his account of divine justice and motivates his lifelong ambition for the progress of humanity through the advancement of the arts and sciences.⁵⁵ Leibniz's progressivism is ultimately a product of the faith he places in reason, in the goodness of intellectual enlightenment for its own sake and as a means to Christian piety. Yet he is not so rigid in his rationalism that he fails to perceive the contribution mystics can make to the furtherance of his ends. The "beautiful allegories" that the mystics offer can "help to render the truth more acceptable, provided that a good

sense is given to these confused thoughts" (GP III:562): Leibniz himself is no mystic, but he is to this extent a friend of mysticism.⁵⁶

¹ Letter to Pierre Coste, 4 July 1706 (GP III:384). "I despise nothing (excepting judicial astrology and similar delusions), not even the mystics; their thoughts are most often confused, but as they ordinarily provide beautiful allegories or images that move us, this can help to render the truth more acceptable, provided that a good sense is given to these confused thoughts." Letter to Louis Bourguet, 3 January 1714 (GP III:562). "There is something in the mystics that can be given a good sense, and I do not despise them entirely." Letter to Thomas Burnett, 23 August 1713 (GP III:327). Leibniz's writings are cited according to the following abbreviations: A = Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Preussische (later: Deutsche) Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (Darmstadt/Leipzig/Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923-). AG = G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and tr. R. Ariew and D. Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989). BC = G. W. Leibniz, *Hauptschriften zur Grundlegung der Philosophie*, ed. and tr. A. Buchenau and E. Cassirer (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1905; 2nd ed. 1924; 3rd ed. 1966). BH = E. Bodemann, *Die Leibniz-Handschriften der Königlichen Öffentlichen Bibliothek zu Hannover* (Hannover: Hahn, 1889; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966). D = *Gothofredi Guillelmi Leibnizii Opera Omnia*, ed. L. Dutens (Geneva: De Tournes, 1768; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1989). GP = *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. C.I. Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875-90; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1978). Grua = G.W. Leibniz, *Textes inédits d'après de la bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre*, ed. G. Grua (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1948; repr. New York: Garland, 1985). Guh = *Leibniz' Deutsche Schriften*, ed. G.E. Guhrauer (Berlin, 1838-40). H = G.W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, tr. E.M. Huggard (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985). L = G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. and tr. L. E. Loemker (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 2nd ed. 1969). Mo = *Mittheilungen aus Leibnizens ungedruckten Schriften*, ed. G. Mollat (Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1893). P = G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and tr. G.H.R. Parkinson (London: Dent, 1973). R = G.W. Leibniz, *Political Writings*, ed. and tr. P. Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed. 1988). RB = G.W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, tr. P. Remnant and J. Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). V = G. W. Leibniz, *Vorausedition zur Reihe VI – Philosophische Schriften – in der Ausgabe der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR*, ed. Leibniz-Forschungsstelle der Universität Münster (Münster, 1982-1991; 10 vols. with successive pagination). W = G.W. Leibniz, *Selections*, tr. P. Wiener (New York: Scribner's, 1951).

² For evidence of Leibniz's knowledge of early mystical writers, see A I, 10:59; A I, 13:397-9, 552. His familiarity with the *Guida Spirituale* of Miguel de Molinos and with Molinos's subsequent trial by the Inquisition is documented in letters written between 1688 and 1691 to the Landgrave Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels (A I, 5:66-8, 181-2; A I, 6:159; Grua 76-80). Leibniz actively followed the controversy concerning quietism, which culminated in the 1697 publication of Fénelon's *Explication des maximes des saints* and Bossuet's *Instruction sur les estats d'oraison, où sont exposées les erreurs des faux mystiques de nos jours*. See his letters to Andreas Morell (A I, 14:202-3, 548-9), Claude Nicaise (GP II:573, 579, 584, 586-7), and the Electress Sophie (A I, 14:54-5). For a brief account of the development of quietism in the seventeenth century, see J.-R. Armogathe, *Le Quietisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973). Leibniz's knowledge of other contemporary mystics is documented below. In this paper I set aside his relationship to the

Jewish mystical tradition and the writings of the Kabbalah, which he knew through his association with Knorr von Rosenroth and F.M. van Helmont. On this, see his letters to Lorenz Hertel (16/26 July 1694; A, I 10:49), the Duchess Sophie (3/13 September 1694; A I, 10:58-61), and Louis Bourguet (3 January 1714; GP III:562), as well as the notes gathered in A. Foucher de Careil, *Leibniz, la philosophie juive, et cabalé. Trois lectures... avec les manuscrits inédits de Leibniz* (Paris: Auguste Durand, 1861).

³ One recent author summarizes the tradition in the following terms: "[Mysticism] can be characterized as a search for and experience of immediacy with God. The mystic is not content to know *about* God, he longs for union with God. 'Union with God' can mean different things, from literal identity, where the mystic loses all sense of himself and is absorbed into God, to the union that is experienced as the consummation of love, in which the lover and the beloved remain intensely aware both of themselves and of the other. How the mystics interpret the way and the goal of their quest depends on what they think about God, and that itself is influenced by what they experience: it is a mistake to try to make out that all mysticism is the same. Yet the search for God, or the ultimate, for His own sake, and an unwillingness to be satisfied with anything less than Him; the search for immediacy with this object of the soul's longing: this would seem to be the heart of mysticism." Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. xv.

⁴ *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1900; 2nd ed. 1937).

⁵ *La Logique de Leibniz, d'après des documents inédits* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1901; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961).

⁶ *Leibniz et l'organisation religieuse de la terre* (Paris; Felix Alcan, 1907); *Leibniz* (Paris: Librairie Bloud, 1909). See also Baruzi, "Trois Dialogues Mystiques Inédits de Leibniz," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 13 (1905):1-38.

⁷ *Leibniz*, p. 131.

⁸ Baruzi sees this as confirmed by the readings of Russell and Couturat. Although the cornerstone of their interpretation, the "logical doctrine of a substance from which all the predicates arise analytically," seems not at all mystical, "if we regard this doctrine from a new 'point of view', it reveals to us an inviolable and indestructible being, then a mind self-conscious of its independence, its reach, and its 'silence'" (*ibid.*, p. 130).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁰ *Leibnizens Synthese von Universalmathematik und Individualmetaphysik* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1925), p. 116. To a greater degree than Baruzi, Mahnke acknowledges the many places at which Leibniz's views appear to conflict with those of mystics. Consequently, he writes, "it would naturally be false if one wanted to take Leibniz to be a mystic in the ordinary sense. Although his philosophy indeed strives for a mystical deepening of rationalism, to be equally fair to both sides, it is also a rationalization of mysticism" (*ibid.*). See also Mahnke, "Die Rationalisierung der Mystik bei Leibniz und Kant," *Blätter der deutschen Philosophie* 13 (1939):1-73. For an earlier statement of this reading, see Dietrich Tiedemann, *Geist der Spekulativen Philosophie*. 6 vols. (Marburg, 1791-97; repr. Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1969 [Aetas Kantiana 274]), 6:369ff. Tiedemann's book was brought to my attention by Catherine Wilson's essay "The Reception of Leibniz in the Eighteenth Century," in N. Jolley, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 466.

¹¹ *Leibniz et la Querelle du Pur Amour* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1959), p. 226.

¹² Heinekamp, "Leibniz und Mysticism." in Peter Koslowski, ed., *Gnosis und Mystik in der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1988), p. 203.

¹³ The most serious defect of the interpretations of Russell and Couturat is not that they ignore important mystical elements in Leibniz's thought, stressing instead the extent of his rationalism, but that they divorce the latter from the ethical and theological dimensions of his thought. To make the rationalist reading compelling, it must be integrated into an account of the theodicy: Leibniz's vindication of divine justice (God's goodness combined with his wisdom) through an explication of this as the best of all possible worlds. I attempt to do this in my book *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Cf. Heinekamp, "Leibniz und Mysticism," pp. 191-2. In letters to Andreas Morell, Leibniz admits to a limited knowledge of Boehme's writings, which he found obscure (Grua 116-7, 120, 126, 139). Among German mystics he seems to have given the greatest attention to the works of Valentin Weigel. In his manuscripts there are extensive notes on several of Weigel's books (Grua 74-5/V 2074-92). Leibniz was also well acquainted with the writings of Pierre Poiret, of whose views he offers a mixed opinion (see A I, 14:557; GP III:315; GP VII:495; Grua 84-7, 105, 120).

¹⁵ G. Rodier, "Sur une des Origines de la Philosophie de Leibniz," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 10 (1902):552-64; Joseph Politella, *Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Cabalism in the Philosophy of Leibniz* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Ph.D. dissertation, 1938); Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, *Platon et l'Idéalisme Allemand (1770-1830)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), pp. 57-62; George MacDonald Ross, "Leibniz and Renaissance Neoplatonism," *Studia Leibnitiana*, Supplementa 23 (1982):125-34; Catherine Wilson, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: A Historical and Comparative Study* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ Paul Henry, "The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought," in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, tr. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. xlii-lxxxiii; Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*. For a contrasting view, which argues for the "fundamentally biblical and Christian character of mysticism," see Louis Bouyer, *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism*, tr. Illtyd Trethowan (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), p. 187.

¹⁷ A key document is his so-called "Letter to Hansch on the Platonic Philosophy or on Platonic Enthusiasm." This originated as a letter to Michael Gottlieb Hansch of 25 July 1707, and was first published by Hansch as part of his 1716 *Diatriba de enthusiasmo Platónico*. In it Leibniz writes of Plato: "No ancient philosophy comes closer to Christianity, although we justly censure those who think that Plato is everywhere reconcilable with Christ. But the ancients must be excused for denying the beginning of things, or creation, and the resurrection of the body, for these doctrines can be known only by revelation" (D II, 1:222/L 592). See also his letter to Nicholas Remond of 11 February 1715 (GP III:637/L 659).

¹⁸ Cf. GP I:380.

¹⁹ For an extended discussion of these topics, see Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*.

²⁰ It is integral to Leibniz's account of reason's power that we do not possess a direct or intuitive knowledge of reality. Instead, he assumes only that human minds have access to a range of innate ideas expressing the natures of things in general, and that through these

ideas we are provided with the means to construct, at a level of abstraction, a theory of reality. An example of such a theory is his own monadology.

²¹ Cf. BH 62-3, 108-11; GP VI:75/H 98-9; GP VI:507-8/L 552-3.

²² For statements of this view, see *Theodicy* §184 (GP VI:226/H 243); *Causa Dei* §8 (GP VI:440); GP VII:305/L 488; GP VII:311/P 77; D II, 1:223/L 592.

²³ Cf. *New Essays* II, iv, 17 (A VI, 6:300); IV, iv, 5 (A VI, 6:392); GP IV:571/L 585.

²⁴ See *Causa Dei* §§ 9, 12 (GP VI 440); and Daniel Fouke, "Emanation and the Perfections of Being: Divine Causation and the Autonomy of Nature in Leibniz," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 76 (1994):168-94.

²⁵ Cf. *Discourse on Metaphysics* §§28-29.

²⁶ "[God's] goodness would not be supreme, if he did not aim at the good and at perfection so far as possible. But what will one say, if I show that this same motive has a place in truly virtuous and generous men, whose supreme function is to imitate divinity, insofar as human nature is capable of it?" (Mo 60/R 57-8).

²⁷ Leibniz frequently emphasizes the significance of his definition for the debate between Bossuet and Fénelon: "And through this definition we can resolve the great question of how genuine love can be disinterested, although it is true that we do nothing that is not for our own good. The fact is that all the things we desire in themselves and without any view to their interest are of such a nature as to give us pleasure by their excellent qualities, with the result that the happiness of the beloved object enters into our own. Thus you see, Sir, that the definition ends the debate in a few words, and this is what I love" (letter to Thomas Burnett, 18/28 May 1697; A I, 14:226). Cf. A I, 14:58-9; GP III:383-4; Naert, *Leibniz et la Querelle du pur Amour*.

²⁸ Leibniz acknowledges a long-standing debt to the German Jesuit Frederick Spee, whose *Güldenes Tugend-Buch* (1649) he often recommends for the prominence it gives to the virtue of divine love. See his letter to the Electress Sophie of August 1697 (A I, 14:59), with its accompanying French translation of the introduction to Spee's book (A I, 14:891-903); his letter to Andreas Morell of 10/20 December 1696 (A I, 13:398-9); the essay attached to his letter to Claude Nicaise of 9/19 August 1697 (GP II:579); and *Theodicy* §96 (GP VI:156). On the background to the relationship between Leibniz and Spee, see Frederick W. C. Lieder, "Friedrich Spee and the Théodicée of Leibniz," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 11 (1912):147-72, 329-54. Lieder shows that the contents of the *Güldenes Tugend-Buch* are primarily drawn from St. Thomas. I am grateful to Ursula Goldenbaum for emphasizing Spee's importance in this context.

²⁹ To Hansch, Leibniz writes: "As opposed to mercenary love, true love is that affection of the mind by which we are brought to find pleasure in the happiness of another. For what we take pleasure in, that we desire for itself. Furthermore, since the divine happiness is the confluence of all perfection, it follows that the true happiness of a created mind is in its sense of the divine happiness. So those who seek the right, the true, the good and the just because this delights them rather than because it is profitable - although it is in truth most profitable - are best prepared for the love of God, according to the opinion of Augustine himself, who brilliantly shows that the good desire to enjoy God, the bad to use him, and who proves, as the Platonists tried to do, that the exchange of the divine love for the ephemeral is the cause of the fall of souls. Therefore, too, our happiness cannot be separated from the love of God" (D II I:224-5/L 594). Cf. A I, 14:55-8; GP II:578; GP III:387/R 171; Mo 62-3/R 59.

30 See Baruzi, *Leibniz*, ch. 5: "Analyse d'un Exemple." Leibniz does not explicitly mention St. Teresa in the *Discourse*, but the attribution is supported by a 1696 letter to Andreas Morell: "As for St. Teresa, you are right to esteem her writings, in which I once found this lovely thought, that the soul should conceive of things as if there were only God and itself in the world. This even provides a considerable object to reflect upon in philosophy, which I usefully employed in one of my hypotheses" (A I, 13:398/AG 64).

31 Cf. *Discourse on Metaphysics* §§14, 28.

32 For Plotinus, see *Enneads* VI.9.7: "In sum, we must withdraw from all the extern, pointed wholly inwards; no leaning to the outer; the total of things ignored, first in their relation to us and later in the very idea; the self put out of mind in the contemplation of the Supreme; all the commerce so closely There that, if report were possible, one might become to others reporter of that communion. . . . God . . . is outside of none, present unperceived to all; we break away from Him, or rather from ourselves; what we turn from we cannot reach; astray ourselves, we cannot go in search of another; a child distraught will not recognize its father; to find ourselves is to know our source" (tr. MacKenna). Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. X; and Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, chs. 4 and 7.

33 *Enneads* VI.9.9 (tr. MacKenna).

34 *Theodicy*, Preface (GP VI:27-8). In the same passage Leibniz affirms that our ideas provide an adequate basis for knowledge of the divine: "In order to love God, it suffices to consider his perfections, which is easy, for we find ideas of them in ourselves. The perfections of God are like those of our souls, but he possesses them without limits; he is an ocean of which we have received only drops; there is in us some power, some knowledge, some goodness - but they are all present in their entirety in God" (GP VI:27). Cf. *Monadology* §30 (GP VI:612/AG 217).

35 This is the "apophatic" or negative way in mystical theology, which finds its most influential exposition in the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysius: "This then be my prayer . . . by thy persistent commerce with the mystical visions, leave behind both sensible perceptions and intellectual efforts, and all objects of sense and intelligence, and all things not being and being, and be raised aloft unknowingly to the union, as far as attainable, with Him Who is above every essence and knowledge. For by the resistless and absolute ecstasy in all purity, from thyself and all, thou wilt be carried on high, to the superessential ray of the Divine darkness, when thou hast cast away 'all, and become free from all" (*Mystical Theology*, I.1). *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, tr. John Parker (Merrick, NY: Richmond Publishing Company, 1976; originally published 1897), p. 130. On the unknowability of God, see also Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, VII.3; *Epistles* 1, 5; Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, ch. 8; Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), ch. 1.

36 For the Platonic roots of this distinction, see A.-J. Festugière, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon* (Paris, 1936); Bouyer, *The Christian Mystery*, ch. 15; Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, *passim*. Fénelon draws explicitly on the contrast between "méditation" and "contemplation" in his version of quietism. See Armogathe, *Le Quiétisme*, pp. 84-7. In his letter to Hesse-Rheinfels of 15/25 March 1688, Leibniz makes a gesture toward preserving this distinction (A I, 5:67); however, it plays no systematic role in his philosophy.

37 Leibniz repeats this point on many occasions. See *Meditations on the Common Concept of Justice*: God makes "himself known to the human race... through the eternal light of reason which he has given us, and through the wonderful effects of his power, of his

wisdom and his infinite goodness, which he has placed before our eyes" (Mo 61/R 58); and his notes on the published account of William Penn's 1677 travels through Germany and Holland: "The light [which illuminates our understanding] is nothing other than the knowledge of great truths . . . without which I do not believe one could have a true love of God, since one cannot love without knowing and without recognizing the beauty of what one loves. Thus, in order to love God, it is necessary to know his perfections, which the eternal truths represent to us when, on penetrating into the foundation of things, we see there the great order and wholly marvelous universal harmony, which is to the divinity what a ray is to the sun" (Grua 89: cf. 91).

³⁸ Later in the same passage he writes: "I wish that Valentin Weigel, who in an extraordinary book not only explains the blessed life through deification but frequently recommends a death and quiet of this sort, had not given us grounds to suspect a similar opinion [namely, that the soul returns to God in death], along with other quietists. The chief to affirm this position is the man who calls himself Angelus Silesius, the author of some beautiful sacred poems entitled *Der cherubinische Wandersmann*. In another way Spinoza tends toward the same view" (D II, 1:225/L 594). See also the essay attached to his 9/19 August 1697 letter to Claude Nicaise: "To wish to sever one's self from one's self and from its good is to play with words; or if one wishes to go into the effects, it is to fall into an extravagant quietism, it is to desire a stupid, or rather affected and simulated inaction in which under the pretext of resignation and the annihilation of the soul swallowed up in God, one may go to libertinism in practice, or at least to a hidden speculative atheism, such as that of Averroes and of others more ancient, who held that our soul finally lost itself in the universal spirit, and that this is perfect union with God" (GP II:578/W 566).

³⁹ See his 1697 letters to Andreas Morell (A I, 14:548-9) and the Electress Sophie (A I, 14:57); and the preface to the *Theodicy* (GP VI:27-8).

⁴⁰ *Memoir for Enlightened Persons of Good Intention* §11 (K X 10-11/R 105). See also the final paragraph of his review of the book *Pansophia* by W.H. von Luettichau, published in the *Nouveau Journal des Sçavans*, September-October 1696 (A I, 13: 232); and Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*, ch. 3.

⁴¹ Cf. the preface to the *New Essays* (A VI, 6:71/RB 71).

⁴² See, in particular, his letters to Nicholas Remond of 10 January and 26 August 1714 (GP III:605/L 654-5; GP III:624-5). For a discussion of this aspect of Leibniz's method, see Albert Heinekamp, "Die Rolle der Philosophiegeschichte in Leibniz' Denken." *Studia Leibnitiana*, Sonderheft 10, 135-9.

⁴³ Letter to Andreas Morell, 1/11 October 1697 (A I, 14:548). For other occurrences of the phrase, see GP II:539; GP III 327, 384, 562. In an earlier letter to Morell, Leibniz writes: "I am naturally led to attach myself in things to what must be praised in them, without worrying very much about what can be criticized in them. . . . I read books not in order to censure them but in order to profit from them, with the result that I find some good everywhere, though not equally" (A I, 13:398).

⁴⁴ Cf. Grua 79: "If quietude only goes as far as contemplation of the eternal truths contained in the divine perfections and a constant apprehension of the infinite being insofar as it is such, without regard to our particular interest and earthly things, there is nothing to find fault with. For, indeed, the mental vision which accompanies an act of love for God above all things is only that. Thus, the method of quietude taken in this sense would be nothing but a spiritual device for making last longer than usual the act of divine love

recommended to us by Jesus Christ and by theologians, both mystical and nonmystical, which is the most essential point of our religion."

45 This is especially so in the case of Fénelon: "I believe that the intention of the Archbishop of Cambrai has been to elevate souls to a true love of God, and to that tranquility which accompanies the enjoyment of it, while at the same time avoiding the illusions of a false quietude. Whether he has successfully carried out his plan, I cannot yet say. However, I trust that he will not be misunderstood, and the description of the book that I have seen in the *Histoire des Ouvrages des Savants* confirms me in this opinion, for it seems to me that everything I have read could be given a favorable interpretation. However, as I see some judicious people find fault with the work, or demand further explanation, I suspend my judgment concerning it: while waiting for further clarification, I would always be inclined to have a favorable opinion of an author, especially when one also has evidence of his merit, and I believe that there is no matter that deserves being pressed more than the true love of God" (GP II:579). Cf. his accompanying letter to Nicaise of 9/19 August 1697 (GP II:573). Leibniz expresses a similar attitude toward Pierre Poiret's *L'Oeconomie divine, ou Système universel et démontré des oeuvres et des desseins de Dieu envers les hommes* (1687) in his letter to Morell of 1/11 October 1697 (A I, 14:549). In his letter to Hesse-Rheinfels of 15/25 March 1688, he extends the same charity to "Tauler, Ruysbroek, Valentin Weigel, and other mystics, both Catholic and Protestant" (A I, 5:66).

46 Leibniz makes this criticism on a number of occasions in his correspondence with Morell. See Grua 120, 139.

47 "The world is addicted to trifling things. One does not think of what makes for genuine happiness. Reasons alone are not enough to ensure their own entry. Something is needed which incites the passions and enchants the soul, in the way that music and poetry do" (Grua 88-9). Cf. *Theodicy*, "Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason," §9 (GP VI:55); GP III:562 (quoted in n. 1).

48 *On the True Theologica Mystica* (Guh. I:410-13/L 367-9). For a convincing demonstration that the contents of this essay are consistent with the rest of Leibniz's philosophy, see Heinekamp, "Leibniz und Mysticism," pp. 201-3. The date of the work is uncertain but it likely stems from the same period (1688-90) as his notes on Valentin Weigel (see n. 14). Like them, the essay is written in German and there is some similarity of language. Leibniz's assertion "Gott ist mir näher angehörig als der Leib" (Guh I:412) is a clear echo of a phrase he quotes from Weigel's *Vom orth der Welt*: "Die seele ist näher als der leib, aber gott ist mir noch näher als die seele" (V:2088). The idea of the essay is defended in a letter to Friedrich Bierling of 7 July 1711: "Even Mystical Philosophy, such as that of Plato and Pythagoras, has its uses, as does Mystical Theology among us, and it serves to move people's minds more forcefully" (GP VII:497; cf. 487). The contrast between a "true" and "false" (or "good" and "bad") mysticism is invoked on many occasions; see A I, 5:66; A I, 5:600; A I, 14:202; GP II:573, 576.

49 Pseudo-Dionysius. *Mystical Theology*. I.1.

50 To Marie de Brinon, he writes: "It is not enough, Madame, to recognize the attributes of God in a theoretical and general manner, when one has practical opinions that reverse them. For in that case one risks recognizing them only in name, without penetrating to their true sense. . . . I pray to God that he gives us and conserves in us true charity, by making us place our happiness in the practical knowledge of his perfections, which leads us to imitate them by seeking to bring about the good so far as is possible" (letter of 19/29 November 1697: A I, 14:745).

51 "I admit that I have never been able to appreciate that *quietude* or inaction, or that purely passive state that some mystics introduced long before Molinos. These are the fantasies of people who do not consider sufficiently the nature of the human mind. The bad thing is that while the ancient mystics remained in theory, Molinos (if one believes the excerpts from his trial) has drawn from it the consequences of a very false and extremely dangerous practice; but as Cardinal Petrucci has disavowed these consequences and other serious authors have defended his propositions despite their falsity, I do not see why the Pope must demand a retraction from him. . ." (A I, 5:181-2). Leibniz expresses a similar view of millenarianism: "[O]ne should not persecute those who are called Chiliasts or Millenarians for an interpretation of the Apocalypse which appears auspicious [to their beliefs]. The Augsburg Confession opposes only those Millenarians destructive of the public order. But the mistake of those who wait patiently for the Kingdom of Jesus is quite harmless" (A I, 7:36-7). See Daniel J. Cook, "Leibniz and Millenarianism," presented at the VI. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress, Hannover, July 1994. In his letter to Nicaise of 9/19 August 1697, Leibniz suggests that nothing has done more to promote the spread of quietism and other mystical movements than the force exerted to suppress them (GP II:573-4).

52 Letter to the Landgrave Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, 29 June/9 July 1688. Cf. A I, 14:548.

53 The passage continues: "Among people who have extraordinary views, I have found almost only M. van Helmont who agrees with me on the great principle of charity, and in whom I have noticed a genuine ardor for the good, although in other respects we often have very different opinions on particular matters" (*ibid.*). See also Leibniz's letter to Heinrich Wilhelm Ludolf of 2/12 October 1697: "One finds in the world many well-intentioned people; the problem is that they do not agree and do not work in concert. If there were a way of finding some sort of glue to unite them, it would be a great thing. Unfortunately, people of good will often have certain quirks or particular opinions which cause them to be contrary to one another. We see this, for example, in Mlle. Antoinette de Bourignon, who scorned everyone else. . . . If only we could banish the sectarian spirit, which consists at bottom in the ambition that everyone else should be ruled by our maxims, whereas we should be satisfied to see that they work for the principal end" (A I, 14:557). The same idea of toleration is stressed in his reaction to Marie de Brinon's assertion that the only way to heaven is by the path of Rome: "I would praise even your charity, Madame, provided that you did not say that one must send to the devil whoever is not of Rome" (draft letter to Marie de Brinon, 19/29 November 1697; A I, 14:741). In another version of the letter, he writes: "Keep, if you wish, purgatory, transubstantiation and all your seven sacraments; keep also the pope with all his clergy, we do not oppose ourselves to these. . . . Save yourself only from two things, namely, affecting the honor of God through a cult of creatures who give bad impressions of the good in people, and injuring the charity one owes to human beings through a sectarian and condemnatory spirit, the consequences of which again reflect on the honor of God, whose idea is destroyed by condemnatory sectarians who make him appear unjust and tyrannical, and in a word, give him qualities that are those of his enemy" (A I, 14:743; cf. 745). For the background to this correspondence, see Eric Aiton, *Leibniz: A Biography* (Bristol: Adam Hilgar, 1985), pp. 180-5.

54 "Today's 'enthusiasts' believe that they also receive doctrinal instruction from God. The Quakers are convinced of this, and their first systematic writer, Barclay, claims that they find within themselves a certain light which itself announces what it is. . . . Some half-wits, when their imaginations become worked up, form conceptions which they did not

previously have; they become capable of saying things which strike them as very fine, or at least very lively; they astonish themselves and others with this fecundity which is taken to be inspired. They possess this ability mainly in virtue of a powerful imagination aroused by passion, and a fortunate memory which has copiously stored the turns of phrase of prophetic books which they are familiar with through reading or through hearing them talked about. Antoinette de Bourignon adduced her gift for speaking and writing as proof of her divine mission. . . . There are people who, after practising austerities or after a period of sorrow, experience a peace and consolation in the soul; this delights them, and they find such sweetness in it that they believe it to be the work of the Holy Spirit... [Yet] the way these people clash with one another should further convince them that their alleged 'inner witness' is not divine, and that other signs are required to confirm it. The Labadists, for instance, disagree with Mlle Antoinette; and although William Penn travelled to Germany for the purpose, apparently, of bringing about some kind of mutual understanding among those who rely on this 'witness', he does not appear to have succeeded. . . . It is indeed desirable that good people should agree with one another and should work in unison; nothing could contribute more to making the human race better and happier. But they must themselves be truly numbered among the people of good will, that is, people who do good and are reasonable and ready to learn." *New Essays* IV, XIX (A VI, 6:505-7/RB 505-7).

⁵⁵ In the draft of his letter to Gilles Des Billettes of 11/21 October 1697, Leibniz speaks of his "zeal for advancing the public good in general without regard for differences of religion or nationality and without dwelling on matters of self-interest. I am not a phil-Hellene or a phil-Roman but a phil-anthropos. My great interest is to be able to contribute to the search for truth and the advancement of the arts and sciences" (A I, 14:622-3; cf. A I, 14:625/L 475).

⁵⁶ I would like to thank Daniel Cook and Steven Strange for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.