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## Leibniz's Metaphysics

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### Its Origins and Development

This is the first systematic study of the development of Leibniz's philosophy. By placing his vast writings in their proper intellectual context and by analyzing unnoticed early works, Christia Mercer shows that Leibniz developed his philosophy much earlier than previously believed and for reasons that have not been recognized. *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development* offers a major reassessment of Leibniz's thought. It will engage philosophers, historians, and scholars of religious studies.

For too long, the history of early modern philosophy has been a tale of tidy progress according to which Leibniz developed his metaphysics primarily in reaction to the old scholasticism and the new Cartesianism. *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development* shows that this story is inaccurate. By uncovering a German school of conciliatory eclectics who trained the young Leibniz, Mercer places his early texts in an entirely new light. By excavating Leibniz's long-hidden views about substance, God, and method, Mercer exposes for the first time the underlying assumptions and ultimate goals of his philosophy. It becomes clear that Leibniz's relation to Descartes, Spinoza, and other major seventeenth-century thinkers is significantly different than previously thought. This study will compel scholars to reconsider many of their assumptions about early modern science, theology, and philosophy.

Christia Mercer is an associate professor of philosophy at Columbia University.

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CHRISTIA MERCER

*Columbia University*



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*For Tommy George and Wanda Jo:  
Yippie-ki-yo-ki-yey*

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## Acknowledgments

This book is really two books in one, each of which comes with its own set of intellectual debts. The first, which is my PhD thesis and for which Cambridge University Press originally gave me a contract, was conceived at Princeton University, researched at the Leibniz Archives at the University of Münster (Germany), and completed at the University of Notre Dame. As a graduate student at Princeton, I had the opportunity to meet and work with Margaret Wilson, Dan Garber, and Bob Sleigh, whose philosophical acumen, scholarly skills, and personal generosity have inspired me over the years. My research in Germany was funded by the Fulbright Commission and encouraged by the editors of Leibniz's philosophical writings at the Leibniz Forschungsstelle. Gerhard Biller, Martin Schneider, and especially Professor Heinrich Schepers helped me to find my way through the labyrinth of Leibniz's papers. During the time I spent at the University of Notre Dame, Ernan McMullin, Dick Foley, Howie Wettstein, and Phil Quinn encouraged the completion of my thesis. I also benefited from the support of the intellectual community at the University of California, Irvine, and from a grant awarded by the American Council for Learned Studies. Among the people who made helpful comments on the original manuscript, from which major parts of chapters 2, 3, and 4 of the present book are taken, I would like particularly to thank Don Rutherford, Bernard Reginster, unnamed readers for Cambridge University Press, Phil Quinn, Alan Nelson, Stuart Brown, Ohad Nachtomy, Mark Kulstad, and Stephen Menn.

The second book was conceived during a second lengthy research trip to Germany, this time supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Although I had returned to the Leibniz Archives to prepare the thesis for publication, in my attempt to answer some questions that remained from my earlier research, I discovered Leibniz's youthful Platonism and the Platonism of his teachers. With this recognition, I was forced to rethink everything but the core of my original interpretation. Chapters 5 through 10 of the book are based on the research funded by the Humboldt Foundation, some of which took place in Oxford. My colleague at the University of Oslo, Eyfi Emilsson, has greatly helped me grasp the rudiments of Plotinian metaphysics, while Sarah Hutton has enlightened me on matters concerning early modern Platonism more generally.

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## References to Leibniz's works

My primary source is *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923. I abbreviate my references as follows: capital roman numerals = series number; lower case roman numerals = volume number; arabic numerals = page number. Because the fourth volume of series six is itself three volumes (A, B, C) and because the pagination is consecutive, there will be some citations in which the page number is more than three digits. For example, VI iv [B] 1444 = series six, volume four (part B), page one thousand four hundred and forty four. Each text in each volume of the Academy edition is numbered. When I refer to a whole text as opposed to only part of it, I sometimes refer to it by its number. For example, Leibniz's thesis, *Metaphysical Disputation on the Principle of Individuation* = VI i N.1.

Leibniz published very little during his lifetime. To distinguish between published and unpublished works, I capitalize all the words in the title of the published ones and only the first word in the title of unpublished ones.

### Abbreviations

AG: *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, eds. Roger Ariew, Daniel Garber, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.

AT: *Oeuvres de Descartes*, eds. C. Adam, P. Tannery, 11 vols., Paris: Vrin, 1996.

CSM: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2 vols., eds. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Dutens: Leibniz, *Opera Omnia*, ed. L. Dutens, 6 vols., Geneva: De Tournes, 1768; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1989.

G: *Die philosophischen Schriften von Leibniz*, ed. C.I. Gerhardt, 7 vols., Berlin: Wiedmann, 1875–90; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1965.

GM: *Mathematische Schriften*, ed. C.I. Gerhardt, 7 vols., Berlin: A. Asher, 1848–63; reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1962.

L: *G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. Leroy E. Loemker, 2nd ed., Dordrecht: Reidel, 1969.

Pk: *G.W. Leibniz: De Summa Rerum, Metaphysical Papers 1675–76*, ed. G.H.R. Parkinson, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

W: *Leibniz: Selections*, ed. P.P. Wiener, New York: Scribner's, 1951.

### Translations

My policy is to cite the primary source and, in those cases when there is a translated version of the passage, to cite the translation after a colon. As a translator, my goal has been to stay close to the original text and to include Leibniz's capitalization of key terms. Therefore, I have often deviated from the translation cited. In cases where the original language is very unclear, I have attached an original language quotation to the citation in the note. Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.