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*The Times Literary Supplement*, July 1972
CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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LEIBNIZ

Political Writings

TRANSLATED AND EDITED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

PATRICK RILEY

Michael Oakeshott Professor of Political Philosophy,
University of Wisconsin, Madison

SECOND EDITION

Cambridge University Press
For

Michael Oakeshott
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In a letter to the Jesuit Father des Bosses, Leibniz had occasion to complain that ‘two things usually make publishers hesitate – one is their desire to profit; the other is ignorance. Thus they do not know what they should select. They do not trust scholars enough, because they believe that scholars have a better understanding of what is scholarly than of what will sell.’ If Leibniz were alive today, he would be gratified to know that the Cambridge University Press, in consenting to publish an edition of his political writings, showed itself admirably free of all these faults. From the outset the Press trusted my judgment in the selection and translation of the pieces to appear in this volume, but also saw to it that I was provided with a searching critique of some of the more obscure points in the ‘editor’s introduction’. For this trust, for this willingness to revive interesting and unaccountably neglected political writings of a great contemporary of Hobbes, Spinoza and Locke, I am much in their debt. While it is true that no one can pretend that Leibniz’ political writings are equal to those of such contemporaries, or even to his own writings on logic, metaphysics and theology, they are at least intriguing and worthy of some attention.

Anyone who reads the introduction will notice that it draws on a wide range of books, letters, manuscripts etc., and that Leibniz’ ‘political system’ has been assembled out of these materials. I think that there really is a system in these writings – though, since Leibniz never wrote a large-scale, comprehensive treatise on politics, the system which I have explained may look rather artificial. A composite it is, indeed; but not an invention.

In preparing the original edition (1972) of The Political Writings of Leibniz I incurred many debts. Dr John Gleason, formerly of the Harvard Classics Department, supplied me some years ago with a translation of chapters 9 and 10 of Leibniz’ Caesarius Fürstenerius, and I retained most of his work in the present version. Mr James Zetzel, of the same Department, was kind enough to read over the translation from the Latin, and to suggest important changes. Professor Leroy Loemker, then of Emory University, cleared up several difficult points in a letter from which I profited. The present version of the Meditation of the Common Concept of Justice was strengthened because I was able to read the actual manuscript, preserved in the Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek in Hanover, Germany; for the funds which made that trip possible I remain grateful to the Harvard Government Department, and for generous assistance at the Landes-
Preface to the Second Edition

...bibliothek I owe a debt of gratitude (stretching down to the present moment) to Dr Gerda Utermöhlen. Finally I want to re-acknowledge a grant from the Canaday Humanities Fund at Harvard, which made it possible to put the finishing touches on the original edition, and the patient assistance and advice of Mrs Patricia Williams, then of the Cambridge University Press. In 1972, as in 1987, my wife's unfailing help and encouragement (and proof-reading) have made all of my scholarly efforts possible.

I have taken advantage of the re-issuing of *Leibniz* by adding three ‘new’ pieces – unpublished manuscripts from the period 1695 to 1714 – which flesh out our view of Leibniz’ political and moral thought. (For permission to publish these manuscripts I am grateful to the Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Hanover – and more particularly to Drs Gerda Utermöhlen and Albert Heinekamp.) Practical considerations necessitated placing these ‘new’ items at the end of the book; and since they are unknown I have written a substantial introduction to each. Different as the three new pieces are, they are linked by Leibniz’ consistent hostility to Hobbes, and by his consistent effort to fuse Platonic rationalism and Christian charity in a ‘universal jurisprudence’ valid for all ‘minds’. (I have also taken advantage of this new edition by enlarging and revising the ‘critical bibliography’, carrying it down to 1986).

My work on this new edition has been greatly facilitated by happy events here in England. For the Hilary and Trinity terms of 1987 I have been the guest of Jesus College, Oxford, which generously provided an ideal work atmosphere and learned, congenial colleagues; all of this I owe to Dr John Gray, who kindly brought me to the College. I am grateful to the British Museum for providing photocopies of rare editions of Leibniz which I needed for this enlarged edition, and to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, for furnishing every Leibniz text I needed with cheerful dispatch. I am most particularly grateful to Mrs Gillian Beeston of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for her generous assistance in connection with the translation of the Latin text of Leibniz’ 1714 lecture on the Greeks as founders of rational theology – the third and last ‘new’ item in this edition. And I am grateful to Jeremy Mynott of Cambridge University Press for proposing this new edition, and to the Editors for incorporating my book in their new series.

My last word will be for Michael Oakeshott, to whom I dedicate this book. It was he who pulled me into the field of political and moral philosophy nearly thirty years ago, who left an indelible imprint as my tutor at the London School of Economics, and who represents everything I most admire in English civilization and academic life. I owe him more than any mere dedication can ever hope to express.

Jesus College, Oxford
June 1987
Abbreviations


Klopp = Onno Klopp, Die Werke von Leibniz, Klindworth Verlag, Hanover, 1864–84.

Latta = Robert Latta, The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings, Oxford University Press, 1898.


Mollat = G. Mollat, Rechtsphilosophisches aus Leibnizens Ungedruckten Schriften, Verlag Robolsky, Leipzig, 1885.

Monadology (cited by propositions, e.g., 'prop. 56').
New Essays on Human Understanding (cited by book, chapter and part, e.g., ‘NE iv, iii, pt. 1’).
Principles of Nature and Grace (cited by propositions, e.g., ‘prop. 2’).
Rommel = C. von Rommel, Leibniz und Landgraf Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, Frankfurt, 1847.
Theodicy (cited by books and propositions, e.g., ‘Theodicy iii, pt. 337’).