How To Turn a Dark Age Into a New Renaissance

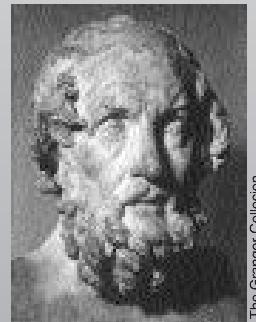
by Gabriele Liebig

Charlemagne (742-814 A.D.)

Human history has been fueled by Renaissances, the turning points when crucial individuals have developed the new ideas needed to propel civilization out of a Dark Age. This was Friedrich Schiller's view of 'universal history,' and it is the standpoint from which we must undertake the task of saving civilization from its existential crisis today. Gabriele Liebig presented this class to a LaRouche Youth Movement seminar in California last January.

St. Paul (died c. 67 A.D.) Engraving by Albrecht Dürer, 1514.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716)



Homer (c. 750 B.C.)

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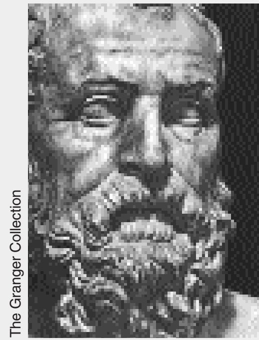
Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)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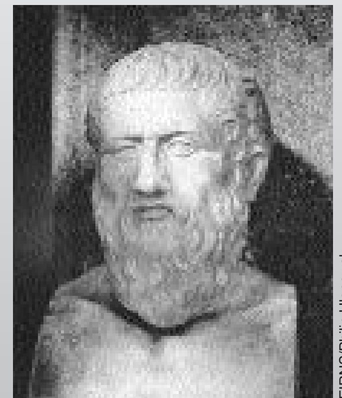
Solon of Athens (638?-?559 B.C.)

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (981-1038 A.D.)

Following the attacks of 9/11, a German newspaper published a fitting cartoon. The scene is during the evening TV news. Apparently, the husband has crawled under the living room rug, and his wife indicates to him, that it's safe to come out: "Darling, the news is over. What's left is only the weather report!"

Indeed, most events on the global stage fill you with horror these days. Economically and politically, humanity is undoubtedly sliding into a new dark age. Until last autumn, this had been a rather gradual downward-slide, but since September 11, we see an accelerated rush into a global "war of civilizations." As Lyndon LaRouche, especially, has repeatedly explained, the events of September 11 and the ensuing drive for war, are a direct consequence of, and reaction to, the disintegrative process of the global financial system. Whoever denies that connection, will certainly not succeed in stopping the dynamic towards war, even if he may have the best intentions to do so.

The problem is, that most governments lack that broad historical perspective, which Friedrich Schiller termed "universal history." The same is true for most of the populations of Europe and the United States. The younger ones, who have never experienced a serious crisis, are rather in "denial," and don't want to hear about the crisis at all; while many older people, who have some sense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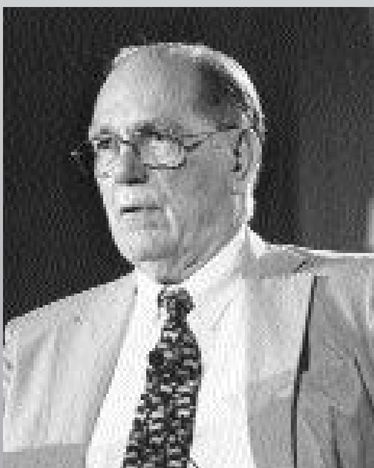
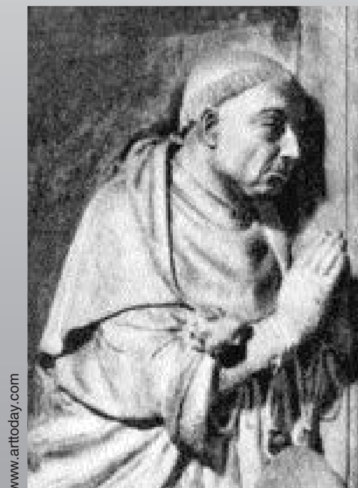
Plato (427-347 B.C.)


EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. (b. 1922)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Nicolaus of Cusa (1401-1464)

of things going down the drain, collapse into fatalism, which makes them susceptible to crazy, "endtimes" propaganda of various forms. In both cases, no measures are taken to take on the enormous crisis.

But, the fact that civilization is in danger, doesn't at all mean, that the end of history is nigh. History is older than the last thirty years, and humanity is larger than just the one country this pessimist is looking at. So, we must tell people: Open your mind's eye, look at the human population on this planet, and look at its history, universal history, and you will find that dark ages have been stopped, or overcome, before! Indeed, many times!

Dark Ages and Renaissances

In fact, Renaissances have always started during dark ages. And, contrary to what many people believe, history is not an automatic process. Both dark ages and renaissances are man-made. Dark ages happen owing to the evil intent of some, and the stupidity of many. Renaissances are the outcome of the conscious good intention of certain individuals with good ideas, and of their relevant activities, to organize the needed support for these ideas among their contemporaries, and to implement them.

What is a dark age? Dark ages are characterized by a spiral of economic collapse and endless war, deteriorating living conditions for the general population, which shrinks in numbers, and a breakdown of education and culture generally. Each generation knows and comprehends less than the generation before it, and after a while certain skills and arts may disappear and be forgotten altogether.

In a renaissance, this process is reversed, and more than that. Starting from the realm of ideas—those recovered from the past, plus new ones—culture and economy, education and the political organization of society, are put back on track. And, if it is a real renaissance, the level of culture and civilization will reach a much higher level than ever before.

Given the fact, that our dark age is well under way, even though it could get much worse, the question is: How do we turn a dark age into a renaissance? Already, in February 2001, after George W. Bush had entered the Presidency, Lyndon LaRouche wrote a paper with the title "Can We Change the Universe?," on that very question:

> As a matter of principle, to what degree, in what manner, and by what means, can man gain foreknowledge of the method by which to wilfully change the current direction of his society's destiny, for the better, in specific ways? Even to overcome, thus, the worst sort of impending, seemingly inevitable catastrophe, such as the presently onrushing one?
>
> Which adopted or implied axioms of present policy-shaping behavior of our government must we replace, and replace with what? . . . How shall we, then, select those aspects of implicity revolutionary, "free will" changes in the axioms governing policy-making, which represent a positive factor in shaping of history? . . . By what voluntarist intervention, by the rest among us, can the necessary change in direction be brought into play?"[1]

In order to answer those questions, LaRouche suggests the "historical method." And he proposes to make use of the ability, which is specific to the human mind, to communicate ideas—by way of reading and writing even with people who have lived many centuries ago. Therefore, in a way, we could go and ask the "makers" of former renaissances, how they did it. In doing this, we are of course limited by the knowledge and available written accounts about those periods of history. But, if we are not formalistic about the available sources, and if we have learned to grasp the ideas behind the written letters and words, then we can find out a lot using this approach.

"Much of the actual history of mankind in general is unknown to us," LaRouche cautions. And any excursion into history, of course, is limited by what we were able to investigate ourselves.

Homer

Very suitable for such excursions, is a vehicle similar to the "flying trunk" of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale. So, let's get into our "flying trunk," and set out for Ancient Greece 3,200 years ago, to the time when the war between Greece and Troy must have occurred, which the poet Homer later described in his epic *The Iliad.* The historians are still fighting atrocious battles over the question, whether this war ever occurred at all, or what else happened at that time.* However, there are good reasons and ample evidence to assume, that Troy did exist, and that it was a country in the northwest of Asia Minor named Wilusa, Wilios, or Ilios, which was allied to the Hittites of Asia Minor. Both the Mycenean culture of Greece, and the culture of Troy, disappeared around 1200 B.C. We don't know what exactly happened, but if we believe Homer's account, then it was a predecessor to the kind of "clash of civilizations," which the faction of Samuel Huntington and Zbigniew Brzezinski want to bring about today: Not only were both civilizations, that of Greece and that of Troy, destroyed in the process; they were also very similar, actually the same type of civilization. Just as the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic civilizations which are now supposed to go to war against each other, are deeply interwoven with each other going back many centuries.

* See "Hypothesis and the Science of History," p. 43, this issue.

The circumstances of that war are still being investigated, but the result was a dark age of several centuries. The historians report that between the Twelfth and Eighth century B.C., the people on the Greek semi-peninsula lived in misery, the population shrank, people forgot many skills they had had before, for example, how to write, and how to navigate ships on the open sea, without sight of the coastline.

The first written documents that emerged after that time, were Homer's epics, which date from the Eighth century B.C. The older one, the *Iliad,* describes the war against Troy, but not in a pacifist ("I don't go there") way, as it is full of praise for the courage of the heros on both sides, who were slain in that war. Hearing the story would make the listener rise above this war, to admire the highly developed culture it had destroyed.†

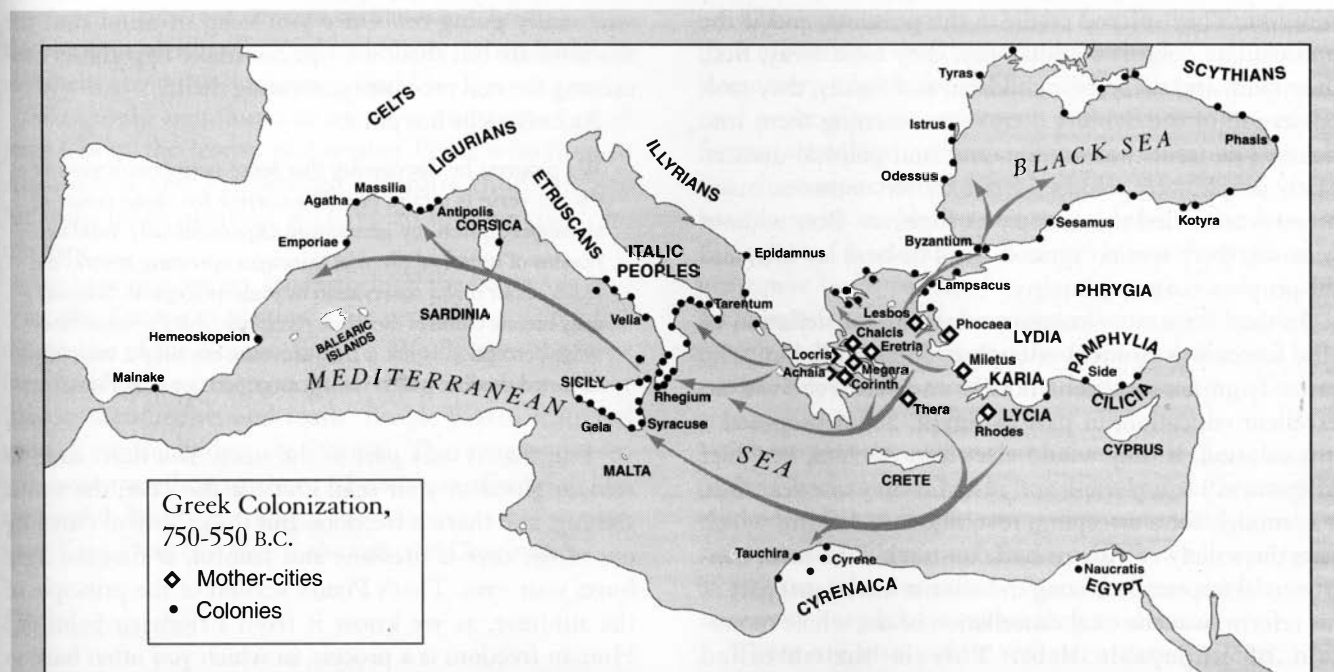
The *Odyssey* takes place some decades later. Also here, the beauty and prowess of the former culture of Crete and Mycenae are described: The island of Crete alone had had ninety cities, Homer reports. He also gives detailed descriptions of the capital of Sparta, where King Menelaus resided. And even in rural Ithaca, Odysseus's birthplace, his family lives in a several-storey mansion.

Most interesting, however, is the image of man depicted in the hero Odysseus, and how he deals with the oligarchical Olympian gods. Odysseus is clever, emotionally unblocked, and proud to be a human being. When he is offered immortality (i.e., the status of an Olympian demigod) if he marries the nymph Calypso, he turns the proposition down, demanding instead permission to go home to his human wife Penelope. And, although he is open to the well-meaning advice of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, he always expects to be hoodwinked by the rest of the lot. Homer's dealing with the Olympian gods is very ambiguous, poetical, psychological, and often very funny.

The third fundamental idea of the *Odyssey* is a call to action: Use ships to sail across the sea to other shores, explore foreign countries and cultures; if they are more highly developed, learn from them, and if they are poorly developed, teach them and build colonies. With a far-reaching view both into the distant past and the future, the author of the *Odyssey* also expanded the horizon of the existing image of the world, which ended at the "Pillars of Hercules," that is, the Straits of Gibraltar, beyond that limit of the earth, outward into the Atlantic Ocean.[2]

The entire epic clearly reflects an intention, a message to the listeners, especially in the Greece of Homer's life-

† See "Homer, The Blind Seer," p. 32, this issue.



Greek Colonization, 750-550 B.C.

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time. This is underlined by the fact that Homer's tale doesn't end with Odysseus's happy reunion with his faithful wife after an absence of twenty years. The hero, at this point being in his late forties, is rather to be sent on another mission—this time land-inward, to journey until he meets people who have never seen a ship, and mistake an oar for a shovel—imagine!—and to teach them the art of seafaring and travelling to other countries.

Whoever was behind this project besides Homer, it worked: The Greeks let themselves be inspired by Homer's seafaring vision. The historical process is called the Greek colonization of the Mediterranean (Eighth-Sixth centuries B.C.).

Solon

Let us make a time jump of roughly 150 years, to the law-giver Solon of Athens and his great reform in 594 B.C. The story is recounted by Friedrich Schiller in his historical essay, "The Legislation of Lycurgus and Solon." The Athenian city-state was in a severe economic and political crisis. The gist of it was, that the oligarchs who ruled over the peasant population, more and more neglected the production of food and other goods, but discovered a way to enrich themselves by usury, which they practiced without restraint. They offered credit to the peasants, and if the unfortunate debtors couldn't pay, they took away, first, their land, and then, their children, and finally, they took possession of the debtors themselves, turning them into slaves. The result was an economic and political disaster. Many people were sold as slaves to other countries, many more debtors fled the country as fugitives. But, without peasants, there was no agriculture. The land lay idle, and the people were going hungry.

In this desperate situation, a certain constellation of elite forces was prudent enough to listen to Solon, who came from a prominent family and had received an excellent education, in part in Egypt. Solon proposed a just solution, if they would elect him Archon, or Chief Magistrate. He is elected, and rules for only one year. But, it is enough for a sweeping, revolutionary reform, which puts the society of Athens back on track. The most controversial (especially among monetarist historians) part of his reform, was the total cancellation of the whole mountain of unpayable debt. This is the so-called "*Seisachtheia,*" and all the debt-slaves become, in a single stroke, free citizens again, and can return home.

Shortly thereafter, enormous fights break out, but Solon's enemies did not succeed in undoing the long-term effect of his reform. In the course of these fights, Solon refused to become a tyrant, because that would have violated his own constitution and concept of natural law. On this concept of natural law and its connectedness to the Common Good of society he wrote a famous poem.[3] Solon's reform marks the beginning of Athens' political rise as a regional power, and the ascent of what we still today admire as Greek culture and science.

Plato

Let us make another time jump of more than 200 years, because we want to briefly visit the philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.). Athens is in crisis again. A symptom of this is the prosecution and judicial murder of Socrates in 399 B.C. But Plato did his job. From him, we have learned the concept of the *idea,* as something of a higher order of reality than the things perceived by the senses.

So, we meet him in his dialogue *The Republic,* when he is just telling his famous allegory of the cave. We hear him describe the difficulties involved in finding out what is really going on in the world, when you are sitting glued to your seat in front of a—television set. Of course, Plato's television set is the prison-wall in this cave, on which the prisoners see just the shadows of some puppets being moved behind their backs, which are illuminated by a fire still farther back in the cave. But, this doesn't mean that it would be completely impossible for man to find out, what was really going on. Once you keep in mind that the shadows are but shadows, you can make hypotheses concerning the real processes generating them.

As LaRouche has put it:

> We progress by discovering that sense-perception's view of the universe is a false one. We correct for those errors of sense-perception, by generating experimentally validated notions of universal physical principles operating beyond the reach of our direct observation by sense-perception. Scientifically literate cultures therefore recognize, that the universe of sense-perception is not a true universe, but only a curiously distorted shadow which reality casts upon our sensorium.[4]

But, that is only part of the story. You don't need to remain glued to your seat. Outside the cave, the sun is shining, and there is freedom. But the process of crawling out of the cave is tiresome and painful, at first the light hurts your eyes. That's Plato's version of the principle of the sublime, as we know it from Friedrich Schiller.[5] Human freedom is a process, in which you often have to decide against bodily demands of sensual wellness.

And there is still another message in Plato's allegory: Once you are out of the cave, walking in the light of knowledge, free and happy, you have a mission to go back in and teach the others to take the same upward road. It is dangerous, because people tend to love their chair in front of the TV set, or rather, there are other,

powerful people who like the situation as it is, and violently oppose any change. The danger is, that you will get killed like Socrates; but, nonetheless, men and women who know more than others, are obliged to go down and teach. This is the destiny of man.

Christianity

We leave Plato, and, since we are only interested in the history of ideas, and a specific sort of ideas, let us just in passing take note of the rise of the Roman Empire in the later centuries B.C., and its collapse in the Fifth century A.D.

One date, however, sticks out: the year 0, when Jesus Christ was born. Owing to him and and others, notably St. Paul, a new culture developed in Palestine, blending Mosaic-Egyptian and Platonic-Greek thought. We know all about it from the New Testament, which reports not only the teachings of Christ, but also about St. Paul's ideas, and efforts to spread the new way of thinking and acting and relating to other people with *agapē* throughout the Roman Empire.

When the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion of Rome, this damaged it significantly. But, at the same time, you had St. Augustine, coming from the area around Carthage in North Africa, who developed a coherent concept of Platonic Christianity in the footsteps of what St. Paul had meant, when he spoke in Athens about the "Unknown God."[6]

We should mention also an older contemporary of Jesus Christ, the Jewish philosopher Philo, who lived in Alexandria and introduced Platonic thought into Judaism. Unfortunately, we have no time to visit him, this time.

We have to move on, leaving behind the Dark Age covering the European continent for several centuries after the demise of the Roman Empire. We fly over the large forests. Here and there, a poor village. Some relics of Roman monuments and roads. People live in scattered tribes. Even the leaders are illiterate. There are no books, just some travelling teachers: Christian missionaries, like the English Boniface, who got a certain amount of support from King Pipin (the Short), the father of Charlemagne.

Charlemagne

We stop in the Eighth century A.D. Charlemagne is king over the area of what is today France and Germany. He has unified the many tribes though several wars, and he has an arrangement for mutual support with the Pope, with Charlemagne being the dominant partner. But all this is boring, compared to his Renaissance project. For Charlemagne, power was not an end in itself, but a means to uplift people to a higher way of life. His favorite book was St. Augustine's *City of God,* which he had someone read to him and his family during dinnertime.

Although Charlemagne never learned to read and write, he was quite educated nevertheless, fluent in Latin, and at least familiar with Greek. He started his grand education project by inviting the most learned men he could find to his court. The royal entourage processed around the country, staying for only a couple of months in any one place, where he held court before moving on.

The wisest of the learned men who collaborated with Charlemagne was Alcuin. He came from Northumberland in England, but Charlemagne met him in Italy. He came to the court in 781. As both men travelled a lot, there exists an extended exchange of letters between Charlemagne and Alcuin. In these letters, they discuss all kinds of themes, ranging from the movement of the stars, to matters of philology. And, of course, the Renaissance project. Alcuin writes to Charlemagne:

> Were many to share your intentions, Franken would be the seat of a new Athens, indeed, a new Athens, finer than the old. For our own, elevated by Christ's teaching, would outstrip all the wisdom of the Academy.[7]

Charlemagne opens schools, first at the court itself, then around the country in every bishopric and cloister, elementary schools for children (boys, that is) to learn to read, write, sing, do arithmetic, and medicine. One of the famous schoolmasters at the time was Hrabanus Maurus. But, there are no books for the schools. Alcuin and others have to write textbooks, and they do this in the form of dialogues. Charlemagne himself himself works on a grammar book for his "mother tongue," because he understands very well, how important it is for building a nation to have an organically developed, literate language. Apparently, most of the Latin-speaking scholars around him resist this initiative.

There are no revolutionary changes in the economy under Charlemagne, but he tries to improve the existing methods. He has people set up state-run model farms, or rather model villages with farms and the whole spectrum of artisans, who are called "*fiscus,*" because they have to rigorously keep book on what they produce.

There are also public infrastructure projects, like wooden bridges over the Rhine, for example in Mainz, where the last Roman bridge had burned down many centuries earlier. Charlemagne personally supervises the attempt to build a canal connecting the German rivers Main and Danube, fully aware of the invigorating effect it would have on future trade. The project fails, because the required technology is simply unavailable. It would

be 1,000 years, before the first, small-scale version of the Main-Danube canal was built in Bavaria.

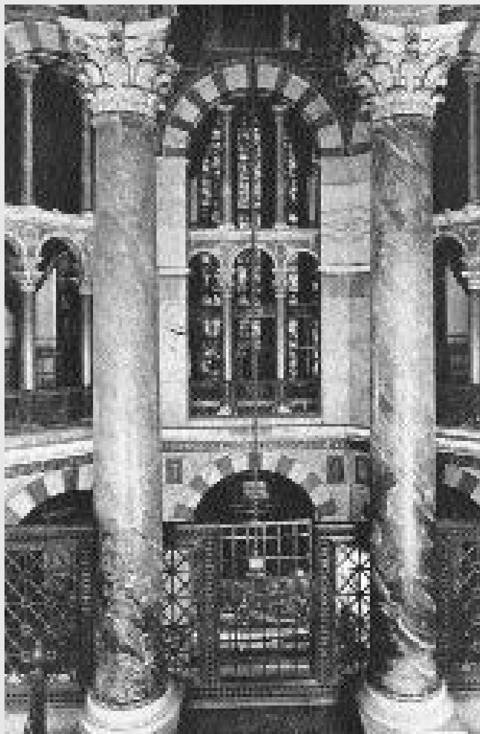
In architecture, the idea is not simply to copy Roman buildings of the past, but to build churches and palaces that were similar to ancient Roman buildings, but also different and more beautiful. The palace of Charlemagne in Ingelheim, Germany, is not very big, but very lovely. And the palace in Aachen, where he spent most of the time in his later years, is yet quite different and absolutely beautiful. It clearly shows Islamic Moorish influences, not only in the similarities of the arches between the Chapel at Aachen and the Great Mosque in Córdoba, Andalusia.

Charlemagne did not have friendly relations with the Omayyad caliphate in Spain—it is a complicated and rather embarrassing story—but he did have friendly relations with the Abbasid ruler in Baghdad, the famous Harun al-Rashid. Diplomacy in those days was tedious, and it is difficult to imagine in our days of the internet, telephones, airplanes, or at least trains. At that time, horses were the quickest means of transport. This story about one of Charlemagne's diplomatic missions to Harun al-Rashid may illustrate the issue.

In 797, he sent a three-man delegation, two Franks, and as a translator, a Jew by the name of Isaac. (This is why this famous story is exhibited at the recently opened Jewish Museum in Berlin.) They left, and for four years Charlemagne didn't hear anything at all. In 801, when he was in Italy, two emissaries met him; one came from Harun al-Rashid, the other from an Islamic governor in Northern Africa (Tunis). They reported to Charlemagne that the two Franks had died during the long journey, but that Isaac had arrived in Baghdad, from whence he had left, loaded with presents for him, and that he waited with those presents in North Africa, to be picked up by ship. The most precious of those presents was a live elephant. Charlemagne sent a ship, they wintered in Italy, and in the spring of 802, Isaac and the others arrived with the elephant in Aachen. The elephant was named Abu Abbas, after the founder of Abbaside dynasty and lived until 810.[8]

Charlemagne's Empire fell apart territorially soon after his death, but the Renaissance effect remained, and was continued by many people during the following several centuries, including the Cathedral movement in

Under Charlemagne, the idea in architecture was not to simply copy Roman buildings of the past, but to build churches and palaces that were similar to ancient Roman buildings, but also different and more beautiful. The palace in Aachen is absolutely beautiful. It clearly shows Islamic Moorish influences, beyond the similarities of the arches between the Chapel at Aachen and the Great Mosque in Córdoba.



Far left: *Chapel Palantine, Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle). Designed by Odo of Metz, it was consecrated in A.D. 805.*

Left: *Great Mosque of Córdoba, double-tiered arches of the prayer hall. First constructed in A.D. 786-787 under 'Abd al-Rahman I.*

France,[9] through Frederick II Hohenstaufen in the Thirteenth century.[10]

The Islamic Renaissance

Unfortunately, we have no time for a stop-over in Baghdad, where Harun al-Rashid ruled A.D. 786-809, because we want to move on to Persia. But, we remember that that famous king, like Charlemagne, drew the most learned men he could find to his court, and had them collect all the knowledge of the world. Later, his son Al Mamun put all these books in a newly built "House of Wisdom." It was a library-academy, on the model of the famous library of Alexandria, which had been burned down by Julius Caesar's troops in 48 B.C.

In an article on Andalusia, Muriel Mirak Weissbach has described the miracle of the Arabic language.[11] Owing to the work of many poets, who operated with conscious intent, a highly developed language was created. It was apparently so well-suited for expressing the most advanced ideas, that for, instance, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), who was a Persian, wrote his books in Arabic.

We were introduced to Ibn Sina in 1977 at a conference of the European Labor Party in Wiesbaden, Germany. A young woman in her twenties, Helga Zepp, not yet married to Lyndon LaRouche, spoke about this great Islamic thinker, Ibn Sina, who lived a thousand years ago (980-1037). We published this speech at the time, and I recently re-read it. She started with "declaring war against stupidity." If you never heard about Ibn Sina, this is due to the strange history books we had in school, she said. And then she told us, that Ibn Sina was a great physician, the authority in medical science not only in his time and country, but worldwide for the next seven centuries. A Latin translation of his *Canon of Medicine* was used in Europe until the Seventh century and beyond.

The actual subject of her presentation was, however, his major work on philosophy, his *Book on Healing*—the German title is more appropriate, *Book on Healing of the Soul*. She pinpointed three ideas in Ibn Sina's metaphysics, and these were: first, the notion of God as the "Necessary Being," the first cause of everything, which is not caused by anything else. Second, the fascinating idea that the "moving principle" of the universe, is also the moving principle of the creative human mind. And third, that it is not enough to know something—you have also to act accordingly, you have to apply that knowledge, in order to change the world.[12]

Indeed, Ibn Sina—his full name in Arabic is Abu Ali Al-Hussain Ibn Abdallah Ibn Sina, although he was known in the Latin West as Avicenna—is not an "ivory-tower" type of person. He was born in Bukhara, one of the major centers of the old Silk Route. He got an excellent education in his father's house, including the *Qu'ran*, Greek philosophy, then medicine. At the age of 17, he is an accomplished physician and cures the King of Buchara, who allows him to use the Royal library.

He studies universal sciences, but continues to earn his living as a physician. His enormous *Canon of Medicine* includes not only the complete medical knowledge of his time, but also many original contributions by himself, for example on the contagious nature of diseases like tuberculosis, on gynecology, and anatomy. He was the first to describe the disease meningitis, he described in detail the anatomy of the human eye, and how the nerves move the muscles.

And, Ibn Sina was a politician as well, which brought him, not surprisingly, into great trouble. In the Persian city of Hamadan he works as personal physician and advisor to the king, who appoints him also Vizir. This causes counter-reactions and intrigues and leads even to his imprisonment. But, as he is mentally and physically strong, he continues to write even in prison. Then he escapes to Isfahan, where he completes his works and dies in 1037.

His works were translated into Latin, and influenced Christian scholars like Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Nicolaus of Cusa, of course, and the great Jewish thinker Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides), who was born 1135 in Córdoba (Muslim Spain) and later went to Egypt, where he was the leader of all Jewish congregations and personal physician of the son of the Sultan Saladin. This alone should open some eyes to the absurdity of the argument by Brzezinski, Huntington, and others about the intrinsic "clash of civilizations," and about allegedly unbridgeable gaps between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in particular.

The Golden Renaissance

We come to the last leg of our journey: Renaissance Italy. Yes, the Renaissance starts with Dante, Petrarch, and the project to create an Italian literate language. What the Arabs can do, we can do as well, they must have said to themselves.

But, it is important to correct a wrong idea about the Fourteenth and Fifteenth century in Europe and in Italy. We tend to think: First there was the Dark Age, with the plague that killed off half the population, and *then* came the Renaissance—Dante's project of an Italian literate language, the poets Petrarch and Boccaccio, then, in the Fifteenth century Nicolaus of Cusa and his friend Eneas Silvius Piccolomini, who became Pope in 1458, and Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and so forth. The fact is, the great plague and the renaissance happened largely during *the same time*. Nicolaus of Cusa himself succeeded in avoiding the plague, but his friend Eneas got it, and only narrowly survived.

Not only does every renaissance start in a dark age, it also takes place for some period of time in circumstances that would be described, under different criteria, as a "pretty-dark age." In the introduction to his book of tales, *The Decameron,* Boccaccio tells us, how the plague not only killed people in every family, but it also destroyed all human relations, perverted morality, and led to a mental and emotional barbarism. The intention to counteract this was the agapic motivation behind his book. Mindless existentialists, who like the *Decameron,* because it includes stories about monks having sex with young girls, etc., will never understand that. It would certainly be a worthwhile research project, to see how many of Shakespeare's plays come from stories in the *Decameron.* Also, the original of the famous "Parable of the Rings" of the German poet Gotthold Lessing, in his drama *Nathan, the Wise,* comes from the *Decameron* (Day 1, No. 3), although the wise Jew is not called Nathan, but Melchisedech.

The Renaissance is a huge project, with a goal of rebuilding a run-down culture and society. The humanists took delight in discovering an increasing number of ancient Greek and Roman writings, in translating and publishing them. But the idea of the best humanists never was to simply copy the old ideas; rather, it was to seek out the best of those ideas of Plato and others, and to create with such ingredients a new and better culture.

The Golden Renaissance was actually a movement. It was the long-term, successful result of the activities of a number of enthusiastic individuals and their friends, who at first were organized in small informal circles, like the "Paradiso of Alberti" or Marsigli's group "Santo Spiritu" in Florence. Into these circles they recruited intelligent and open-minded people, some of whom—like Coluccio de' Salutati (1330-1406), who was Secretary of the Republic of Florence for thirty years—gained considerable political influence.[13] The activities of those Renaissance humanists were manifold: Some organized large networks of people all over Europe, to whom they wrote letters regularly, or they translated ancient works, and took care to spread them around; others performed scientific experiments, developed painting into a science, or took care of the education of the younger generation and wrote, for this purpose, new textbooks. All of these activities taken together, form the breeding ground, on which future geniuses can grow.

One such genius is Nicolaus of Cusa, the towering intellectual giant of the Golden Renaissance. He was born in Kues on the Mosel River, but he didn't like it at the scholastic university of Heidelberg, and went instead to Padua in Italy. He lived in Italy in his later years also, as a cardinal, especially after his friend Eneas became Pope Pius II.

Nicolaus of Cusa is a pioneer in the dialogue of cultures, which is why Helga Zepp LaRouche refers to him so prominently in her call for an international correspondence about that subject.[14] In 1437, he is sent to Constantinople for ecumenical talks with the Eastern Church. He returns by ship with a huge delegation from Constantinople, including the Eastern Emperor and the Patriarch, in time for the Council of Florence (Ferrara), which leads to the reunification of the Eastern and Western Churches in 1439.

After Constantinople has fallen in 1453 to the Islamic Turks, Cusa writes *De pace fidei* ("On the Peace of Faith") about peace among the religions. In this dialogue, which is set in heaven, representatives of 17 religions discuss, along with the Apostles Peter and Paul, and the Word of God, how there is "only one religion in a variety of rites." It is not only a very important philosophical writing, it is also an absolutely artful piece of prose. Well-translated excerpts may be performed like a dramatic dialogue.[15]

It includes many wonderful passages, which I could quote here. However, I will focus on two passages expressing Cusa's humanist image of man very beautifully. In the discussion about peace among the religions, the first to speak is a Greek. He agrees with the Word of God (*logos*) that all philosophers are striving for only "one wisdom," and then talks about his image of man:

> How great is the power of Wisdom that shines forth in the creation of man!—in his members, in the ordering of the members, in the infused life, the harmony of the organs, the movement, and, finally, in the rational spirit. This spirit is capable of marvelous arts and is, as it were, Wisdom's imprint; in this spirit, more than in anything else, eternal Wisdom shines forth as in a close image [of itself] . . .[16]

The second thought is expressed by St. Peter in a discussion with the Syrian about eternal life and the unity of human nature with God's nature. St. Peter says that a common idea to all religions is, that

> all men have the desire and hope for eternal life. . . . Men seek after happiness (which is eternal life) in no other nature than their own. Man wishes to be only a man—no angel or any other nature. But he wishes to be a happy man who attains ultimate happiness. This happiness is only human life's enjoyment of—i.e., union with—its own Fount, from which flows life itself and [which] *is* immortal divine life.[17]

In *De pace fidei,* Cusa mentions only one philosopher of a foreign culture by name: Avicenna, whom he praises as one of "those among the Arabs [sic], who are discerning and wise." He states that, in harmonious accordance with the Christian view,

> the intellectual happiness that results from the vision, or enjoyment, of God and of truth is preferred by Avicenna incomparably more than the happiness described in the law of the Arabs—even though Avicenna was [an adherent] of that law. . . . Therefore, with regard to that the present [issue] there will be no difficulty in rendering harmonious all the sects.[18]

The discovery of this direct reference to Avicenna (Ibn Sina) in *De pace fidei* led me to another idea: Why not imagine another conversation taking place in the simultaneity of eternity, more informal perhaps than Cusa's heavenly synod, just a discussion about some crucial ideas, which we want to discuss anyway as necessary ingredients of a new renaissance?

For this discussion, we have invited Nicolaus, Ibn Sina, and the philosopher G.W. Leibniz from the past, and from the present, we have a man, well-known to all of us, joining them: Lyndon LaRouche. This is, of course, my metaphorical LaRouche, and has to be distinguished from the real, living LaRouche, who will hopefully forgive me for this. The conversation is fictitious, of course, but every single idea in it is authentic, and all passages in quotation marks are literal quotes.

The Debate

Ibn Sina said, already entering the door: My compliments to you, Nicolaus, for your piece on the "one religion," and especially for those words you have put in the Greek's mouth on the image of man. As a doctor and philosopher, I couldn't agree more. And I don't say this, because you had such kind words for me . . .

Cusa: Well, I studied your *Book on Healing* with great interest. I really like your metaphorical description of God as "pure reason," and that man feels in his soul a kind of longing for real knowledge and wisdom. Similarly, as I wrote in "The Layman about Wisdom": "Nothing is more delightful to the intellect than is Wisdom. . . . Because eternal and infinite Wisdom shines forth in all things, it attracts us by means of a certain foretasting of its effects, so that we are brought onto it with wondrous desire."[19]

Leibniz was also full of praise for the Persian colleague and said that he had taken up his notion of God as "Necessary Being" explicitly in the centerpiece of his own metaphysical works, the *Monadology* (Para. 45).[20]

Ibn Sina modestly said, that there was no doubt, that both Cusa and Leibniz had formulated the idea of the human mind as the image of God, in a much clearer and more poetical way than he had done earlier.

Leibniz wanted to know, whether Ibn Sina was perhaps referring to the passage in the *Monadology* about the difference between the souls of animals and the human mind, which some also call "spirit": "Among the differences that there are between ordinary souls and spirits . . . there is also this, that, while souls in general are living mirrors or images of the universe of created things, minds are also images of the Deity himself or of the author of nature. They are capable of knowing the system of the universe, and to imitate it somewhat by means of architectonic patterns, each mind being like a small divinity in its sphere." (Para. 83)[21]

At this point, my metaphorical **LaRouche** suggested, that in order to explain to people in our time, in what respect they are a "living image of God," you ought to explain to them what is specifically "human" in their thinking, in contrast to the empirical thinking of animals, or the logical operations of a computer.

Leibniz nodded, and quoted from the *Monadology:* "We see that animals when they have the perception of something which they notice and of which they have had a similar previous perception, are led by the representation of their memory to expect that which was associated in the preceding perception, and they come to have feelings like those which they had before. For instance, if a stick be shown to a dog, he remembers the pain which it has caused him and he whines or runs away.

"Men act in like manner as animals, in so far as the sequence of their perceptions is determined only by the law of memory, resembling the *empirical physicians* who practice simply, without any theory, and we are empiricists in three-fourths of our actions. For instance, when we expect that there will be daylight tomorrow, we do so empirically, because it has always happened so up to the present time. It is only the astronomer who uses his reason in making such an affirmation." (Paras. 26 and 28)[22] Which is both an argument against empiricism, as nonhuman thinking, and against the notion of Descartes and other mechanists, that animals are machines and don't think at all.

Cusa, for his part, contributed a good explanation of the difference between two levels of reason, a lower more mechanical one, and a higher one involving insight and judgement: "[The situation is] as if a layman who did not know the meaning of the words were to read aloud from some book. The reading aloud would proceed by the power of reason. For he would read aloud by making inferences regarding the differences of the letters, which he would combine and separate; and this would be the work of reason. Yet, he would remain ignorant of [the content of] what he was reading aloud. But suppose there

were also another man, who were to read aloud and both know and understand that which he read. Here is a certain illustration of confused reason and reason formed by mind. For mind exercises discriminative judgment regarding instances of reasoning, [thereby discerning] which reasoning is good and which is sophistical."[23]

Ibn Sina brought up another issue, namely, how ideas come into being: You should know, that at times the conceivable idea is abstracted from the existing thing, as, for example, when we abstract the conceivable idea-form of the celestial sphere by way of observation and sense-perception. At times, the truly-existing idea-form is not taken from existing things. It is rather *vice versa,* as, for example, when we are thinking the idea of a building, which we are freely inventing. In this case, the conceived form of idea becomes the moving principle for our hands and limbs, so that we cause the building to take shape in reality. The relationship is not, that first the conceptional content exists, so that we could then recognize it; but, we recognize it first, and then it really exists. The relationship between the universe and the first intelligence, the necessary existent, is that one.[24]

Cusa turned to Ibn Sina, smiling: You see, here you are yourself quite clearly drawing the analogy between creative man and the Creator, God. I merely elaborated this concept a bit further, and explained the difference between a fixed image and a *living* image of God. My layman explains it thus: "You know that our mind is a certain power that bears an image of the Divine Art. . . . Therefore, mind is created by the Creative Art—as if that Art willed to create itself, and because the Infinite Art is unreplicable, there arose its image. [The situation is] as if a painter wished to reproduce himself by painting, and because he himself is not replicable, there would arise—as he was reproducing himself—his image.

"And because no matter how nearly perfect an image is, if it cannot become more perfect and more conformed to its exemplar, it is never as perfect as any imperfect image whatsoever that has the power to conform itself ever more and more, without limit, to its inaccessible exemplar. For in this respect the image, as best it can, imitates infinity. It is as if the painter were to make two images [of himself], one of which was dead but seemed actually more like him, and the other of which was less like him but was alive—it could make itself ever more conformed. No one doubts that the second image is the more perfect qua imitating, to a greater degree, the art of the painter. In a similar way, every mind . . . has from God the fact that, as best it can be, it is a perfect and living image of the Infinite Art . . . in such a way that it can conform itself, when stimulated, ever more and more to its exemplar."[25]

Ibn Sina interjected, that this requires, however, that man must *want* and *work* for this kind of perfection. And that the same is true for any effect of human ideas on reality. The difference between God and man being, that any thought of God means immediately that the thought-object really exists; but human ideas become realized only, if there is the will to do it. "The cognitive idea becomes real in us and then it becomes the cause for substances of artificial creations existing in the outside world. If the mental existence of these ideas within us were sufficient for bringing the artificial forms into existence . . . , then cognitive comprehension were at the same time our power over the things we want to produce. But it is not so; the existence of cognitive notions within us does not suffice to achieve an outside effect. They need, in addition, a constantly renewed resolution of will, which is set into motion by the power of want, which at the same time sets into motion the power to move. This power moves the nerves and limbs like instruments, then the outer organs, and finally matter."[26]

LaRouche whole-heartedly agreed, especially to the notion of human will, or conscious intention, which is necessary to change the world, for better or worse. And often, a "sensuous act" is necessary to actualize a decision taken in the mind. Then, he moved on from philosophy to economy, elaborating briefly on the deep interconnection between epistemology and scientific progress, and how the culture of a society affects the productivity of its economy, which is measured in the relative potential population density of the society: "Human beings have the unique ability of their species, to rise above that prison-house of delusions called sense-certainty, to discover experimentally demonstrable universal physical principles. . . . Where lower forms of life are unable to rise, by their own minds, above the ecological and related potentialities bestowed upon their biological heritage, mankind is able to transmit variously false or true discoveries of universal physical principle, from generation to generation.

"This transmission of such distinctly human qualities of ideas, constitutes that to which we rightly award the name of 'culture.' Thus, the history and nature of mankind, is expressed as either evolutionary development, or decadence, of variously failed and relatively successful cultures, and of the individual persons within those cultures.

"My own most fundamental, and eminently successful contribution to the study of cultures, lies in my introduction of the conception of *potential relative population-density,* as the uniquely competent basis for defining *a physical science of economics.*"[27]

And he defined physical-economic development as the discovery, transmission, and application for practice of

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Benozzo Gozzoli, "Journey of the Magi," 1459 (detail). The mural subject celebrates the 1437 Council of Florence, which brought together the poets, philosophers, and statesmen of the Latin West and the Greek East.

new physical principles.

All three wise men, **Ibn Sina, Cusa,** and **Leibniz,** fully agreed to this.

Ibn Sina said, that his metaphysics actually included a principle of perfection as a kind of germ-notion for "anti-entropy," but that his economic policy was limited to some simple advice. He listed three such suggestions: Every government must guarantee that (1) everyone has the opportunity to earn his living in a way that is also useful to the rest of society, (2) this is not undercut by people who enrich themselves by various forms of cheating, such as gambling or usury, and (3) there must be a public sector that serves the common good, taking care of the poor and sick, and other public affairs.[28]

Cusa at this point referred briefly to his plans for a general reform of Church and state, which he had outlined in his book *Concordantia catholica,* and

Leibniz gave a very interesting report on his plan for a "German Society for the Arts and Sciences," which was to bring together "*theoria cum praxi,*" theoretical science with practical research, testing and applying newly discovered principles.[29] Therefore, the Society should not be a traditional university, but something more like a science city, with a large library featuring the most interesting books from around the world, a museum of discoveries, laboratories, workshops, schools, an orphanage, and an institution where poor people could find employment, etc. This Society was supposed to be a radiating point of physical-economic change. He expressed a certain frustration, because the Germans didn't realize the plan. The closest approximation of Leibniz's plan actually was put in place by Czar Peter I in St. Petersburg.

He referred to the very last page of his book, *New Essays on Human Understanding,* where he developed this principle of an alliance among theory and practice, and proposed to add to the traditional scholarly faculties of Theology, Law, Medicine, and Philosophy, a new faculty of Economics: "Some people have believed, not without reason, that along with the others there should be an *Economic* faculty: this would include the mathematical and mechanical arts, and everythimg having to do with the fine points of human survival and the conveniences of life; and it would include agriculture and architecture . . . . And then there are the professions whose members serve

society [work for the common good–GL] other than by what they say, and who ought to be guided by those who are truly learned—if only learning were valued as it ought to be. Even in the higher manual arts there has been an alliance of practice with learning, and it could go further. As indeed they are allied in medicine . . . . This alliance between theory and practice can also be seen in war . . . , among painters, sculptors, and musicians, and among certain other kinds of *virtuosi.* If the principles of all these professions, arts and even trades were taught in a practical way by the philosophers—or it might be in some other faculty of learned men—the latter would truly be the teachers of mankind. But this would require many changes in the present state of things in literature, in the education of the young, and thus in public policies [administration of the state–GL]."[30]

LaRouche responded enthusiastically: Here you have already the idea of the Ecole Polytechique, which was later founded in France! This is why I always referred to Leibniz's notion of "technology" as the key idea for my concept of physical economy.

Now, however, for a last time, Leibniz took the speech, and in a somewhat grim mood, he said about his philosophical and political adversaries, who don't believe in natural law: " . . . they give their brutish passions free rein and apply their thoughts to seducing and corrupting others. If they are ambitious and by nature rather callous, they are capable of setting fire to the four corners of the earth, for their pleasure or advancement . . . . But these people may come to experience for themselves the evils that they believe will only befall others. If they cure themselves of this spiritual epidemic whose bad effects are starting to show, those evils will perhaps be prevented; but if the disease continues to spread, it will produce a revolution, and providence will cure men by means of that . . . ."[31]

* * *

The revolution Leibniz was talking about, came; its most positive aspect was the American Revolution of 1776. Something similar is obviously and desperately needed today. The humanists of the world should support the better America in this noble undertaking.

Notes

1. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., "Can We Change the Universe?," *Executive Intelligence Review,* March 2, 2001 (Vol. 28, No. 9).
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3. Solon of Athens, "The Constitutional Order," trans. by David Shavin, *Fidelio,* Summer 1993, Vol. II, No. 2.
4. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. "Zbigniew Brzezinski and September 11th," *Executive Intelligence Review,* Jan. 11, 2002 (Vol. 29, No. 1).
5. See Friedrich Schiller, "On the Sublime," in *Friedrich Schiller, Poet of Freedom,* Vol. III, ed. and trans. by William F. Wertz, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 1990).
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8. See Engelbert Muehlbacher, *Deutsche Geschichte unter den Karolingern* (Essen: Phaidon Verlag), Vol. I.
9. See footnote 7.
10. Christa Kaiser, "Kaiser Friedrich II. und der moderne Nationalstaat," *Neue Solidarität,* Dec. 6, 2000 (Nr. 49).
11. Muriel Mirak Weissbach, "Andalusia, Gateway to the Golden Renaissance," *Fidelio,* Fall 2001 (Vol. X, No. 3).
12. Helga Zepp, "Euro-Arabische Renaissance," both quotes from *Neue Solidarität,* Jan. 20, 1977.
13. See S. Harrison Thomson, *Das Zeitalter der Renaissance. Von Petrarch bis Erasmus* (Munich: Kindler Verlag, 1977), p. 38ff. English edition: *Europe in Renaissance and Reformation*.
14. Helga Zepp LaRouche, "Invitation To Participate in an International Correspondence for a 'Dialogue of Cultures,' " *Fidelio,* Fall 2001 (Vol. X, No. 3)
15. See "Nicolaus of Cusa: A Great Man of Ecumenicism," *Fidelio,* Summer 2001 (Vol. X, No. 2), for a report on a performance of selections from *De pace fidei* by members of the Schiller Institute's "Tell Group" in Hanover, Germany.
16. Nicolaus of Cusa, "De pace fidei," in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa,* trans. by Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis, Minn.: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2001), Vol. I. See also *Toward a New Council of Florence: "On the Peace of Faith" and Other Works by Nicolaus of Cusa,* translated with an introduction by William F. Wertz, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 1993).
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Nicolaus of Cusa, "Idiota de sapienta" ("The Layman About Wisdom)," in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises, op. cit.*
20. See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *The Monadology,* in *Discourse on Method and The Monadology,* trans. by George R. Montgomery (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Press, 1992), Paras. 45 and 38.
21. *Ibid.,* Para. 83.
22. *Ibid.,* Paras. 26 and 28.
23. Nicolaus of Cusa, "Idiota de mente" ("The Layman About Mind"), in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises, op. cit.*
24. Ibn Sina (Avicenna), *Book on Healing of the Soul,* Series II: Philosophy, Dissertation 8: Natural Theology, Ch. 7. Translated from the German by the author.
25. Nicolaus of Cusa, "Idiota, de mente," *op. cit.*
26. Ibn Sina, *op. cit.*
27. LaRouche, "Brzezinski," *op. cit.*
28. Ibn Sina, *op. cit.,* Dissertation 10: Practical Philosophy, Ch. 4, "The Life of Cities."
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30. G.W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding,* trans. and ed. by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 527.
31. *Ibid,* p. 462.