

True and False Mysticism in Leibniz

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Abstract

The question of Leibniz's relationship to mysticism has been a topic of some debate since the early part of the 20th Century. An initial wave of scholarship led by Jean Baruzi presented Leibniz as a mystic. However, later in the 20th Century the mood turned against this view and the negative appraisal holds sway today. In this paper I do two things: First I provide a detailed account of the ways in which Leibniz is critical of mysticism; second, I argue that there is, nonetheless, an important sense in which Leibniz should be regarded as an advocate of mysticism. However, the approach that I take does not focus on an effort to overturn the kinds of considerations that led people to reject the views of Baruzi. Instead, I try to reframe the discussion and explore more complex and interesting relationships that exist between mysticism and Leibniz's philosophical theology than have been articulated previously. Here I draw on some recent discussions of mysticism in the philosophical literature to illuminate Leibniz's own distinction between "false mysticism" and "true mystical theology" and his assessment of the views of a number of other people who might plausibly be identified as mystics.

The question of Leibniz's relationship to mysticism has been a topic of some debate since the early part of the 20th Century when Jean Baruzi published three unedited texts, which he referred to as "Mystical Dialogues," and followed this with two books in which he made the case that Leibniz should be regarded as a mystic.² Baruzi's thesis found some initial support in the work of Dieter Mahnke.³ However, later in the 20th Century the mood turned against this view, with Émilienne Naert⁴, Nicholas Rescher⁵, and Albert Heinekamp⁶ claiming that Leibniz's philosophical theology is essentially at odds with key features of the mystical tradition. And in 1998 both Donald Rutherford and Daniel Cook published papers which upheld this tradition.⁷

In this paper I do two things: First I provide a detailed account of the ways in which Leibniz is critical of mysticism; second, I try to argue that there is, nonetheless, an important sense in which Leibniz should be regarded as an advocate of mysticism. However, the approach that I take is not focussed on an effort to overturn the kinds of considerations that have led people to reject the views of Baruzi and Mahnke.

Instead, I try to reframe the discussion and explore more complex and interesting relationships that exist between mysticism and Leibniz's philosophical theology than have been articulated previously. Here I shall draw on some recent discussions of mysticism in the philosophical literature to illuminate Leibniz's own distinction between "false mysticism" and "true mystical theology" and his assessment of the views of a number of other people who might plausibly be identified as mystics.⁸

1. What is mysticism?

One of the main difficulties in approaching the question of Leibniz's attitude toward mysticism stems from the various ways in which the term itself is, and has been, used. Etymologically, it can be traced back to the Greek verb $\mu\upsilon\omega$, which means 'to conceal,' and the earliest Hellenistic uses are adjectival in form, describing secret rituals. Early Christian usage is consonant with this, with 'mystical' referring to esoteric interpretations of scripture and concealed aspects of the divine such as God's presence in the Eucharist.⁹ More pertinent to the current discussion is the later use of the term as it appears in the title of one of the surviving works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, namely *The Mystical Theology* (Dionysius 1920). Pseudo-Dionysius illustrates his conception of mystical theology by a description of Moses' encounter with God on Sinai, which proceeds from contemplation of God via negative theology to a mystical experience which involves "union' with the ineffable, invisible, unknowable godhead" (Corrigan and Harrington 2015, sec. 3.4).

The conception of experience that informs Pseudo-Dionysian mystical theology is probably the most prominent component of mysticism as commonly conceived. It is this conception that we find in the Oxford English Dictionary, where mysticism is said to be "belief in the possibility of union with or absorption into God by means of contemplation and self-surrender; belief in or devotion to the spiritual apprehension of truths inaccessible to the intellect." As we shall see below, it is not the only way in which Leibniz uses the term. But it is not just Leibniz who offers us a more complex conception. As Jerome Gellman observes in a recent article: "Typically, mystics, theistic or not, see their mystical experience as part of a larger undertaking aimed at human transformation ... and not as the terminus of their efforts. Thus, in general, 'mysticism' would best be thought of as a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined in different traditions" (Gellman 2014). But even if we restrict ourselves to conceptions of mysticism that might be regarded

as broadly epistemic in nature, the Oxford English Dictionary definition does not capture a number of distinctions that recent philosophers have drawn.

Whilst recognizing that there is unlikely to be clear consensus on what would count as an adequate conception of mysticism, I want to rely on Gellman's discussion to provide further background for my discussion of Leibniz.¹⁰ On Gellman's account what distinguishes mysticism from other modes of apprehension is its dependence on mystical experience, which he divides into two kinds, "wide" and "narrow", where the former is thought to capture "a more general usage" of the term.

A wide mystical experience is:

A (purportedly) super sense-perceptual or sub sense-perceptual experience granting acquaintance of realities or states of affairs that are of a kind not accessible by way of sense perception, somatosensory modalities, or standard introspection.

And a narrow one is:

A (purportedly) super sense-perceptual or sub sense-perceptual unitive experience granting acquaintance of realities or states of affairs that are of a kind not accessible by way of sense-perception, somatosensory modalities, or standard introspection.¹¹

Gellman adds two other important qualifications: 1) It is not part of his conception that "at the time of the experience the subject could tell herself, as it were, what realities or state of affairs were then being disclosed to her"; and 2) based on observation of mystical writings, Gellman does not accept William James' claim (James 1958) that a "mystical experience must be a transient event, lasting only a short time and then disappearing." There is nothing to prevent mystical experience lasting hours or days. Indeed, it is consistent with Gellman's account that there might be a permanent state of mystical awareness.

The key difference between the wide and narrow senses of mystical experience is that the latter involve "unitive experience", where a unitive experiences is one that "involves a phenomenological de-emphasis, blurring, or eradication of multiplicity, where the cognitive significance of the experience is deemed to lie precisely in that phenomenological feature." And here Gellman offers three distinct examples: 1) "experiences of the oneness of all of nature"; 2) "'union' with God," 3) "the Buddhist unconstructed experience"; and 4) "monistic" experiences, devoid of all multiplicity" (Gellman 2014, sec. 1.2).¹² Importantly for the present discussion, it follows from this that narrow mystical experiences are incompatible

with purported experiences of God in which the subject of the experience is taken to be clearly distinct from God. Gellman's discussion also includes accounts of a number of other categories into which mystical experiences have commonly been divided which will be important for my discussion of Leibniz.

a) Introvertive vs. extrovertive mysticism

In his seminal book, W. T. Stace introduces the distinction between "extrovertive" and "introvertive" mysticism.¹³ Here the distinction is between experiences that do and those that do not include content that is sensory, somatosensory or introspective in addition to the super or sub-sensory. In extrovertive mysticism the distinctively mystical character accompanies ordinary experience, either as a simple accompaniment or in a way that is unitive. Where this is not the case the experiences are said to be "introvertive".

b) Identity with God vs. union with God

Within the category of narrow mysticism, a further distinction may be usefully drawn between two kinds of unity. Among the writings of mystics, at least some authors appear to speak of experiencing an identity with God. Thus, Gellman notes that the Islamic Sufi mystic al-Husayn al-Hallaj (858-922 CE) proclaims "I am God",¹⁴ the Jewish kabbalist Isaac of Acre (b. 1291CE?) writes about the soul being absorbed into God "as a jug of water into a running well",¹⁵ and Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1327/8CE) "made what looked very much like identity-declarations" (2014, sec. 2.2.2).¹⁶

Others talk in a way that suggests a "union" with God, which Gellman describes as experience that "involves a falling away of the separation between a person and God, short of identity." Thus, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153CE) speaks of a "mutuality of love," Henry Suso (1295–1366CE) likens experience of oneness with God to a drop of water falling into wine, taking on the taste and colour of the wine,¹⁷ and Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293–1381CE) writes about "iron within the fire and the fire within the iron".¹⁸ Following Nelson Pike (1992, ch.1), Gellman suggests that in medieval Christian mysticism union can be thought to have "at least three stages ... quiet, essentially a prelude to the union with God, full union, and rapture, the latter involving a feeling of being 'carried away' beyond oneself" (2014, sec. 2.2.1).

c) Apophatic vs. kataphatic mysticism

The distinction between apophatic (from the Greek, *apophasis*, meaning negation) and kataphatic (from the Greek, *kataphasis*, meaning affirmation) mysticism concerns the way in which, and the extent to which, the content of mystical experience is available through language. Apophatic mysticism is the mysticism that is associated with kind of the negative theology found in Pseudo-Dionysius, in which the experiences are held to be beyond words or 'ineffable'. Kataphatic mysticism places no such restriction on what might be reported.¹⁹

With these ideas in mind, I want to turn next to the conception of mysticism that informs the traditional rejection of Leibniz as a mystic. We find in Heinekamp the suggestions that Baruzi and Mahnke could only claim that Leibniz was a mystic because they are employing "a very broad and unspecific conception of mysticism" (1988, 203), and that when it comes to "the true concern of the mystics", Leibniz's "intellectualistic philosophy is at many points the exact negation of mysticism" (1988, 203).

What Heinekamp seems to have in mind when he is thinking of mysticism is made more precise in Rutherford's article. Rutherford notes that Leibniz was familiar with early Christian writers such as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa.²⁰ However, his discussion is based primarily on Leibniz's consideration of the late 17th century controversy surrounding what is generally referred to as 'quietism' and his rejection of the quietist position.²¹ Furthermore, in a footnote Rutherford offers a quotation from Andrew Louth's book *The Origin of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* which provides the understanding of the notion that is in play throughout his paper. It is worth quoting in full:

[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 the other. How the mystics interpret the way and 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. (1981, xv)

If we set this account against the more detailed one that Gellman presents, we can see that Rutherford is concerned with only a subset of positions that are described there. The quote from Louth is mainly describing experiences that are mystical in Gellman's "narrow" sense, i.e., experiences that are unitive. And, whilst remaining neutral on the issues of identity vs. union, his account extends only to introvertive mysticism. However, it is not quite as simple as this, since Louth allows that "union" may be such that "the lover and the beloved remain intensely aware both of themselves and the other" which falls short of the requirements for union as Gellman presents them.

2. Leibniz's criticisms of mysticism

It should be apparent from the discussion so far, that there is, at least in principle, a good deal of scope for regarding Leibniz as a proponent of mysticism if we follow something like Gellman's conception. Later in the paper I shall argue that this broader conception will allow us to make sense of why Leibniz is willing to speak favourably of "true mystics" and "true mystical theology". And, at that point, I shall part company with the tradition that has dominated recent discussions of Leibniz and mysticism. However, before turning to this issue, I want to look at the kinds of considerations that have given the tradition its authority. For it is undeniably the case the Leibniz makes some very negative comments about what he terms "false mysticism". Leibniz's most sustained attacks and his use of this expression are directed at those whom he also characterizes as "quietists". In this section I shall begin with a discussion of the case that Leibniz makes against quietism and then move on to other forms of mysticism that meet with his disapproval.

2.1 The nature of quietism

The rise of quietism is associated with Miguel de Molinos (1628-96), and, in particular, his *Spiritual Guide* of 1675.²² A key thesis in the *Guide* is the claim that, in order to reach the spiritually mature state of contemplation in which blessedness consists, one must go beyond the kind of Christian meditative practice that involves a thinking reflection on the scriptures or other devotional literature. As a result of such claims, Molinos fell afoul of Jesuits for whom there was a perceived tension with the meditative practice advocated by St Ignatius of Loyola's (1491-1556)

Spiritual Exercises of 1548.²³ Whilst initial disputes led to Molinos' vindication by the Inquisition in 1681, on July 18, 1685 he was arrested and imprisoned in Rome, and in 1687 appeared before the Inquisition again. This appearance was less successful. It led to a sentence of life imprisonment and the censuring of 68 propositions from the *Guide* and other writings which was later ratified by Pope Innocent XI (1611-89) in the Papal bull *Coelestis Pastor*. Molinos confessed his errors the day after his sentencing, but died in the prison of the Holy Office in 1696.²⁴

Whilst he was clearly aware of Molinos and his writings,²⁵ more significant for our understanding of Leibniz is the subsequent wave of quietism that arose in France in connection with the life and work of Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte-Guyon, or 'Madame Guyon' (1648-1717). Guyon's book (*A Short and Easy Method of Prayer*, 1685) and the interest with which it was received in French society led to a brief imprisonment in 1688. Guyon retracted her views, but their influence did not wane, particularly as a result of the support that she received from her cousin François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, or François Fénelon (1651–1715), who was tutor to the Dauphin's eldest son. Guyon was imprisoned again from 1695 until 1703 and her views were subject to condemnation by a commission that sat at Issy in 1697 on which Fénelon served. There followed a well-known controversy between Fénelon and his old friend and teacher Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704). Bossuet had composed an account of the Articles d'Issy. Fénelon refused to endorse this treatise however, and instead composed his own explanation as to the meaning of the Articles d'Issy, which appeared more sympathetic to Guyon and was ultimately condemned by the Inquisition in 1699. Fénelon submitted and the controversy subsided.

Given the complexity of the series of events and the attendant condemnations, quietism emerged as a rather manufactured heresy, the details of which it is hard to articulate definitively. But the common conception of the view was that it included the claim that the greatest good for human beings consists in a union with God reached through a process of self-annihilation, the result of which is retreat from the world in complete inaction and passive contemplation. And it is to something like this complex of views that Leibniz reacted.

Quietism as Leibniz understands it then is narrower in scope than the characterizations of mysticism offered by both Louth and Gellman. Like at least some of Louth's mystics, the quietists fall into Gellman's category of narrow introvertive mysticism. However, the conception of the unitive relation with God is one of identity rather than union. Thus, although Leibniz was clearly an opponent of

quietism, for the reasons that I shall outline below, we should not take his rejection of quietism to exhaust the issue of whether he was favorable toward mysticism.

2.2 Leibniz's objections to quietism

It is clear from his writings that Leibniz was an opponent of quietism. The following passage from a letter written to his follower Michael Gottlieb Hansch in 1707 (1683-1752) is representative of the kind of appraisal that he offers:

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, and undesirable deification. (D II.I, 225/L 594).

The first thing to note here is that this is a case in which Leibniz is offering a critique of what he terms "false mystics". Just who Leibniz regards as falling into this category is something to which I shall return below. But in the letter to Hansch he mentions Valentine Weigel (1533-88) whose work Leibniz had excerpted and commented on at some length in 1687²⁶, Angelus Silesius (1624-77), whose *The Cherubinic Pilgrim*, a collection of 1,676 short poems, is mentioned here explicitly, and, perhaps most notably, Spinoza.²⁷

Several objections to quietism are raised. First Leibniz lists two features of the state of blessedness advocated by quietists which are problematic: 1) a denial of individuality; and 2) a denial of mental activity and the entering of a passive state. And at the end of the paragraph he appears to offer two reasons why he thinks this is problematic: it would be 1) an "evil enthusiasm"; and 2) "an undesirable deification." These are strong terms, and it is clear that Leibniz thinks that something very important is at stake. In a piece attached to a letter to Claude Nicaise from 19 August 1697, he reveals his concerns as follows:

And to wish to be detached from oneself and from one's own good is to play with words or, if we turn to the effects, it is to fall into an extravagant quietism: it is to desire a stupid inactivity, or rather an affected and simulated inactivity, in which under the pretext of the resignation and annihilation of the soul swallowed up in God, one may proceed to libertinism in practice, or at least

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to a hidden speculative atheism, such as that of Averroes and of other, more ancient, thinkers, who claimed that our soul is ultimately lost in the universal spirit and that this is the perfect union with God. (A II, 3 367/LGR 160)

Here we learn that Leibniz is concerned that, at best, the quietists will be disguised atheists, and at worst will be inclined to libertinism. In fact, the passage offers us additional insight into Leibniz's thinking. For he is not merely claiming that quietists attain the union with God to which they aspire, and that this has bad consequences. The bad consequences are also said to emerge from something illusory.

At the heart of the concern that Leibniz expresses in the first passage is the thought that quietists “deny individuality and action” to the blessed. There is an obvious worry about the first of these. For a blessedness without individuality is one that could arise only if the purported mystic no longer existed. But, even the second, i.e., the denial of action, is objectionable to Leibniz. For Leibniz, the reality of the human consists in being a substance. And, whilst he struggled throughout his life to provide a definitive account of how he understood both the intension and extension of this term, he consistently maintained for most of his life that substances are essentially active.²⁸ Thus, on pain of non-existence a “passive state” is impossible for a human being, and Leibniz thus regards any such claims to involve only “an affected and simulated inactivity.” As he observes in the essay *Reflections of the Doctrine of a Single Universal Spirit* from 1702:

If it were claimed that these souls reunited to God are without any functions, we fall into an opinion contrary to reason and all good philosophy, as if any subsisting being could ever reach a state in which it is without any function or impression. (GP VI 536/LTS 288)

Leibniz offers an additional, though related, consideration as evidence against the kind of mysticism he associates with quietism in the paper sent to Nicaise in 1697:

There are doubtless false mystics who imagine that once one is united with God by an act of pure faith and pure love, one remains united to him, as long as one does not formally revoke this union. (A II, 3 368/LGR 158)

Here the mystical state is characterised as one in which the mystic is capable of turning away from God. For Leibniz this would stand as a recognition by those defending the practice that genuine annihilation, or indeed absolute passivity, is not the desired end-point. For the capacity to revoke the union must remain. Thus, not only is the concept articulated by the proponents of false mysticism internally incoherent, it does not even capture the phenomena that its proponents intend.

As I have pointed out, however, Leibniz is not just concerned to point out the

falsity of quietism as a matter of theory. He is concerned about the possible effects on those who are in the grip of such a confusion. Leibniz's engagement with the quietist debate was a reaction to a real-world phenomenon, namely the practice of categorizing particular people as mystics of a certain kind and the consequences of this. Those identified as mystics were people who were taken to have had some kind of direct epistemic access to God. And, to the extent that those people returned to the world, they were objects of attention, and potential guides, for those who did not regard themselves as having had such access. They held out the possibility of a genuine revelation of the divine mind, including, in no small part, information about how to live in accordance with God's will.

As we have seen, Leibniz was worried that taking oneself or another to have attained blessedness would "be an evil enthusiasm, and undesirable deification" (D II.I, 225/L 594) which might lead to "libertinism in practice, or at least to a hidden speculative atheism" (A II 3, 367/LGR 160). There are several different claims here, all of which are intended to be negative. The first two are accounts of what would attend success as a quietist. The third and fourth are possible consequences. I shall examine each in turn.

Leibniz first raises the concern that quietism would "be an evil enthusiasm". We can begin to get an understanding of what Leibniz means by this by turning to the discussion of Leibniz's views on enthusiasm in the *New Essays* in response to Locke's discussion of the topic at ECHU 4.19. Here Leibniz begins by noting that:

'Enthusiasm' was at first a favourable name. Just as 'sophism' indicates literally an exercise of wisdom, so 'enthusiasm' signifies that there is a divinity inside us. 'There is a God within us.'²⁹ And Socrates claimed that a God or Daemon gave him inner warnings, so that 'enthusiasm' [in his case] would be a divine instinct. (NE 504)

Leibniz observes, however, that over time the term came to have negative connotations:

But men sanctified their passions, and took their fancies and dreams and even their ravings to be something divine, and as a result 'enthusiasm' began to signify a disorder of the mind ascribed to the action of some divinity, supposedly inside those who were seized by it. For prophets and prophetesses, such as Virgil's Cumean Sybil, did manifest mental derangement while their God had possession of them. More recently the term has been applied to people who believe groundlessly that their impulses come from God. ... Today's 'enthusiasts' also believe that they receive doctrinal instruction from God.

(NE 504-05).³⁰

Leibniz then provides brief critical comments on a number of people whom he classifies as “today’s ‘enthusiasts’”. At this point he does not mention any of those we have seen him identify as quietists among the enthusiasts he discusses.³¹ However, I think we can nonetheless appropriate this characterization of enthusiasts when considering Leibniz’s rejection of quietists, given that they were people whom he would have held to “believe groundlessly that their impulses come from God” and “also believe that they receive doctrinal instruction from God”.

Leibniz objects to quietism on the grounds that it is an “evil enthusiasm”. The sense in which it constitutes enthusiasm for Leibniz should be reasonably clear. For the quietists claim to have entered a state that could not have really have existed, let alone counted as an encounter with God. Thus anything that they do or say that is supposed to receive support because it is grounded in this encounter will be justified illegitimately.

It is hard to know just what work the term ‘evil’ is doing here. In one sense it seems redundant. However, Leibniz famously distinguishes three kinds of evil in section 21 of the *Theodicy*

Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. Metaphysical evil consists in mere imperfection, physical evil in suffering, and moral evil in sin. (GP VI, 115/H 136)

Whatever the complexities of this typology, it seems likely that the sense in which Leibniz conceives of quietism as involving an “evil enthusiasm” is that it is morally evil, or sinful. As we shall see later, Leibniz does not appear to think that all enthusiasts are blameworthy. So, whilst I am not aware of any textual evidence that can take us further here, we might speculate that Leibniz thought the quietists ought to have known better than to claim unification with the divine and were thus blameworthy in claiming divine authority for their beliefs and behaviour.

The second worry that Leibniz raises is that quietism would lead to an “undesirable deification” (D II.I, 225/L 594). Setting aside worries about the coherence of conceptualising unification with God, there is something else at stake here. On the one hand, Leibniz may simply be concerned about the kind of attitudes that might attend the desire to be God and be cultivated in others if such a possibility were advertised as desirable. But he might also be concerned about the way in which supposed union with God would condition the continued existence of a given individual who had been deemed to achieve such a state. For that individual would, in some sense, be thought to have become God and then returned. With millenarian

ideas alive in the late 17th century, it could well be that Leibniz was concerned about the extent to which quietism might engender messianism.

One of the main negative consequences that Leibniz was concerned about is expressed in the third of his worries, namely that quietism might lead to “libertinism in practice” (A II 3, 367/LGR 160). As evidenced by his pairing it with a concern about atheism, Leibniz is most likely to be thinking of libertines as those who are religious freethinkers rather than the more common association with lack of moral and/or sexual constraint that emerges in the wake of eighteenth century authors such as Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) and Pierre Choderlos de Laclos (1741-1803). During the 1690s, Fénelon served as a kind of spiritual advisor to Françoise d’Aubigné, Marquise de Maintenon (1635–1719), the second, andmorganatic, wife of Louis XIV who may well have been his mistress prior to the marriage. So it is at least possible that Leibniz was alluding to this connection. However, there does not seem to be any suggestion that quietism itself was more generally associated with sexual impropriety.

The issue of whether there was a causal connection between quietism and libertinism might be thought to be a simple empirical matter. Indeed, in a certain sense, the question is settled by the fact that Molinos and what were taken to be the doctrines of quietism were condemned by Pope Innocent XI in the Bull *Coelestis Pastor* of 1687; and to a lesser extent by the ways in which Madame Guyon and Fénelon were treated by the authorities. Whilst it is true that the disputes here were due to apparent deviation from the teachings of the Catholic Church, to which Leibniz himself did not formally subscribe, the charge of libertinism seems reasonable. After all, the quietists were themselves Catholics and led to propose heretical doctrines on the basis of the significance which they attached to the quietist conception of the union with God. And there is no particular reason to think that quietism would have been any less likely to engender free thinking among people from different denominations had it gained traction. Whatever the motivation, the fact that Leibniz was concerned to resist such trends can be in no doubt. There is ample evidence of his desire to uphold tradition from his writings and projects that he undertook throughout his life.

Leibniz’s final concern is that taking the quietist’s conception of blessedness seriously might lead one toward “a hidden speculative atheism” (A II, 3 367/LGR 160). Here he alludes explicitly to “Averroes and . . . other, more ancient, thinkers, who claimed that our soul is ultimately lost in the universal spirit and that this is the perfect union with God” (ibid.), and also suggests claims to “find some traces

of this opinion in ... certain epigrams of a mystical author called Johann Angelus” (ibid.).

Just what Leibniz intends here is unclear. One of the doctrines traditionally associated with the Islamic philosopher Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn ‘Aḥmad Ibn Rušd (1126-98), commonly known as Averroes, was monopsychism. This view, which can be traced back to certain readings of Aristotle, held that the intellectual capacities of human beings were due to the activity of a single agent intellect, and it was taken to be in conflict with the immortality of the human soul. Leibniz’s understanding of the route from this to “hidden speculative atheism”, presumably something that he is associating primarily with Spinoza, is one which it would be hard to reconstruct without further information. However, it is clear that Leibniz’s own views (which we shall return to in part below) are incompatible with atheism, and to the extent that he regarded any view as tending in this direction it was bound to be something he opposed.³²

3. Leibniz’s rejection of other forms of mysticism

As we saw above, in the *New Essays*, Leibniz offers an extended critical discussion of enthusiasm. Leibniz does not use the term ‘mysticism’ in those passages, and seems to reserve the expression ‘false mystics’ for those to whom he attributes the kind of introverted unitive mysticism that corresponds to his understanding of quietism. Primarily, the avoidance of the term ‘mystic’ in these contexts seems to turn on the fact that those discussed are not taken to have claimed that they have experienced a union with God. Nonetheless, at least some of those who Leibniz classifies as ‘enthusiasts’ are spoken of in ways that satisfy Gellman’s “wide mysticism”, and are often characterized as mystics today.³³ Thus, for present purposes, I shall classify these figures as false mystics, and I want to consider the reasons that Leibniz offers for rejecting their claims.

In the section on enthusiasm from the *New Essays*, Leibniz begins by mentioning the Quakers and Robert Barclay (1648-90) in particular, who are said to “find within themselves a certain light which itself announces what it is” (NE 505).³⁴ Next he refers to those “who see sparks and even something brighter” (ibid.) or who “become capable of saying things which strike them as very fine, or at least very lively [and] astonish themselves and others with this fecundity which is taken to be inspired” (NE 505-06), and finally to those who have been “practising austerities” or who have suffered from “a period of sorrow” and then “experience a peace and

consolation in the soul [which] delights them” (ibid.).

Unlike the quietists, Leibniz does not regard these enthusiasts as guilty of incoherence. Furthermore, whilst Leibniz is clearly concerned about the existence of some of these figures, he is more sanguine about others. Nonetheless, they are all taken to be problematic in the sense that they are people who illegitimately “believe that they ... receive doctrinal instruction from God” (NE 505). What Leibniz has in mind here is the claim to novel personal revelation, and he is confident that none of those whom he regards as enthusiasts can legitimately lay claim to this.

The groundlessness of the beliefs of enthusiasts is evidenced for Leibniz in a number of ways. Where mystics are like the Quakers in claiming that the authority of their claims is based on illumination that is entirely private, Leibniz responds: “But why call something ‘light’ if it doesn’t cause anything to be seen?” (ibid.). In other cases the claims of mystics include prophecies and the veracity of the claimed revelations are undermined where these prophecies have “turned out to be false” (NE 508), for example, those of Christiana Poniatovia, Nicolaus Drabicius and others which were published in the *Light Out of Darkness* in 1664 by Johann Amos Comenius (1592–1670) and which told of the imminent onset of the millennial age.³⁵ In addition, Leibniz notes that the beliefs of enthusiasts “clash with one another” (NE 507), which he illustrates by citing the disagreements among the Labadists,³⁶ Flemish mystic Antoinette Bourignon de la Porte (1616–1680), and the Quaker William Penn (1644–1718).³⁷ In both of these cases, the worries are clear – the experiences that are regarded as epistemically significant do not even turn out to be reliable indicators of the truth, let alone indicators that provide some further internally accessible justificatory condition.

A further concern, however, is connected not with the false beliefs acquired by mystics but rather the way in which it narrows their epistemic horizons. Thus, in comments on William Penn’s book *An account of W. Penn’s travails in Holland and Germany* (Penn, 1695) from 1696, Leibniz writes:

I see that the majority of those who lay claim to a greater spirituality, and particularly the Quakers, try to show their distaste for the contemplation of natural truths. But in my opinion they should do just the opposite, unless they want to encourage our own laziness or ignorance. (LGR 151)

Whilst I shall argue below that Leibniz can plausibly be regarded as advocating a form of mysticism, it is clear from this passage that he regards many of those whom one might readily identify as mystics as rejecting something that he regards as essential, namely the pursuit of truths that concern the world. Indeed, this is part of

a broader strand in Leibniz's rejection of the promotion of an approach to life that evades a commitment to engagement with the external world broadly construed. As Rutherford points out, whilst Leibniz seems happy to tolerate mystics who retreat from public life altogether in pursuit of a personal relationship with God,³⁸ his conception of the truly virtuous person is in tension with this kind of behaviour. For the virtuous person approaches perfect charity, which is comprised in part by a disinterested love of all beings that requires the active promotion of the communal well-being of every other rational creature.³⁹

But Leibniz also introduces another reason not to take at least some enthusiasts seriously which is of a slightly different kind, namely that they have experiences that lead to behaviour in which "all their schemes go to ruin" (NE 506). Here Leibniz seems to be suggesting that were there genuine mystical experience it ought to have positive practical consequences. We shall return to these issues when we consider Leibniz's views on 'true mysticism'. For now, we can note that, whilst Leibniz does not think that access to revealed truth would be sufficient for one's plans to succeed, the thought that God might reveal things directly which gave rise to behaviour that was utterly at odds with the flourishing of those to whom they were revealed is not something he is willing to sanction.

Leibniz seems to regard the consequences of the supposed divine encounters that we have considered to this point as relatively benign. But this is not so in all cases. The problematic examples that Leibniz has in mind are ones which result in the "attempt to form sects and even stir up trouble" (NE 506). Here Leibniz makes explicit mention of the way in which the behaviour of the English had "confirmed this", presumably an allusion to the proliferation of independent religious groups during the interregnum, as well as a number of particular cases. He explicitly mentions the poet and mystic Quirinus Kuhlmann (1651–1689) whose messianic goal of uniting Protestant and Russian powers with the Ottoman Empire against the Catholics failed completely when he was burned as a heretic in Moscow in 1689;⁴⁰ and Francis I Rákóczy (1645–1676), whom he claims was influenced "to foment disturbances in the Emperor's hereditary domains" as a result of reading prophecies of the imminent onset of the millennial age by Christiana Poniatovia, Nicolaus Drabicius and others which were published in Comenius' *Light out of Darkness* (Comenius 1657).⁴¹

At the end of his discussion of enthusiasm, Leibniz reveals another reason that he is sceptical regarding the claims of those he mentions when he observes: "And as for the dogmas of religion, we have no need for new revelations" (NE 509).

As we shall see later, to the extent that Leibniz thinks there is such a thing as true mysticism, its content is not at all new. For whatever complications may surround the issue of Leibniz's attitude toward the institutions of the Christian religion, it is clear that he regarded the essence of the teachings of the gospels as an articulation of a religious ethics that was sufficient. Thus, setting aside Leibniz's views about the inadequacy of particular claims to new revelation, the main concern he has is that we are already in a position to see that there is nothing more to be revealed.

In addition to providing us with information about Leibniz's reasons for opposing false mysticism, the discussion of enthusiasm in the *New Essays* offers alternative explanations for the states that are deemed to be revelatory. It is not obvious, however, that Leibniz regards these alternate explanations as sufficient to undermine the credibility of the reports. Indeed, it seems that they are offered as ways of understanding how the contents of experiences whose divine inspiration has been independently ruled out might have come about. Nonetheless, they are instructive for our understanding of Leibniz's attitudes toward mysticism.

In cases where people report vivid experiences, such as lights, Leibniz suggests they have become "aroused when their minds become over-heated" (NE 505). Where people speak with a seeming inspiration that outstrips their learning, Leibniz suggests it may be due to a combination 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" (NE 506). Finally, in connection with those who have been "practising austerities" or who have suffered from "a period of sorrow" followed by "peace and consolation", Leibniz observes that they "find such sweetness in it that they believe it to be the work of the Holy Spirit" (ibid.). Here the thought seems to be that where happiness emerges after a time of great distress the strength of the alleviation of suffering may be all there is to the sense that something divine has been at work.

When discussing what he regards as pathological causes of claims to individual revelation Leibniz mentions a number of people. The first is French-Flemish visionary Antoinette Bourignon de la Porte.⁴² The second, referred to as "a certain young lady who attracted attention not long ago" (NE 506), is Rosamunde Juliane von der Asseburg (1672-1712), a noblewoman about whom Leibniz had corresponded with Electress Sophie in 1691.⁴³ Perhaps most interesting of all here is Leibniz's suggestion that "in Spain" von der Asseburg "would have been another St Teresa" (ibid.). Leibniz's willingness to suggest that Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), who

is one the most important mystics in the Catholic tradition, had experiences that might be best explained psychologically, suggests that he was unwilling to endorse the claims of any who reported individual illumination through their own special encounter with God.⁴⁴

4. Leibniz's positive appraisals of mysticism

The foregoing discussion has been concerned with Leibniz's rejection of what he himself terms "false mysticism" and other forms of spiritual life that might readily be identified as mystical. These kinds of considerations seem decisive in connection with the question of whether Leibniz was a mystic in the sense that Rutherford identifies. However, this cannot be the last word on the matter. For, as we have seen, there are texts in which he speaks of "true mystics" and endorses theses that seem to fall within the ambit of mysticism as presented in the account offered by Gellman. Indeed, Leibniz himself wrote a piece running to several pages that has the title *On the True Mystical Theology* (Guh DS I, 41-13/LGR 79-83).

The most well-known place in which Leibniz appears to endorse the views of one of those traditionally considered a mystic is section 32 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. Here, immediately after he has described his thesis of the perfect spontaneity of substance, Leibniz observes: "And that is why a person of very exalted mind, revered for her saintliness, was in the habit of saying that the soul must often think as if there were nothing but God and itself in the world" (A VI 4, 1581/AG 64). Whilst Leibniz does not mention the person by name here, in a somewhat later letter from 1696 he tells Andreas Morrell:

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 itself 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/LGR 154).

This positive appraisal of St Teresa is at the heart of Baruzi's attribution of mysticism to Leibniz.⁴⁵ On their own, and especially in light of the rather negative comments about St Teresa in the *New Essays*, these references do not amount to a great deal, and it seems that the critics of Baruzi and Mahnke are right to say that they do not make a compelling case for mysticism in Leibniz on the basis of these texts.

A more significant indication that Leibniz does not regard all mysticism as illegitimate can be found in the piece sent to Nicaise in August 1697:

I don't doubt that the true mystics and guides are far removed from it [i.e., quietism], and I have especially found satisfaction in the excellent works of the Jesuit Father Spee, whose merit was infinitely beyond the reputation he has acquired. (A II 3, 370/LGR 160)

Immediately after offering a criticism of quietism, Leibniz talks of "true mystics". As we have already seen, in his letter to Hansch, Leibniz was critical of "false mystics". Here we find an explicit reference to the complementary class and it is hard to see how one could take this as anything other than a recognition that there is a form of mysticism that Leibniz regards as legitimate. Though not essential for present purposes, it is also interesting to note that he seems to offer an example of someone whom he regards as falling into this category, namely the German Jesuit Friedrich Spee (1591-1635).⁴⁶ Spee is perhaps most famous for as the author of *Cautio Criminalis, or a Book on Witch Trials* (Spee, 2003), a book that was perhaps the first to give systematic arguments against the reliability of testimony obtained under torture and instrumental in the demise of witch burning in the 17th Century. Leibniz expressed approval for Spee's now better known work in a letter to Sophie from 1697,⁴⁷ but in the same place he also speaks of Spee's "book on the three Christian virtues" that is, his *Güldenens Tugend-Buch* (Spee 1656),⁴⁸ which is concerned with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, as "one of the most solid and moving books on devotion that I have ever seen" (ibid.). Indeed, Leibniz translated the preface to the book, which contains "a beautiful dialogue" (A I 14, 60/LTS 181) into French and sent it to Sophie along with the letter.⁴⁹

Most important of all for our understanding of Leibniz's positive attitudes toward mysticism, however, is his own essay *On the True Mystical Theology* (Guh DS I, 41-13/LGR 79-83). Lloyd Strickland suggests that this piece may well have been inspired by the correspondence with André Morell (1646-1703). Strickland notes that Morell was "an ardent supporter of the cobbler-turned-mystic Jakob Böhme" (LGR 80) and that he tried hard to persuade Leibniz of the virtues of Böhme's works. Morell's efforts were not successful, with Leibniz claiming at one point that Böhme "often did not understand himself" (Grua I, 79). However, *On the True Mystical Theology*, which is concerned with similar issues to those found in the Leibniz-Morell exchange, seems to have been written soon after.⁵⁰ And Strickland plausibly suggests that "the text itself appears to be Leibniz's attempt to invest the idea of a mystical theology with 'a good sense' (i.e. to find an acceptable way of understanding it), and thus to wrest it back from people like Böhme" (ibid.).

On the True Mystical Theology is a piece which warrants a more detailed discus-

sion than it has hitherto received or than I can offer here.⁵¹ For present purposes, I shall outline some of the main features and try to explain how they might be thought to warrant the label that Leibniz gives them.

The piece begins with a statement of Leibniz's conception of the relation between God and creatures as one in which the divine perfections "flow immediately from God" and are replicated in finite beings where the "concomitant shortfalls flow from creatures themselves, their limits or non plus ultra" (LGR 80). These metaphysical claims are followed immediately by an epistemological thesis:

The inner light alone, which God himself kindles in us, has the power to grant us our first knowledge of God. Through such apprehension alone do we attain a clear grasp of essence and truth, so that neither further evidence of truth, nor further explanation of such essences, will be required. (ibid)

Leibniz goes on to contrast those who are "enlightened" as a result of using the inner light with those who are merely "learned" as a result of "believing [their] external senses" (ibid), and to point out that the "light does not arrive from the outside, even though external teachings also can – and on occasion must – provide us with the opportunity to catch a glimpse of it" (ibid.). He next speaks about the kind of warrant that the light gives and contrasts it with the states of mind that we have already seen him characterize pejoratively as enthusiastic.

The light fills the heart with clarity and reassurance, not with fantasies and mad stirrings. There are some who imagine a world of light in their brain, reckon they see splendour and magnificence, and are surrounded by many thousands of tiny lights. But that is not the true light, only a heating of the blood. (ibid.) And as the essay proceeds Leibniz expands on the ways in which the internal light reveals truths about God and its importance for the attainment of salvation, observing that "without this light's illumination nobody has the true faith; and without true faith nobody will be blessed" (LGR 81).

The tenor of *On the True Mystical Theology* is quite different from much of Leibniz's writings. And whilst not as ebullient as the rhetoric of those most commonly regarded as mystics, it is, at least to my ear, a piece written by someone who is waxing lyrical about a subject which is dear to their heart. But, in fact, it is also expressing an epistemological thesis that we find throughout Leibniz's writings. As he puts it in Book 1 of the *New Essays*:

You know, Philalethes, that I have long held a different view: that I always did and still do accept the innate idea of God, which M. Descartes upheld, and thus accept other innate ideas which could not come to us from the senses. (NE 74)⁵²

Leibniz explains his understanding of the nature of ideas perhaps most clearly in the paper *What is an Idea?* Here we are told: “An idea consists not in some act, but in the faculty of thinking, and we are said to have an idea of something even if we do not think of it, if only, on a given occasion we can think of it” (A VI 4, 1370/L 207).⁵³ In the *New Essays*, this conception of ideas is explicitly connected with illumination, when Leibniz speaks of our having a “light of nature” (NE 84), which “involves distinct knowledge” (ibid.)

What Leibniz is trying to distinguish here is the innate presence of ideational content from the way in which it is available to those who possess the idea. From relatively early on in his career, Leibniz draws a contrast between distinct knowledge and knowledge that is confused. He explains the distinction in his 1684 publication *Meditations on Knowledge Truth and Ideas*. The typology in this article is rather complex and it is first necessary to recognize that both confused and distinct ideas are species of the genera of clear idea, where the latter provide “the means for recognizing the thing represented” (A VI 4, 586/AG 24). With this in mind, the distinction is drawn as follows:

Clear knowledge, again, is either confused or distinct. It is confused when I cannot enumerate one by one marks sufficient for differentiating a thing from others, even though the thing does indeed have such marks and requisites into which its notion can be resolved. (ibid.)

With these considerations in mind, talk of the light of nature can be seen to be a way of referring to the capacity that we have to bring the content of an idea to the mind in such a way that it is fully available. In the *New Essays*, this is contrasted with “instinct”, which presents content confusedly. As an example of the kind of content being made available by instinct, Leibniz points to the practical principle “that we should pursue joy and avoid sorrow” (NE 88), which is “based on inner experience” given that “one only senses what joy and sorrow are” (ibid.). Or as he adds shortly after: “It is an innate principle, but it does not share in the natural light since it is not known in a luminous way” (NE 89).⁵⁴

If we bring together the considerations from the *New Essays* with the claims that Leibniz makes in *On the True Mystical Theology*, it seems to me that we get the following picture. Leibniz is committed to the claim that all humans have an innate idea of God. However, the possession of this idea does not ensure that the content is readily available to consciousness. It is here that the true conception of mysticism plays its part. For there are those for whom the idea of God is luminous and, whilst it might be somewhat ‘kindled’ by God in all of us, this does not imply

that it shines as brightly in all people. Distinct knowledge of God is granted only to some, namely those who, unlike the merely learned, rather than “believing [their] external senses” find themselves “confronted with the true light” and “convinced that it is of God, and not of the devil or flesh”, given that “Just as the sun is proof of itself, so is this light”, the light which “fills the heart with clarity and reassurance” (LGR 81). These, it would seem are the “true mystics”.

5. Should Leibniz be regarded as a mystic?

In the previous section I presented an account of what Leibniz thinks “true mysticism” consists in and which suggests that he is positive in his appraisal of it. It seems to me that this provides us with a strong prima facie case for the claim that there is a mystical dimension to Leibniz’s thinking. However, the relationship between this thesis and the views of the authors that I mentioned at the beginning of the paper is rather complex.

If we turn first to Baruzi and Mahnke. As I said above, it seems to me that they do not make a case for mysticism in Leibniz, and Heinekamp may well be correct in thinking that they fail to make their case due to the fact that they rely on “a very broad and unspecific conception of mysticism” (1988, 203). However, in pointing to Leibniz’s interest in the passage from St Teresa, Baruzi’s instincts here are perhaps more reliable than his critics have assumed. For the debate about mysticism in Leibniz has always been set against the background assumption that mysticism should be conceived as involving the kind of union with God that Leibniz suggests is being claimed by the quietists. If instead we turn to what Leibniz has to say about “true mysticism”, we will find that his appropriation of St Teresa is in line with what Leibniz represents as the essence of mystical experience, namely intellectual acquaintance with the divine person and the contents of the divine mind.

These issues come into better focus as we turn to Rutherford’s attempt to make sense of places in which he sees Leibniz as saying positive things about mystics. In explaining why he does not think that Leibniz is sympathetic to mysticism, Rutherford provides a summary of the claims that I have presented by drawing attention to *On the True Mystical Theology* and the *New Essays*. And he concludes this section as follows:

To the extent that our minds are emanations of the divine understanding, we can say that in contemplating the divine 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 beings but the divine mind itself. (Rutherford 1998, 27).

As we have seen, it is precisely insofar as a given person receives such illumination that their understanding of God is mystical.

What Rutherford seems to be doing here, and the same might well be said of others such as Rescher, Heinekamp and Cook, is to assume that knowledge which is based on the proper use of ideas could not be mystical. Mysticism is presented as something that is essentially irrational and in direct conflict with Leibniz conceived of as “a classic rationalist” (Cook 1998, 112). As Rutherford puts it: “He rejects the distinction – integral to mystical writers – between discursive rational knowledge and a higher form of knowing (theoria, contemplation), by which we are able to apprehend God directly in an act of intellectual vision” (1998, 30). However, in doing so, they are left with the stubborn fact that Leibniz is himself willing to talk about a “true mysticism”. I think the tension can, however, be resolved by doing two things. On the one hand, I want to question the thought that we should restrict the term ‘mystical’ in the way that previous scholars have, and on the other, I want to query the dichotomy on which I take this restriction to be predicated.

I have already articulated one of my reasons for resisting the restrictive conception of mysticism, namely that there is textual evidence to suggest that it is not Leibniz’s own conception. It seems to be roughly co-extensive only with what he calls “false mysticism”, which I have suggested encompasses quietism and enthusiasm as Leibniz construes them. Presumably, the motivation for using the term ‘mysticism’ in this way is the assumption by previous scholars that they are using the term in a way that respects correctness conditions based on observation of patterns of use. And, one could imagine a response to the kind of suggestion that I am making which ran something like the following: “Whilst Leibniz speaks of ‘true mystical theology’ what he describes has nothing in common with that which is tracked by ordinary usage of the term.” Indeed, in this regard, they would be able, as we have seen, to appeal to the Oxford English Dictionary in support.

However, one of the problems here is that none of the authors devotes much effort to spelling out what they think the term ‘mysticism’ means, or provides a detailed justification for using it in their favoured way. And, of course, a simple appeal to an English language dictionary, however authoritative, is of no real help in this context. Instead, I want to suggest that we consider returning to the characterization of mysticism with which I started, namely the one derived from Gellman’s detailed and comprehensive article on mysticism from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of*

Philosophy. And once we do this, I think Leibniz can quite happily be characterised as advocating a form of mysticism, what we might call a ‘rational mysticism’.

The evidence we have examined makes it clear that Leibniz should not be characterized as what Gellman terms a “narrow mystic”. For, as we have seen, one of his main objections to quietism was that it involved precisely the kind of “blurring, or eradication of multiplicity” that was said to be distinctive of this kind of mysticism. Leibniz’s true mystic is always taken to be distinct from God. And whilst Leibniz is willing, for example in his letter to Hansch to observe that “Blessedness of the soul does indeed consist in union with God”, he adds that “we must not think that the soul is absorbed in God” (D II.I, 225/L 594). Leaving aside the issue of what exactly Leibniz might mean by “union” here, it does not seem to be the kind of union that Gellman has in mind.

Another form of mysticism that seems at odds with Leibniz’s account is apophatic mysticism. But as we saw, apophatic mysticism is one of two exclusive disjuncts. The fact that Leibniz’s mysticism is not apophatic distances him from the tradition associated with Pseudo-Dionysius, but it does not preclude his views being mystical in the kataphatic sense.

As we have seen, Leibniz suggests that distinct knowledge of God is available through the employment of an innate faculty or idea. Thus, Leibniz satisfies the basic conditions for classification as a “wide mystic”. For our innate ideas are said to grant acquaintance with God in a way that is “super sense-perceptual”, and God is not thought to be “accessible by way of sense perception, somatosensory modalities, or standard introspection.” In addition, this acquaintance is presented as revealing a discursively articulable conception of the nature of God. But this simply means that Leibniz’s account of the illumination in the essay *The True Mystical Theology* presents that theology as one that emerges through a kataphatic wide mystical experience.

What is particularly interesting here is that it is far from clear that Leibniz the mystic should not also be regarded as Leibniz the rationalist. For it is precisely in so far as the ratio of the divine nature is implanted in us that we have the capacity to become consciously acquainted with God under that very mode of presentation. Leibniz might plausibly be regarded, as I suggested, as a ‘rational mystic’. It is hard to be sure what it is that has led previous commentators to assume that there must be a tension here. My suspicion is that there has been a failure to recognize that discursive cognition of God might be something that is a component of an experience that comprises a direct acquaintance brought about through the activity of

our innate idea of God. However, this is clearly something that warrants further exploration.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have presented a discussion of Leibniz's criticisms of mysticism and attempted to defend the thesis that he can plausibly be regarded as an advocate of mysticism nonetheless. My discussion is self-evidently programmatic and invites much greater development. I want to finish by mentioning some other avenues that might be explored in connection with the conception of Leibniz as a mystic that I have offered.

One thing that is clearly lacking in my treatment is any direct consideration of the relationship between Leibniz's mysticism and that of other authors. Particularly interesting here would be further investigation of the way in which Leibniz understood Spee and the nature of his positive appraisal. And, in addition, interesting insights might be yielded by direct comparison with other famous Christian mystics, for example (though by no means exhaustively) Meister Eckhart (ca 1260-1327/8), Catherine of Sienna (1347-80), St Teresa, St John of the Cross (1542-91), as well as those within the Jewish Kabbalistic and Hasidic traditions, such as Isaac Luria (1534-72) and, closer to our time, Martin Buber (1878-1965).⁵⁵ There is also the question of the extent to which conceiving Leibniz as a rational mystic would have ramifications for the way in which other famous philosophers of the early modern period, perhaps most notably Descartes and Spinoza, might fall into the same category. This would entail a sort of domestication of mysticism that might not appeal to those whose conception of mysticism is dominated by the kinds of authors that appear to feed into the way that previous scholars of Leibniz have approached the issue. However, this in itself does not strike me as an infeasible objection to exploring such ideas.

In addition it would be worth exploring some of the other dimensions to mysticism that we found in Gellman's treatment. So far I have represented Leibniz as a wide kataphatic mystic. However, there was another distinction to which I drew attention at the beginning of the paper, namely that between introvertive and extrovertive mysticism. The debate about Leibniz's mysticism has been framed by previous scholars in such a way that it was only introvertive mysticism that was at issue. An interesting question, to which I do not have the time to turn in the current essay, concerns the extent to which Leibniz might also be classified as an

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extrovertive mystic. My sense is that the answer to this question might well be ‘yes’, and that evidence could be found for this if we turned to the significance of doctrines that are central to Leibniz’s philosophy, such as his version of panpsychism, his commitment to the principle of uniformity, according to which “All the time and everywhere everything’s the same as here” (GP III, 343/WF 220-21), and, of course, the doctrine of the pre-established harmony. But an investigation of these aspects of Leibniz’s thought must await another day.

Finally, as we saw toward the beginning of the paper, Gellman notes, over and above the epistemic characterization of mysticism that is at the centre of his account, there is a more general conception of mysticism as “as a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined in different traditions” (Gellman 2014). It is unclear just how Leibniz thought that his rational mysticism related to particular traditions – though it is clearly presented as consistent with Christianity. However, it is one of Leibniz’s most cherished thoughts that enlightened acquaintance with God yields a transformation of the self. Indeed, he ends *The True Mystical Theology* as follows:

Let each person prove to himself whether he has faith and life. If he finds certain joys and pleasures greater than those that come from his love for God and the fulfilment of his will, then he does not know Christ sufficiently and does not feel the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Scripture provides us with a beautiful test whether a person loves God, namely when he loves his brother, and makes efforts to help and to serve him. Whoever does not do so boasts wrongly of enlightenment, or of Christ and the Holy Spirit. (LGR 84)

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Notes

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² See Baruzi 1905, 1907, and 1909

³ See Manke 1925 and 1939.

⁴ See Naert 1959.

⁵ See Rescher 1955.

⁶ See Heinekamp 1988.

⁷ See Cook 1998, 118-21; Rutherford 1998.

⁸ It should be noted from the outset that this paper is an exercise in what has sometimes been termed “Philosophical History” (see Sleigh 1990, 2). For further discussion of the place that such an approach to Leibniz’s work might usefully play in the historiography of philosophy, see Lodge 2015b.

⁹ See Gellman 2014.

¹⁰ It is worth noting Gellman’s own admission that “Because of its variable meanings, even in serious treatments, any definition of ‘mystical experience’ must be at least partly stipulative” (2014, sec. 1). However, the categories that he provides seem to track distinctions that can plausibly be made in light of surveys of writings that are attributed to mystics. See, for example, those discussed by W. T. Stace (Stace 1960) and anthologized in Bernard McGinn’s *Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (McGinn 2006).

¹¹ Two terms of art need further explanation here, although they will not figure in my later discussion. By a “super sense-perceptual experience”, Gellman means an experience that “includes perception-like content of a kind not appropriate to sense perception, somatosensory modalities (including the means for sensing pain and body temperature, and internally sensing body, limb, organ, and visceral positions and states), or standard introspection.” As Gellman also notes, this kind of experience has sometimes led people to speak of an additional faculty of “spiritual sense”. By contrast a “sub sense-perceptual experience” is “either devoid of phenomenological content altogether, or nearly so . . . or consists of phenomenological content appropriate to sense perception, but lacking in the conceptualization typical of attentive sense perception.”

¹² Also see Smart 1958 and 1978, and Wainwright 1981, ch.1.

¹³ See Stace 1960, 62-123.

¹⁴ See Schimmel 1975, chapter 2.

¹⁵ See Idel 1988, 67.

¹⁶ Also see McGinn, 2001 and Smith, 1997.

¹⁷ Suso 1953, 185.

¹⁸ See Pike, 1992, chapter 2.

¹⁹ It is also worth mentioning in passing a further distinction between theurgic mysticism, in which there is an intention to actively engage the divine as source of the mystical experience, from that in which the experience occurs spontaneously or through a process of nothing more than readying for the possibility of divine intervention (see Shaw 1995, p. 4.). At least toward the end of his life, Leibniz's rejection of theurgy appears unequivocal: "I scorn nothing readily (with the exception of the divinatory arts, which are nothing but sheer tromperie through and through)" (Letter to Remond, July 1714, GP III 620).

²⁰ See A I 10, 59; A I 13, 397-9, 552.

²¹ For evidence of Leibniz's attention to this controversy, see letters to Andreas Morell (A I 14, 202-03; 548-49) to Claude Nicaise (GP II, 573; 579; 584; 586-87) and Electress Sophie (A I 14, 54-55/LTS 175; LTS 416).

²² Molinos 2010.

²³ Loyola 1992.

²⁴ See the *Introduction to de Molinos* 2010, 1-20.

²⁵ For evidence of Leibniz awareness of Molinos' writings and their aftermath see letters to Landgrave Ernst Hessen-Rheinfels (A I 5, 66-68; 181-82; A I 6, 159).

²⁶ See A VI 4, 2665-2689.

²⁷ Ibid. Johann Angelus Silesius was the pseudonym of Johann Scheffler (1624-77), a mystic and poet who converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism. It is interesting to note that Heidegger chooses a line from Silesius as a key text in his discussion of Leibniz's commitment to the principle of sufficient reason in his lecture series *The Principle of Reason* (Heidegger 1991). The line is as follows: "Die Rose ist ohne warum; sie blühet, weil sie blühet", "The Rose is without a 'wherefor' — she blooms because she blooms."

²⁸ For references that document Leibniz's commitment to the essential activity of substance during the period of his most intense engagement with mysticism, see Lodge 2015a, 188-93.

²⁹ The reference here is to Ovid *Fasti* VI.5.

³⁰ It is interesting to note that Leibniz's account of the transition makes reference to the role of the Cumaean Sybil, a prophetess who guarded the entrance to the underworld at Avernus and granted Aeneas access when he sought his father Anchises.

Leibniz also notes that Virgil expressed doubts about the extent to which one's sense of divine inspiration should be taken as a guide (see NE 504).

³¹ I shall, however, consider these below in connection with Leibniz's attitude towards those who might be deemed mystics but who were not quietists.

³² For a helpful discussion of monopsychism and medieval Averroism see section 5.4 of Hasse (2014).

³³ For a helpful discussion of these and other aspects of Leibniz's understanding of enthusiasm, see Cook 1998.

³⁴ It is hard to assess the adequacy of Leibniz's characterization of such a diverse movement as the Quakers. However, some support can be found for it in the notebooks of founder George Fox. Here Fox claim "I directed them to their teacher, the Grace of God, and shewed them the sufficiency of it, which would teach them how to live, and what to deny; and being obeyed, would bring them salvation. So to that grace I recommended them, and left them" <http://www.qis.net/~daruma/fox-ministry.html> (accessed 17/11/15).

³⁵ Comenius 1657.

³⁶ The Labadists were a 17th-century religious community and movement founded by the French protestant Jean de Labadie (1610–1674). Perhaps the most famous of the Labadists was Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678).

³⁷ See NE 508.

³⁸ This is evidenced in a letter to Landgrave Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels 29 June/9 July 1698 where Leibniz expresses the view that, having been acquitted by the Pope, Molinos should be allowed freedom of conscience provided he pose no threat to public order (see AI 5, 181-82).

³⁹ See Rutherford 1998, 27-28.

⁴⁰ See Schmidt-Biggemann 1998, 269.

⁴¹ Leibniz is referring to the so-called Magnate Conspiracy of 1666-70. For all that his claims about the deliverances of the mystics that I have mentioned are negative, Leibniz acknowledges that it is possible that "inspired utterances could bring their proofs with them" (NE 507). This would require "outer verification" in the form of "miracles". The main thing that he has in mind is "the important revelation of some surprising truth which was beyond the powers of the person who had discovered it, unless he had help from outside" (ibid.). But he implies other miraculous ability might suffice, referring to the case of the famous German mystic Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) of whom he notes, "if he had been able to make gold, as some people believed ... then we would have some reason to give more

credence to this remarkable shoemaker” (NE 507-508). Whilst one might imagine that he would have been willing to ascribe such feats to Jesus and perhaps others such as Moses, it is clear that Leibniz thinks that the enthusiasts of his day cannot claim to have provided any such signs.

⁴² It is interesting to note that Bourignon’s influence is thought to have been responsible for the microscopist Jan Swammwerdam (1637-90) giving up his research on the grounds that it was motivated by vain and idle curiosity. Leibniz’s admiration for the work of Swammerdam may explain his singling Bourignon out for criticism.

⁴³ Leibniz reports the latter as being generally normal in outlook, but as someone who had fantasies regarding conversation and letters from Jesus including the claim that she was “his wife in a special way” (NE 506). For the correspondence with Electress Sophie see A I 7, 29/LTS 70; 32/LTS 74; 33-34/LTS 75-76; 38/LTS 82; 43/LTS 84; 50-52/LTS 92-94; 106-07.

⁴⁴ This comment about St Teresa is at odds with the case made by Baruzi for Leibniz’s mysticism, which turns in no small part on his observation that Leibniz cites with approval Teresa’s suggestion that “the soul should often think as if there were only God and it in the world” in section 32 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. See Baruzi 1909, ch. 5. I return to this issue below.

⁴⁵ Op. cit.

⁴⁶ However, as Lloyd Strickland has pointed out to me, the passage is somewhat ambiguous. It may be that Spee is merely presented as someone whose writings might serve as useful devotional aids.

⁴⁷ See A I 14, 60/LTS 180.

⁴⁸ Spee 1656.

⁴⁹ The translation is reproduced at A VI 4, 2517-29. Leibniz speaks favourably of Spee in a number of other places. See the letter to Andreas Morrell of 10/20 December 1696 (A I, 13, 398-99/LGR 153-57), the paper he sent to Claude Nicaise in 1697 (A II 3, 71/LGR 160); and sections 96-97 of the *Theodicy* (GP VI, 156-57/H 176-77). The background to the relationship between Leibniz and Spee was explored some time ago in an article by Frederick W. C. Lieder (Lieder 1912). However, Lieder’s work is primarily genealogical. Whilst it would be interesting to pursue Spee’s dialogue and it’s relation to Leibniz’s own thought further I shall not attempt that here.

⁵⁰ See especially A I 15, 558-62, and A I 16, 161-5. Both are from 1698.

⁵¹ See Pelletier 2010 for a translation into French with a brief commentary. References here are to LGR, which is based on a new transcription.

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⁵² The commitment to the innate idea of God is repeated several times in the *New Essays* (for example, see NE 75; 429; 434; 438).

⁵³ See also NE 106, where Leibniz observes “Knowledge, ideas and truths can be in our minds without our ever having actually thought about them. They are merely natural tendencies, that is dispositions and attitudes, active or passive, and more than a *tabula rasa*.”

⁵⁴ Also see NE 91 and 94.

⁵⁵ Interesting work has already been done on the relationship between Leibniz and the Kabbalistic tradition, most famously by Alison Coudert, whose book *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (Coudert 1995) is an important touchstone for the further work that might be done.