



Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

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Abstract

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) was one of the great thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and is known as the last “universal genius”. He made deep and important contributions to the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, logic, philosophy of religion, as well as mathematics, physics, geology, jurisprudence, and history. Even the eighteenth century French atheist and materialist Denis Diderot, whose views could not have stood in greater opposition to those of Leibniz, could not help being awed by his achievement, writing in his *Encyclopedia*, “Perhaps never has a man read as much, studied as much, meditated more, and written more than Leibniz... What he has composed on the world, God, nature, and the soul is of the most sublime eloquence. If his ideas had been expressed with the flair of Plato, the philosopher of Leipzig would cede nothing to the philosopher of Athens.” (Vol. 9, p. 379) Indeed, Diderot's mood was almost despairing in a remark from another piece, which also has a great deal of truth in it: “When one compares the talents one has with those of a Leibniz, one is tempted to throw away one's books and go die quietly in the dark of some forgotten corner.” More than a century later, Gottlob Frege, who fortunately did not cast his books away in despair, expressed similar admiration, declaring that “in his writings, Leibniz threw out such a profusion of seeds of ideas that in this respect he is virtually in a class of his own.” (“Boole's logical Calculus and the Concept script” in *Posthumous Writings*, p. 9) The aim of this entry is primarily to introduce Leibniz's life and summarize and explicate his views in the realms of metaphysics, epistemology, philosophical theology, and natural philosophy.

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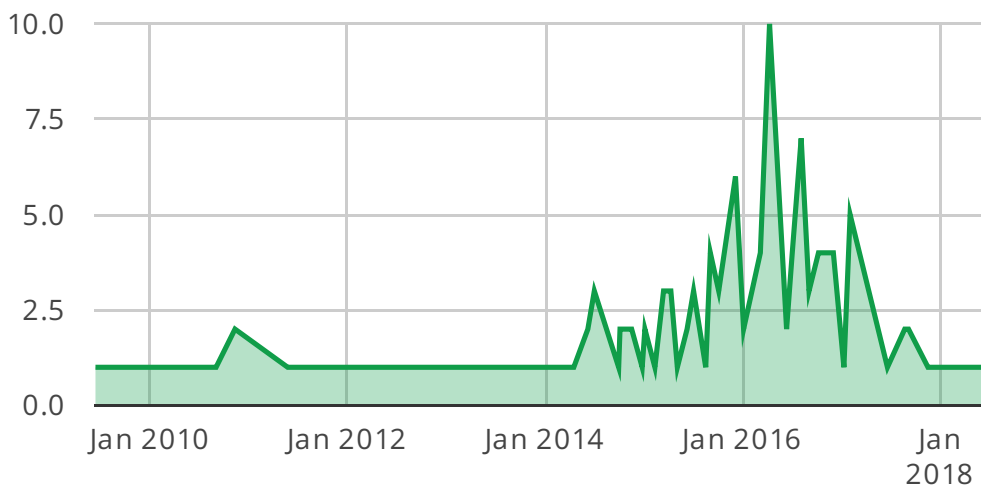
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