The Life And Works Of Gottfried Von Leibniz Essay, Research Paper

The Life and Works of Gottfried von Leibniz

Gottfried von Leibniz, born on July 1st, 1646, was a German philosopher, as well as a mathematician, a universal genius, and a founder of modern science. He foresaw the development of symbolic logic and, unconnected with Isaac Newton, invented the calculus with a superior notation, including the symbols for integration and differentiation. He expressed a theory of substance based on monads, which were metaphysical and animistically bestowed points of force and perception. Leibniz also supported Christian ecumenism in religion, organized Roman laws and introduced natural law in jurisprudence, proposed the metaphysical law of optimism (attacked with wit by Voltaire in Candied) that our universe is the “best of all possible worlds,” and transmitted Chinese thought to Europe. For his work, he is considered a forefather of German idealism and a pioneer of the Enlightenment. Leibniz was the son of a professor of moral philosophy at Leipzig. An advanced youth, Leibniz taught himself Latin and some Greek by age 12 so that he could read the books in his father’s library. From 1661 to 1666 he majored in law at the University of Leipzig.

When refused admission to its doctoral program in law in 1666, he went to the

University of Altdorf, which awarded him the doctorate in jurisprudence in 1667.

In the tradition of Cicero and Francis Bacon, Leibniz chose to pursue the active life of a sycophant. He thus declined a chance to become a professor at Altdorf because he had “very different things in view.” After serving as secretary of the Rosicrucian Society in Nuremberg in 1667, he moved to Frankfurt to work on legal improvement. From 1668 to 1673 he served as the elector-archbishop of Mainz. He was sent to Paris in 1672 to try to dissuade Louis XIV from attacking German areas. Leibniz proposed a campaign against Egypt and the Levant as well as building a canal through the Isthmus of Suez. Although his proposals were unnoticed, Leibniz remained until 1676 in Paris, where he practiced law, examined Cartesian thought with Nicolas de Malebranche and Antoine Arnauld, and studied mathematics and physics under Christian Huygens. From 1676 until his death on November the 4th, 1716, Leibniz served the Brunswick family in Hanover as librarian, judge, and minister. After 1686 he served primarily as historian, preparing a genealogy of the Hanovers based on the careful examination of primary source materials. In search of sources, he traveled to Austria and Italy from 1687 to 1690. Because of his Lutheran background, he declined the position of custodian of the Vatican Library, which required his conversion to Catholicism.

In his later years, Leibniz attempted to build an organized framework for the sciences in central Europe and Russia. At his pleading, the Brandenburg Society (Berlin Academy of Science) was founded in 1700. He met several times with Peter the Great to recommend educational changes in Russia and proposed what later became the Saint Petersburg Academy of Science. Although shy and bookish, Leibniz knew no master in disputation. After 1700 he opposed John Locke’s theory that the mind is a tabula rasa (blank tablet) at birth and that we learn only through the senses. He strongly protested the Royal Society’s charge (1712-13) of plagiarism against him regarding the invention of the calculus. In his final debate with Samuel Clarke, who defended Newtonian science, Leibniz argued that space, time, and motion are relative.

Leibniz’s most important works are the Essais de Theodicee (1710; Eng. trans (1951), in which much of his general philosophy is found, and the Monadology (1714; trans. as The Monadology and other Philosophical Writings, 1898), in which he stated his theory of monads. His work was put in order and modified in the 18th century by the German philosopher Christian Wolff. Altogether, the life and works of Gottfried von Leibniz was an essential part to the mathematics of today.