

PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEWS IN GERMAN TERRITORIES (1668-1799)

Volume II

edited by
Pasquale Terracciano
Francesco Valerio Tommasi



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Introduction

Francesco Fronterotta, Riccardo Pozzo, Pasquale Terracciano,
Francesco Valerio Tommasi

This volume presents the collected proceedings and expanded research derived from two conferences held in Rome in 2024 and 2025, dedicated to exploring the manifold functions of the philosophical review genre during the Modern and Enlightenment periods. The conferences and the volume were conceived within the PRIN project “Philosophical Reviews in German Territories (1668-1799)”, led by Marco Sgarbi. Drawing extensively on the German *Gelehrte Journale* (learned Journals), the contributions collectively demonstrate that scholarly reviews were neither mere ancillary summaries nor secondary reflections upon major works, but rather essential instruments of philosophical inquiry and intellectual canon formation. From the late seventeenth century through the early nineteenth century, the intellectual landscape of German territories was profoundly shaped by periodicals. Reviews thus constituted a conceptual *Kampfpplatz* (battlefield) where emerging modernity’s core tensions were contested.

1. The Review as a Site of Epistemological and Methodological Debate

In this respect, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz recognized the strategic value of the review as a tool for scholarly influence, as shown in Oliveri’s article in this volume. Far from viewing them as neutral reports, Leibniz employed reviews—such as his anonymous evaluation of Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*—to subtly advance his philosophical stance. His approach was to instill “prejudices”, understood as necessary precognitions, in the readership, thereby inclining them to view Locke’s arguments critically. For instance, by focusing on areas like the association of ideas and enthusiasm, where he seemed to agree with Locke, Leibniz simultaneously highlighted the underlying philo-

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sophical flaws that stemmed from Locke's reliance on Cartesian premises which Locke himself criticized.

One primary function of the philosophical review was to actively shape and interpret major metaphysical and epistemological projects. The complex reception of Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism, for example, unfolded significantly through critical engagement. Early contemporaries struggled to accurately categorize Kant's philosophy, misinterpreting it as a radical form of idealism similar to Berkeley's, or finding substantial similarities with Leibniz's doctrine of pre-established harmony (see Bucarelli's essay). Kant sought to resolve these issues in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* by describing transcendental philosophy, through a biological metaphor, as an "epigenetic system of pure reason". This concept explicitly countered the interpretation of transcendental philosophy as a mere "preformation" theory—a danger highlighted by his student Schultz's review which appealed to the pre-established harmony guaranteed by a benevolent creator to ensure agreement between intellect and nature. Reviews thereby provided the necessary critical context for Kant to refine and clarify foundational concepts, such as the crucial distinction between "judgments of mere perception" (*Wahrnehmungsurteile*) and objectively valid "judgments of experience" (*Erfahrungsurteile*).

The review genre also served as a laboratory for testing and disseminating terminology crucial for nascent philosophical systems. Christian Wolff, perhaps the most prolific self-reviewer of his time, utilized reviews published in Latin in the *Acta Eruditorum* to introduce and clarify the technical terminology of his German works to an international audience, as Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero shows. These "self-translations" reveal Wolff's profound terminological choices, such as equating the German *Ding* with the scholastic *ens* in his earliest exposition of ontology, or his reluctance to use *perceptiunculae* in German while adopting it in Latin to designate "small perceptions", thereby showing a gap in the German psychological vocabulary. This comparative analysis underscores how reviews functioned not just as summaries but as vital complements to systematic works, helping authors stabilize their conceptual frameworks.

2. The Review in the Political and Ideological Sphere

The philosophical review was fundamentally intertwined with the political struggles of the era, acting as a direct medium for ideological engagement. Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *The Closed Commercial State* (1800), a work born from the conceptual crisis following the French Revolution, immediately became a focal point for controversy, receiving intense scrutiny across the journalistic landscape between 1800 and 1803 (see Gristina's article). Critics quickly framed Fichte's model—which redefined property as a right to productive activity and proposed economic closure to ensure distributive justice—as a dangerous political aberration. Conservative voices, influenced by Burke and Smithian economics, condemned it as stemming from "abstract theoretical constructs" and leading to an unacceptable limitation of personal liberty, labeling it a "vast penitentiary" or a

form of “tyrannical despotism”. The reviews thereby served to neutralize a theoretical position perceived as carrying dangerous Jacobin implications. Christoph Friedrich Nicolai’s review, in particular, utilized this debate to highlight an internal tension in Fichte’s political thought, contrasting the valorization of radical liberty in his earlier *Beitrag* with the prescriptive socio-economic order of the *Closed Commercial State*.

Fichte’s awareness of the review’s decisive influence culminated in his unrealized plan for a “Journal at the Second Power”, a publication dedicated to reviewing other review journals, as clarified in the article that Matteo d’Alfonso and Maurizio Trudu have dedicated to it. Fichte realized that “the general public does not read books; the reviews are its book”, and thus criticism must target the critiques themselves to effectively shape public opinion.

This intellectual scrutiny extended to historical figures. The eighteenth-century German Enlightenment utilized reviews to conduct a measured reassessment of Niccolò Machiavelli, shifting his image from a theological scandal to an object of reasoned philosophical debate (see Terracciano’s article). Reviews provided a forum to debate the conflict between political necessity and moral virtue, notably in the wide discussion surrounding Frederick II’s *Anti-Machiavel* (1740). Furthermore, reviews acted decisively in determining the boundaries of modern philosophy itself. The three major reviews of Johann Franz Budde’s *Introductio ad historiam philosophiae Hebraicae*—an ambitious attempt to integrate the Jewish Kabbalah as the origin of true philosophical knowledge—ultimately served to marginalize the Hebrew tradition. Through strategies ranging from outright rejection (Amsterdam) to selective rewriting (Leipzig), the reviews actively participated in defining philosophy as a tradition that was Greek, rational, and Christian, thereby excluding a revelatory Jewish origin. This conundrum is addressed in this volume by Guido Bartolucci.

3. Genre Hybridity, Communication, and the Democratization of Knowledge

A pivotal moment in the evolution of this genre was the birth of the philosophical history of philosophy, a process essentially linked to the work of Christoph August Heumann, as shown by Roberto Bordoli. In his *Acta philosophorum* (1715–1726), the first periodical specifically dedicated to this field, Heumann established a fundamental distinction between *historia philosophica* (written by historians) and *historia philosophiae* (written by philosophers). For Heumann, the history of philosophy was not a mere branch of history like military or ecclesiastical history, but a new philosophical discipline essential for the search for truth and virtue. Through the *Acta philosophorum*, Heumann promoted Eclecticism as a critical method for independent judgment, emancipated from the “despotism” of traditional sects and authorities. He argued that a philosopher must examine past ideas as an equal, accepting only what is rigorously grounded in reason. This perspective allowed for a radical re-evaluation of the philosophical canon: for instance, Heumann was the first to fully include forbidden figures like Giordano Bruno in the narrative of modern philosophy, treating

even atheism and heresy as legitimate objects of philosophical judgment that help refine human knowledge.

The case of Georg Friedrich Meier illustrates how reviews functioned within these institutional networks. Meier's textbooks were used by Kant for nearly forty years, and his work was extensively discussed in journals such as the *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen* and the *Hamburgische Berichte*, as highlighted in Pozzo's paper. Critical reviews by contemporaries like Moses Mendelssohn and Thomas Abbt signal the tensions of the era: Mendelssohn critiqued Meier's "terrifying" productivity and the ambiguity of authorship between him and Baumgarten, while Abbt ironically dissected Meier's habit of using fixed classification schemes—or "basic threads"—for all his writing.

The prominence of the review genre coincided with and propelled significant transformations in the form and accessibility of intellectual discourse. Christian Thomasius stands out as a pioneering figure, transforming the review by integrating it with dialogue and polemics, notably in his periodical *Monats-Gespräche* (1688–1690). The articles of Marco Sgarbi and Riccarda Suitner are focused on him. The use of dialogue in reviews served multiple functions: it allowed different perspectives to be presented *pro & contra*, fostering critical thinking in readers by withholding final, dogmatic judgment. This genre proved highly effective for popularizing knowledge, as it allowed difficult philosophical ideas to reach a wider, less academic readership that included soldiers, merchants, and women, thereby democratizing intellectual debate. Thomasius argued that reviews should eschew elitism and embrace a direct, critical style that would challenge established authorities and pedantry, treating criticism and excerpting as inseparable elements of philosophical practice.

More broadly, the sheer volume, variety, and competitive nature of *Gelehrte Journale* between the late 17th and late 18th centuries demonstrate a radical shift in knowledge dissemination. The shift toward accessible German-language periodicals, often appearing as ephemeral, anonymous, or pseudonymous *Flugschriften* (flyers), fundamentally altered the material conditions and social perception of intellectual work. The commercial nature of reviews meant they played a strategic role in determining what books should be bought, effectively offering themselves as a substitute for the books themselves for a burgeoning bourgeois audience eager for self-cultivation. Reviewers acted as "knowledge actors" as seen in the technical debates over translations of Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime*. The recurring attention to issues of translation in reviews of works like this highlights the crucial role of language in constructing national intellectual identity and making ancient texts accessible to non-specialist readers (see Pizzichemi's paper).

4. Conclusion

The systematic examination of philosophical reviews reveals them as an indispensable source for understanding the intellectual history of the Enlightenment. These sources demonstrate how critical judgment—often embedded

within ostensibly neutral summaries, dialogues, or polemical pamphlets—was essential for disseminating philosophical knowledge, establishing terminological standards, engaging in political combat, and shaping the modern philosophical canon through acts of inclusion and purposeful exclusion. The study of these intricate relationships, bridging the distance between private scholarship and public consumption, between abstract theory and ideological commitment, remains vital for grasping the foundations of modern European thought. This collection illuminates this dynamic intellectual landscape where the philosophical review reigned as the defining genre of its age.

Leibniz and the Function of Book Reviews

Lucia Oliveri

Abstract: Leibniz viewed reviews as charitable acts by savants who dedicate part of their time to advancing science and returning it to society. This activity must be disinterested and scientifically honest insofar as it does not bring honor and recognition to the savant. Leibniz was an active reviewer of books for major journals of the time. Does his activity reflect what he says about savants? Through an analysis of a paradigmatic case—his review of John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*—I argue that, in this case at least, Leibniz used reviews as a scientific tool to instill prejudices in his scientific peers. By “prejudices”, I do not mean false judgments about a book but rather precognitions that one must have to critically assess a book’s content, which may incline readers to reject the author’s arguments.

Keywords: Leibniz, Locke, Review, Innate Ideas, Substance, Matter.

1. Introduction

Every era has its challenges. The invention of the printing press posed the challenge of an overflow of information in the form of printed books to the 17th century. This revolution impacted the lives of scholars, who had to find ways to cope with scientific reports, literature, and news. It also had a social dimension in that it motivated the scholarly community to establish official practices for dealing with products of knowledge, making ideas accessible without time-consuming reading practices. Reviews and excerpts became the main means of doing so.

G. W. Leibniz participated in the rethinking of cultural and scientific exchanges as a producer, consumer, and administrator. He served as librarian and as an influence on journals such as *Monatlicher Auszug*, as recently documented by Beiderbeck and Gantet (2021, 3–6). In his letters and writings, Leibniz expresses concern about the growing volume of published materials and the insufficient time allotted for reviewing them. This challenge motivates him to reflect on the role of the savant in society. The writing *Mémoire pour des personnes éclairées et de bonne intention* (1692, A IV 4 617) paradigmatically testifies of Leibniz’s commitment to rethinking the role of savants, portraying them as learned individuals who must give back to society by investing their valuable time in community-benefiting activities. Among the charitable activities that advance the public good, Leibniz lists those that promote

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science, such as meditations, observations, experiments, and instructions. Savants should pursue authentic scientific improvements rather than honor and public approval.¹

In addition to the services that scholars can offer the public, there are also products that organize knowledge, such as encyclopedias, book catalogs, and book excerpts (*excerpta*). The latter seem to have a mere subsidiary function; they are useful for finding passages quickly and for providing an initial overview of the subject matter and the author's approach.

As testified by the Academy Edition, *excerpta* was a practice used by Leibniz not just as a private way of studying a book, but also for sharing contents with other thinkers of the time. Few pages could easily be sent by mail and shared with other scholars, or published in journals. As Gantet (2021a, 263) has showed, the distinction between *excerpta* and *reviews* was not so sharp at the time. Both *excerpta* and reviews are published anonymously and must avoid controversies, even when they express merits and demerits of the book.

In another study, Gantet (2021b) reconstructs Leibniz's publication and review activity in scientific journals and shows that Leibniz extensively exercised the practice of *excerpta* as book reviews. Moreover, his review and publication activity appears to be guided by a dissemination strategy that prioritizes high-impact journals over other media.

This strategy can be seen as reflecting what Leibniz wrote in *Mémoires pour des personnes éclairées*: high-impact journals guarantee a larger audience for ideas that contribute to scientific advancement. However, it can also be seen as a strategy to control and manipulate the dissemination of these ideas by influencing their readership. In this paper, I address the question of whether there is more to Leibniz's review activity than disinterested scientific improvement or if he envisions the potential of reviews to influence reception and debate about the reviewed work.

The question of Leibniz's ambivalent review activity stems from the role of reviews during his time. As Gantet (2021a, 263) points out, reviews were not intended to criticize an author's work. Rather, they were a means of sharing information about a book's content without engaging in critical debate with the author. Jean Gallois, the editor of the *Journal des sçavans* from 1666 to 1674, provides the following guidelines for writing a good review:

¹ *Mémoire pour des personnes éclairées et de bonne intention* (1692, A IV 4 618): "Et pour ce qui est des sçavans, capables de contribuer à l'accroissement de nos connoissances; ils doivent songer à des travaux qui ne servent pas seulement à les faire connoistre et applaudir; mais encor à produire quelques nouvelles lumieres; Ces travaux peuvent consister dans des recherches pour nous, et dans des enseignemens pour les autres. Les recherches peuvent consister en meditations et en experiences ou observations[.] Et les enseignemens peuvent estre de vive voix ou par escrit, communiqué s'en particulier, ou donnés au public. En tout cela il faut regarder au fruit reel, qui s'en peut retirer. Car écrire pour écrire n'est qu'une mauvaise coutume; et écrire seulement pour faire parler de nous, est une vanité, qui fait même du tort aux autres, en les faisant perdre leur temps par une lecture inutile[.]".

It is good that he makes the excerpt long enough so that I may have more knowledge of the book. It is necessary to note what is good or bad in the book, what purpose the book may serve, and what is the advantage of reading it, whether anything has already been written on the same subject matter, and compare the author of this book to those who have written on it before.

[Il est bon qu'il fasse l'extrait un peu ample afin que je puisse avoir plus de connaissance du livre. Il fault remarquer ce qu'il y a dans le livre de bon ou de mauvais, a quoy le livre peut servir et quel profit on en peut tirer, si on a desja escrit sur cette matiere, et faire comparaison de ceux qui en ont escrit avant l'auteur de ce livre, quoted from Gantet (2021, 263 n. 27), my translation.]

Although Leibniz apparently follows these instructions, he uses them as camouflage to deliver more than a report on the contents of the book. His reviews serve as a scientific tool to instill prejudices in scientific users. By “prejudices” I do not mean false judgments about a book, but rather some precognition in the form of knowledge one must have to critically assess the content of the book, which may eventually incline readers to reject the author’s arguments. To support my thesis, I analyze Leibniz’s review of John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1700. Before I begin the analysis, I would like to address a methodological concern.

Leibniz’s review activity spanned his entire scientific life. During this time, he produced a remarkable number of reviews of books on philosophy, mathematics, physics, and more (see Gantet 2021b).² Therefore, limiting the analysis to one review is methodologically unsound. A rigorous approach should survey all of this material and address other variables, such as the periodization of reviews (are there differences between early reviews, when Leibniz was young, and later reviews, when he was a well-known, acclaimed scholar?), the variety of disciplines (is there continuity between reviews of philosophical works and reviews of works in other disciplines?), and, finally, similarities that could be used to argue for a strategic use of reviews, as I suggest. Another way to support my thesis would be to examine Leibniz’s reviews of his own work (see Giampietri 2012) for clues as to whether he employed this strategy also to his own work. This paper is just the beginning of such research. As one must start somewhere, I will focus on what I consider a paradigmatic case: Leibniz’s review of Locke. Therefore, the support for my thesis would be modest. All I argue is that Leibniz used the strategy of deploying book reviews to influence readers at least once. This naturally raises the question of whether he did so systematically.

In par. 1, I explain why Leibniz’s review of Locke is paradigmatic in supporting my thesis. In par. 2, I analyze the review and demonstrate that, beneath the surface of what appears to be a fair and objective report, Leibniz offers a critical evaluation of John Locke’s work. This evaluation is designed so that readers

² Another important tool to accomplish this analysis will be the volume collecting Leibniz’s reviews in scientific journals edited by Antonio Lamarra and Roberto Palaia (forthcoming).

familiar with Leibniz's philosophy, including his intended audience, can immediately grasp the issues and contradictions of Locke's empiricism. In par. 3, I conclude by examining the differences between the first review, published in 1700, and the addendum, published in 1701, in the same journal.

2. Leibniz and Locke

Among the most influential and important controversies between early modern intellectuals, the debate between Leibniz and Locke regarding the existence of innate ideas and their role in knowledge acquisition, as well as the question of whether the mind can develop its abilities only through the material provided by the senses, occupies a unique place, at least in terms of its influence on topics that are still debated today.³ If this is not reason enough why Leibniz's review of Locke is a paradigmatic case, three aspects of the controversy support this view: First, the long-standing confrontation that led Leibniz to write a book-length rejection of Locke's theses. Second, the abundance of public and private sources that shed light on Leibniz's attitude toward Locke's work. Third, the issue of diverging languages and the use of translations that shaped the reception of Locke's work.

Regarding the first issue, Leibniz engaged with the work of Locke over a period of nearly ten years (1695–1704), which culminated in the writing of *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*. During this period, Leibniz hoped to engage Locke in direct dialogue, but Locke refused. In addition to his many indirect exchanges with Locke through Thomas Burnett (see Robinet and Schepers in the *Introduction* A VI 6, XVII–XXIII), Leibniz began corresponding with Lady Masham, Locke's close friend and the daughter of Cudworth (see Meier-Oeser in the *Introduction* to A II 4 LXXXI–LXXXVIII). Locke spent the last years of his life at her house until his death in 1704. Leibniz abandoned the idea of publishing the *New Essays* because the reason for their completion—a live confrontation with Locke—disappeared with his death (Leibniz to Lady Masham, July 10, 1705, A II 4 325). The book was published more than fifty years later, in 1765, by Raspe, after Leibniz's death.

From its structure to its content, the book *New Essays on Human Understanding* documents that the reason for engaging in a lively correspondence with Locke is not solely due to a difference in philosophical views. Leibniz is concerned that Locke's writing style and his use of English, his native language, give him an advantage. Locke is able to express himself in a more accessible and appealing way, making his ideas easier to comprehend and share. This concern is explicit in a passage drawn from the Preface to the *New Essays*:

³ Following Dascal (2006), one could also argue that controversies are essential to understanding Leibniz's philosophy. The controversy between Locke and Leibniz is particularly important, making the review a very important document.

Indeed, although the author of the *Essay* says hundreds of fine things which I applaud, our systems are very different. His is closer to Aristotle and mine to Plato, although each of us parts company at many points from the teachings of both of these ancient writers. He is more popular whereas I am sometimes forced to be a little more esoteric and abstract—which is no advantage for me, particularly when writing in a living language. However, I think that by using two speakers, one of whom presents opinions drawn from that author's *Essay* and the other adds my comments, the confrontation will be more to the reader's taste than a dry commentary from which he would have to be continually turning back to the author's book in order to understand mine.

[En effet, quoique l'Auteur de l'Essay, dise mille belles choses où j'applaudis, nos systemes different beaucoup. Le sien a plus de rapport à Aristote et le mien à Platon, quoique nous nous éloignons en bien des choses l'un et l'autre de la doctrine de ces deux anciens. Il est plus populaire, et moi je suis forcé quelque fois d'être un peu plus acroamatique et plus abstrait, ce qui n'est pas un avantage pour moi, sur tout écrivant dans une langue vivante. Je crois cependant qu'en faisant parler deux personnes, dont l'une expose les sentimens, tirés de l'essay de cet auteur, et l'autre y joint mes observations; le parallele sera plus au gré du lecteur, que des remarques toutes seches, dont la lecture auroit été interrompuë à tout moment par la necessité de recourir à son livre pour entendre le mien.] (NE 47–48/A VI 6 47–48).

These lines from the *Preface* condense the three points I made to support the relevance of the review as a paradigmatic case. First, Leibniz's strategy of turning the book into a dialogue is meant to make his position more appealing and less abstract than it would have been in a treatise. It further compensates for Locke's linguistic advantage. Furthermore, a dialogue allows for a more focused debate, as both participants' positions are presented to the readers. Symbolically, it represents Leibniz's partnership with Plato. What he writes in the *Preface* testifies that he was afraid of the apparent soundness of Locke's argumentation and the popular and simple way of exposition of his thought. Locke's philosophy was not simply attractive, but capable to generate assent. These two features of Locke's expository capacities increased the risk factor of wide dissemination of dangerous philosophical contents, like Locke's criticism of innate ideas.

Leibniz likely had these concerns even before writing those lines in the *Preface*. When the dissemination of Locke's philosophy increases through the translation of his *Essay* first into French by Pierre Coste in 1700 and then into Latin in 1701, he likely was searching for ways to contrast Locke's philosophy. The translations gave him the opportunity to address Locke's philosophy publicly, although anonymously. The first long review appeared in September 1700 and the shorter *Zusatz* in January 1701. Both reviews were written in German, a language Locke did not read. They were never sent to Locke, even though they were published before his death in 1704, when Leibniz was still trying to convince Locke to engage in a public debate.

For these reasons, I hypothesize that the purpose of this review is not the kind of public utility that Leibniz mentions in the quoted text of *Mémoire pour*

des personnes éclairées et de bonne intention (1692). However, this is not because Leibniz is searching for public approval. An analysis of the review's contents led me to conclude that Leibniz intended to influence the German reception of Locke's work.

3. Leibniz's First Review of John Locke

The Review and the *Zusatz* appear in *Monatlicher Auszug aus allerhand neu herausgegeben, nützlichen und artigen Büchern*, the former in the issue of September 1700, as a review of the French edition of the book; the latter in January 1701, occasioned by the publication of the Latin translation of Locke's book. They are anonymous but attributed to Leibniz already early, as testified by their inclusion into *Leibniz's Deutschen Schriften* by Guhrauer in 1838.⁴ As the title of the *Journal* suggests, and as the first line of the review openly claim, it is written in the form of *excerpta* (*Auszüge*).

Since summarizing the entire *Essay* was impossible and unnecessary—Locke had already written an excerpt that was published in Le Clerc's journal before his *Essay* was published (Locke 1688, 49–142)—, Leibniz decides to focus on two chapters added to the fourth edition of Locke's book (1700):⁵ Book II, Chap. 33 *On the association of ideas* and Book IV, Chap. 19 *On Enthusiasm*.

The first set of remarks I would like to offer concerns the choice made by Leibniz of presenting these two chapters. The main reason he adduces is that they are added in the fourth edition of Locke's work, but, as he also mentions, these are not the only changes Locke has made in the course of the four editions. In the second edition, Chap. 21, Book II, *On Power* was largely revised, and another, Chap. 27, Book II, *On identity and Diversity*, newly added. The reason to focus on *Associations of ideas* and *Enthusiasm* is not simply their recent addition in the fourth edition. I first focus on why Leibniz does not offer an overview of the other two chapters mentioned, Chap. 21 and 27 of Book II, although he does not refrain from saying something about Chap. 21.

Both chapters are philosophically significant, and what Leibniz writes about them in *New Essays* can be used to indicate his philosophical attitude toward the theses Locke defends there. Leibniz devotes a significant amount of discussion to opposing Locke's notions of power and personal identity in *New Essays*. Conversely, Leibniz's discussion of the two chapters of the *Review* in the *New Essays* manifests agreement with Locke's ideas. According to the guidelines of the time, this conciliatory attitude is better suited to a review. However, if Locke and Leibniz agree on the theses of the chapters discussed in the review, then the

⁴ In their introduction to the Academy Edition of the *New Essays*, Robinet and Schepers reject Leibniz's authorship of the review and claim that Guhrauer's supposition is wrong (A VI 6 XXII). However, they do not provide reasons for why this is so. More recent studies, such as Gantet (2021), recognize Leibniz as the author of the review.

⁵ Leibniz writes that the fourth edition appears in 1699, but it appears in 1700. For a closer reconstruction of the four editions and the changes Locke made, see Locke 1975, XII–XXXI.

review is not critical and my thesis is false. What is relevant to ground my thesis is the underlying disagreement beneath the apparent agreement. First, I focus on Leibniz's criticism of Chapter 21 in *New Essays* and demonstrate how it builds on what Leibniz only mentions in the review.

Leibniz finds Locke's analysis of the beginning of an action and free will (*Essay* II 21), as well as his analysis of personal identity (*Essay* II 27) highly problematic. In Leibniz's view, Locke follows Descartes in his conception of thinking substance, insofar as the mind's thoughts are always conscious.⁶ This thesis holds that to have a thought the mind has a perception both of the content of the act (the idea), and the kind of act the mind is using to consider its idea (either desiring, or imagining, or dreaming). This perception of the content and of the act amounts for Leibniz to an act of reflection. Locke uses this notion of mind (or of Cartesian thinking substance) as ground for his arguments that there are no innate ideas and truths;⁷ for his distinction between voluntary actions and free actions; for his conception of personal identity as the continuity between conscious acts of thought. I shortly highlight these three Lockean theses and Leibniz's rejection (for an extensive treatment, see Oliveri 2016, 27–33).

Locke's rejection of innate ideas and truths hinges on the notion that a mind is conscious of both the content and the type of state it has. According to Locke, a mind has an idea only if it knows it has that idea. This is similar to saying that the mind remembers encountering the same content in perception or reflection. For Locke, perception through the senses and reflection are the only "windows" through which the mind can acquire ideas. If one denies that having an idea means remembering that the mind has encountered the idea's content, then any idea, including those of the senses, such as colors, turns out to be innate, which is absurd. (*Essay* I 4, par. 20 in Locke 1975, 96–9). Leibniz rejects this thesis, arguing that Locke's criterion for determining whether an idea is innate or acquired is flawed because innate ideas can and must be learned. As Leibniz states: "I cannot accept the proposition that whatever is learned is not innate" (NE 85/A VI 6 85). In other words, remembering that one has previously considered the content does not mean that the content cannot be innate just because it is acquired.

Leibniz references Plato's *Meno*, according to which geometric truths must be learned yet are innate (NE 77/A VI 6 77). Indeed, innate means that the source of the idea must be the mind's abilities and dispositions, without which percep-

⁶ This thesis results from Descartes's definitions of an idea as "the form of any given thought, immediate perception of which makes me aware of the thought. Hence, whenever I express something in words and understand what I am saying, this very fact makes it certain that there is within me an idea of what is signified by the words in question [...]" (AT VII, 160/CSM II, 113), and of thought "I use this term to include everything that is within us in such a way that we are immediately aware [*conscii*] of it. Thus all the operations of the will, the intellect, the imagination and the senses are thoughts" (AT vii 160/CSM ii 113).

⁷ See De Rosa (2002 and 2015) for a confrontation between Locke and Descartes on innate ideas.

tions could not be processed to yield truths. To support this view, Leibniz rejects the idea that the mind is always conscious of its thoughts. He argues that conscious thoughts are merely the tip of the iceberg of a mind's states, as they arise from minute perceptions and endeavors. These perceptions and endeavors represent the mind's permanent and constant activity, whose task is to harmoniously express the entire world and other substances throughout its changes.⁸

Therefore, the mind is always perceiving and active, though not because it is conscious of its perceptions. Perception is the activity of the substance and is more fundamental than thinking. Thinking is constituted by perceptual states that are processed to represent perception in clear and distinct ways, i.e., through general notions, necessary truths, and innate ideas. The mind can eventually become conscious of its processing, and conscious thoughts serve very specific purposes, such as providing reasons and causes for actions and knowledge. In other words, minds represent motives and causes; however, the determination to act in a certain way or continue a series of thought is not solely determined by what is consciously represented. Minute perceptions and endeavors determine the mind's internal states, which it then rationalizes by finding causes and motives (see Priarolo 2016, 745–64). For an example, consider that I believe that I chose to study philosophy because of the value I find in the discipline (rational cause), but the pleasure I feel in philosophizing (minute perceptual activity) played a decisive role in my decision. Therefore, my determination to study philosophy does not solely follow from rationalization; pleasure is a confused expression of metaphysical reasons that inclined me to study philosophy. In short, the unsaid beneath the said is Leibniz's theory of substance, which Locke could never accept.⁹

This divergent view is only suggested in Leibniz's review when he briefly mentions what Locke changed in *Essay II 21*. In the second edition, the conscious perception of motives for performing an action is considered insufficient to determine the action. Thus, voluntary determination through conscious motives cannot be the reason an action is considered free. For Locke, free action is simply the metaphysical possibility of the opposite action (see *Essay II 21*, par. 28 in Locke 1975, 247–48), while the determination of an action depends on what Locke defines as *uneasiness* of the mind (*Essay II 21*, par. 30 in Locke 1975, 249). Leibniz translates *uneasiness* as *Unruheigkeit*, a term that expresses the idea that the mind cannot be absolutely at rest (*Ruhe*) and is therefore always active.

Leibniz understood Locke's definition of free action to be consistent with his own position, and therefore inconsistent with Locke's initial premise that

⁸ Leibniz's notion of consciousness is not easy to explain. In the last fifty years, the literature on the topic clustered around the question of whether reflection is necessary for consciousness and of whether consciousness is a higher order act that violates the principle of continuity (see Jorgensen 2009). Oliveri (2024) argues against this view for it rests on a Cartesian understanding of Leibniz's notion of *coscientia*.

⁹ For a survey of the differences between Locke and Leibniz on the notion of substance, see the essays in Lodge and Stoneham (2015).

the mind is always aware of its actions. The agreement consists in the fact that actions are not the result of the apperception (*Gewahrnehmung*) of a greater good.¹⁰ Rather, action is the consequence of the activity of a substance of which conscious thought is merely a part. This substance is rooted in perceptions that are minute and nonconscious. In short, Leibniz points to an agreement between Locke's concept of *uneasiness* and his own notion of minute perceptions. However, this agreement would have meant for Locke a rejection of the main thesis on which hinges his criticism of innate ideas and his denial of knowledge of metaphysical notions, like substance, identity, modes, and so on.

In the review, Leibniz presents the modifications to *Essay* II 21 as corrections to some of Locke's false judgments in the previous edition. However, this report is inaccurate because Locke never presents the chapter as a correction of mistakes. The chapter is an expansion on the topic of voluntary action requiring the perception of volitions. However, volitions and self-determination are not sufficient to label an action as free. Interestingly, the choice of terminology in presenting Locke's alleged change of mind incorporates Leibnizian ideas, particularly regarding his theory of minute perceptions.

The thesis that thoughts are conscious acts is used by Locke to argue that the mind not always think which is tantamount to saying that it is not always active, like in sleep (*Essay* II 1, par. 19 in Locke 1975, 114–15). This thesis grounds Locke's distinction in *Essay* II 27 between man—the physical individual—; person—the collection of the conscious states of a mind—; and substance—as what we illegitimately infer as the metaphysical ground of the man and the person, since we cannot know what the substance is.

In *New Essays*, Leibniz finds this definition of personal identity too narrow as it implies the denial of a substance that perdures over time and metaphysically grounds all acts of the mind without the mind being conscious of them. Locke's thesis of personal identity hinges on the thesis that thoughts is always conscious because the mind can be sure to be active only when it perceives and is conscious of its activity.¹¹ Since the mind is not always conscious of its activity, it is intermittently active and the person consists only of those states the mind can acknowledge as its own. It follows that one cannot infer with certainty that the mind/person is always active even if unconsciously (this is possible, but not

¹⁰ The use of *Gewahrnehmung* (apperception) in this context squares with the controversy on consciousness. Scholarly debate on Leibniz's theory of consciousness focuses on his use of "apperception", a newly coined term to express an act of awareness that does not entail reflection, since also animals are capable of apperception. However, Leibniz's use of the term appears to be inconsistent as he sometimes equates apperception with consciousness and reflection (see McRae 1976 for the puzzle, and Barth 2011 for a discussion). Recently, Pellettier (2017) has insisted on the technical use of Leibniz's "apperception" as consciousness. In my view, apperception directed to mind's content that triggers the use of general ideas and necessary truths are thoughts that might become object of an act of self-consciousness (Oliveri 2024).

¹¹ Locke's thesis of personal identity and Leibniz's criticism have sparked scholarly attention, see for instance the work of Thiel 2011, and Boeker 2021.

probable (*Essay II 1*, par. 19 in Locke 1975, 114–15). This idea undermines Leibniz's conception of substance as always active. As the activity of the substance is a metaphysical necessary truth to argue that substances change, but perdure over the changes, Leibniz has to reject the thesis that personal identity is tantamount to conscious thoughts in order to affirm his notion of substance, as he does in *NE II 27* (see Oliveri 2016 for an extensive comment).

To conclude this first set of considerations, we can say that, when considering what Leibniz writes against the theses expressed in *Essay II 21* and *II 27*, it is apparent that he could not base his review on a discussion of these two chapters, as he would have resulted too critical towards Locke position, breaking the rules of good reviews. So, he is critical, but in a subtler way, and he does so by focusing on *Essay II 33 On the association of ideas*, and *Essay IV 19, On enthusiasm*.

These two chapters express theses that partially find Leibniz's approval, though Leibniz's reasons to approve those theses differ from Locke's. Locke's main thesis in *Essay II 33* is that associations of ideas result from habits and exposure to frequent occurrences of those ideas in temporal and spatial proximity, often motivated by society and education. Therefore, associations of ideas have an empirical source and are not motivated by reason because there are no logical, necessary relations on which to base connections; only experience exists. Any association entails a degree of madness that cannot be avoided by any reasoning.

Leibniz also argues for a type of empirical knowledge (see Oliveri 2021). Unlike Locke, however, Leibniz believes that rational knowledge is possible if one accepts the existence of innate ideas and necessary truths. His approach to acknowledging empirical knowledge begins with an objection to Descartes's thesis that thought is always conscious, which led Descartes to deny that animals have sensible souls or perceptions.¹² To reject Descartes's denial of animal souls, Leibniz contrasts Descartes's dualism of substances with his theory of substances as active entelechies, whose basic activities are perceptions and appetites. The basic activities of substances do not require consciousness. (see Oliveri 2024). This metaphysical basis enables Leibniz to argue that there are other souls with perceptions that, unlike minds, cannot be conscious of those perceptions. However, these souls have empirical knowledge because it is based on associations of ideas through experience. Although it is true that minds also have and use empirical knowledge, they are also capable of knowledge based on reason, which rests on the human capacity to conceive and understand necessary truths. Once again, Leibniz thinks that Locke is right in pointing to the limit of human knowledge through the acknowledgment that most of human associations of ideas have their sources in their experience and education, and

¹² As also Guhrauer remembers, it is important to read what Leibniz writes in the review with his remark in *New Essays* to chapt. 33, where he explicitly relates the topic of association of ideas to animal associations by imagination. See Guhrauer 1838, 329–30. The connection between Descartes's notion of thought and his denial of animal souls with Locke's empiricism is explicitly addressed in a short correspondence between Leibniz and Samuel Treuer see Oliveri 2019.

basically are nothing but some prejudices that almost mechanically influence human responses to input provided by nature and society (when I see the night, I look for the moon; when someone waves at me, I wave back, Guhrauer 1838, 315); he is wrong in thinking that any association can be exclusively of this kind.

To summarize, Locke's associations of ideas claim that most of human knowledge is not based on reason. Locke proves this by accepting Descartes's thesis of thoughts as conscious acts of the mind in order to deny that innate ideas are possible. Leibniz denies Descartes's thesis that thought is always conscious because this implies the denial of animal cognition. He argues for a kind of basic activity of substances that does not require consciousness and can account for associations of ideas that are empirical, like those advanced by Locke *Essay* II 33. However, Leibniz's reason to accept associations of ideas that are empirical rests on the denial of the thesis that thoughts are conscious acts on which Locke bases his criticism of innate ideas, necessary to argue for experience as the only source of association. Therefore, Leibniz's agreement with Locke, as expressed in the review, is supported by an underlying criticism that allows Leibniz to accept what Locke denies: rational knowledge based on an internal, natural light. The topic of reason as an internal (divine) light is the second link to the chapter *On Enthusiasm*.

Leibniz thinks that Locke's denial of innate ideas is directly related to *Essay* IV 19, *On Enthusiasm*, also added in the fourth edition.¹³ Those who base their knowledge on God's revelation of truths through an internal light are enthusiastic. As Leibniz writes in *New Essays*, Locke is right to criticize those who appeal to God to justify what they perceive as good and true. However, Leibniz notes that enthusiasm *has become* a negative concept.

"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" [Ovid]. And Socrates claimed that a God or Daemon gave him inner warnings, so that "enthusiasm" [in his case] would be a divine instinct. 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... [.] More recently the term has been applied to people who believe groundlessly that their impulses come from God.

[L'Enthousiasme estoit au commencement un bon nom. Et comme le sophisme marque proprement un exercice de la sagesse, l'Enthousiasme signifie qu'il y a une divinité en nous. Est Deus in nobis. Et Socrate pretendoit qu'un Dieu ou Demon luy donnoit des avertissemens interieurs, de sorte qu'Enthousiasme seroit un instinct divin. Mais les hommes ayant consacré leurs passions, [et fait passer] leurs fantaisies, et leurs songes et jusqu'à leur fureur pour quelque chose de divin; l'Enthousiasme commença à signifier un dereglement d'esprit attribué à la force de quelque divinité, qu'on supposoit dans ceux qui en estoient frappés] (NE 504–5 / A VI 6 504–5).

¹³ For a discussion of the relation between *Essay* II 33 and *Essay* IV 19, see Tabb 2019.

Although Leibniz shares Locke's criticism of those who groundlessly appeal to God to justify what they believe to be true, he rejects the denial of a natural light as the source of knowledge of eternal truths because of the *abuse* some philosophical sects made of the internal light as a source of knowledge. The lack of distinction between abuse of something good and what is good about what is abused is the reason why Locke fails to consider that a natural internal light can be the source of ideas and necessary truths required for associations of ideas based on reason.

Even if Leibniz's criticism of Locke is not the focus of the review, the two chapters object of the review are directly related to his stronger criticism through the position of two distinct issues. If Locke is right in arguing that associations of ideas is mostly empirical; he is wrong in arguing that all associations are empirical. If he is right in arguing against the abuse of an internal light, he exaggerates his criticism to the denial of innate ideas, for which reason as the internal light is required. These two issues derive from an overall lack of discernment about Cartesian positions that Locke criticizes but at the same time uses, like the Cartesian criterion of truth, evidence.

Leibniz's criticism of Locke concerns the use he does of his criticism against evidence. Leibniz thinks that Locke considers Descartes's use of evidence as a criterion sufficient to gain knowledge about the innateness of ideas and truths (since the idea is evident, it does not need experience, therefore is innate). Locke criticizes the possibility to know about the innateness of an idea from evidence, but he uses the criterion of evidence himself, which makes him accept the distinction between matter and mind. Leibniz rebuts that the denial of evidence as the criterion for an idea's innate status still is no argument against the possibility of innate ideas. An alternative to Descartes's evidence could be the dependency argument which states that empirical knowledge depends on innate truths, such as identity and contradiction. These truths are therefore presupposed (a priori) to experience (see Oliveri 2021, Chap. 9, for a reconstruction of Leibniz's argument). As discussed in the next paragraph, this epistemological flaw costs Locke the assumption of unsound metaphysical thesis, like Descartes distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*.

The soundness of Locke's criticism of philosophical ideas stemming from Cartesian theses increases the risk that Locke's philosophy finds approval among those unsatisfied with Descartes's philosophy. Once his criticism is accepted, his philosophy seems to be the only natural alternative. Leibniz aims to prevent this outcome and demonstrate that one can agree with Locke's criticism for different reasons. Thus, Locke's solution is not the only natural alternative for those dissatisfied with Cartesian philosophy.

As a proof of this worry, let me just mention the success of Locke's chapter on *Enthusiasm* in Germany. As Konstantin Pollok (2004, XI n. 16) notices, the Lockean chapter played a decisive role in the development of the German *Aufklärung*: on one hand, it is used by Christian Thomasius to reject his previous pietist position and it is published separately in 1720 by Georg Michael Preu with the title *Geist der wahren oder falsch befundenen Inspirationen [... angefügt]*

Joh. Locks Gedanken von der Enthusiasterey. As Leibniz himself mentions in *New Essays*, Locke's critique of enthusiasts will find resonance with those who in Germany find new prophets a philosophical fraud.¹⁴ So, even if Leibniz could not foresee the success of this chapter after his death, he could understand the potential it has to attract a German audience, like Christian Thomasius who, along with his father, Jacob, he knew personally. The acclamation of Locke's rationale philosophy could so motivate the approval of his theses and the dissemination of his dangerous philosophy. An accurate objection to Locke's theses and the dangerous implications they entail, like a lack of sufficient distinction between the abuser of a natural light and the "right" way to understand "the natural light" as reason, urged. Through his review, Leibniz aimed to provide the German readership with the tools necessary to recognize the merits of Locke's criticism and the demerits of his philosophical solutions. Though camouflaged, this was Leibniz's intention, which becomes clearer through a comparison of the long review of 1700 with the *Zusatz* of 1701.

4. The *Zusatz* to the Review: an Overt Criticism

In summary, we can say that Leibniz felt the need to publicly draw important philosophical distinctions that were overlooked by Locke's philosophy. His own philosophy, similar to Locke's in many respects, diverges from it by claiming the necessity of theses that Locke considered unsound, such as innate ideas and the notion of substance.

Table 1 – Comparison Between the Two Reviews.

	1700	1701
Number of pages	16	2
Form	It looks like an objective report	It presents a more critical position
spirit	conciliatory	critical
General observations	The form and the spirit of the review hide Leibniz's criticism that in this phase is still supported by the hope of convincing Locke (and the public) that Locke's philosophy and the epistemic problems he raises can be overcome by Leibniz's metaphysics and doctrine of preestablished harmony.	The spirit and form let transpire Leibniz's problem with Locke's philosophy whose shortcomings are now stressed over Locke's philosophical merits.

¹⁴ Leibniz also contests the use of enthusiasts of the metaphor of light: "Mais pourquoi appeler lumiere ce qui ne fait rien voir?" A VI 6 505.

	1700	1701
Method	By and large, it is a fair report of Locke's chapters.	Direct reference to the unsolved issues of Locke's philosophy or reference to alleged mistakes Locke has acknowledged as such: 1- The reason for association of ideas is not just education: persuasion to have the proof for the connection; 2- The nature of the body is not extension (reference to the controversy with Stillingfleet on the nature of substance); 3- Incapacity to explain eternal and necessary truth; 4- Locke is closer to Aristotle than to Plato; 5- Necessity but insufficiency of factual knowledge for knowledge of necessary truth (letter to <i>What is beyond senses and matter</i> sent to John Toland via Sophie Charlotte 1702).

This urge was also dictated by the growing reception of Locke's philosophy on the Continent. The Latin translation of Locke's *Essay* appears one year after the French translation in 1701. In January of that year, Leibniz published the *Zusatz* in the section VIII. *Einige Ausbesserungen und Zugaben des ersten Jahres der Monatl. Auszüge* of *Monatlicher Auszug* as an improvement to the original review published in the September 1700 issue (see also Guhrauer 1838, 328–29). Besides the difference in length between the two reviews (sixteen pages vs. two), the *Zusatz* takes an overtly critical stance against Locke's philosophy by directly expressing its problems. Table 1 offers a synoptic comparison of the two reviews. In the following, I will focus on the problems reported by Leibniz in the *Zusatz*.

First, Leibniz rejects the idea that the association of ideas is solely the result of education and experience. A stronger reason to associate ideas is the conviction that one has a proof of the association of ideas without testing whether there is actually a proof of the idea's possibility. This criticism echoes the one Leibniz leveled against Descartes in his *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas*, his epistemology paper published in 1684 in the *Acta Eruditorum*. In it, he criticizes Descartes's criterion of truth, which states that anything perceived as clear and distinct is true (see A VI 4 591). This criterion is used to disseminate a philosopher's beliefs as infallible truths. The association of ideas based on evidence simply presupposes the capacity to offer proof without undertaking it, and therefore without knowledge of the possibility of having sound proof. Leibniz analyzes the ontological proof of the existence of God as an example of this error based on evidence. The ontological proof is not a proof because it links God's perfection to God's existence, presupposing the idea that a perfect being is possible. In other words, one assumes the possibility of the perfect being, whose existence cannot be denied, without proving whether such a perfect being is possible. (see A VI 589–90, for a discussion, Oliveri 2021).

This reference resonates with his criticism of Locke's notions of body and matter. Locke's mistake was accepting the Cartesian notion of the body as *res extensa*. Leibniz believes that the argument for Descartes's substance dualism hinges on evidence as a criterion for truth. Therefore, he finds it puzzling that Locke accepts the result of Descartes's reasoning, which is based on a criterion—evidence—that Locke also criticizes (*Essay I 2*, par. 19–21 in Locke 1975, 58–60, and *Essay II 29 Of Clear and Obscure, Distinct and Confused ideas* in Locke 1975, 363–72, and *Essay IV 7*, par. 1–3 in Locke 1975, 591–94). If Locke's criticism of evidence aligns with Leibniz's criticism in *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas*, then Locke is inconsistent in his criticism because he accepts certain doctrines without further inquiring into their metaphysical soundness, as his claim that God could make matter think without imparting a soul to matter. This thesis of Locke was criticized by Edward Stillingfleet and the controversy between the two plays a pivotal role in Leibniz's criticism in the *Zusatz*.

As Leibniz reports in the *Zusatz*, Locke himself allegedly recognized his lack of metaphysical understanding of the implications of his notions of matter and substance in his controversy with the Bishop of Worcester, Edward Stillingfleet. Stillingfleet claimed that Locke's philosophy was openly materialist and opposed the immortality of the soul and the doctrine of the Trinity (see Stewart 2015). Leibniz followed the controversy with great interest and concern, as evidenced by the materials collected in vol. VI 6 of the Academy Edition.¹⁵ Between 1697 and 1700, he read and marked a copy of Stillingfleet's *A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1697), which features three criticisms of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. At the end of 1698, he wrote a *Compte rendu de la Vindication de Stillingfleet et de la lettre de Locke*. Exactly around the year of the review, in 1700, Leibniz wrote *Réflexions sur la seconde réplique de Locke*. As Schepers and Robinet remark, Locke was aware of Leibniz's interest in the controversy and informed him through Thomas Burnett that he was interested in hearing Leibniz's position. In 1699, Leibniz sent Locke a long letter via Burnett that explicitly stated his position (Leibniz to Thomas Burnett of Kemney, Hannover, January 20–30, 1699, A I 16, 506–18). Later, in another letter to Burnett dated February 2–12, 1700, Leibniz attached his *Réflexions sur la seconde réplique de Locke*. Although Burnett sent both documents to Locke, and, although Locke read and commented on them, he never replied (A VI 6 XXI).

Leibniz's reflections on Locke's second reply to Stillingfleet square with the criticism levelled in the *Zusatz*. His *Reflections* turn around epistemological questions concerning certainty about the agreement or disagreement of ideas. Leibniz agrees with Stillingfleet, who criticizes the new way of ideas and refers to his paper in the *Acta eruditorum* from 1684. The mistake of Descartes, and

¹⁵ In a letter to Thomas Burnett from February 1700, Leibniz writes: "J'ay maintenant toutes les pieces du proces entre M. de Worcester et M. Lock excepté la seconde lettre de celuy qui me manque encor." (A I 18 371).

of Locke, is to accept what they conceive as an agreement among ideas without providing arguments that oblige others to *see* the same agreement:

So, Mr Stillingfleet seems to have blamed the abuse of those who, in philosophy and especially in matters concerning ideas, appeal to their own interior testimony and ground their judgments in the agreement or disagreement of those ideas that they claim to experience in the interiority of their minds. However, they are unwilling to provide a more distinct explanation of that agreement. In other words, they are unwilling to go through the way of reasoning, through which they could oblige others to enter into their own conceptions.

[Ainsi M. Stillingfleet paroist avoir voulu blamer l'abus de ceux qui se contentent ainsi de recourir simplement encor en philosophie et particulierement en matiere d'idées, à leur propre temoignage intérieur et appuyent leur jugemens sur ce qu'ils disent experimenter en eux de l'agrément ou desagrement de ces idées, sans vouloir venir à une explication plus distincte de cet agrément, c'est à dire sans vouloir venir à la voye de raisonnement, par laquelle ils pourroient obliger d'autres d'entrer dans les memes conceptions.] (A VI 6 30, my translation).

In a letter dated January 1700, the same year of Leibniz's first review, Leibniz wrote to Burnett that he believed it was possible to reconcile Stillingfleet and Locke's views on knowledge of clear and distinct ideas. This was because Stillingfleet's idea that truths depend on eternal truths was compatible with Locke's new theory of ideas, provided Locke acknowledged that clear and distinct ideas require proof of their possibility. (Leibniz to Thomas Burnett of Kemney, Hanover, 2./ [12.] February 1700, A I 18 371–73). Without knowledge of the possibility of ideas, ideas are, in Locke's sense, chimerical, and there is no criterion for truth (see also A. VI 6 31 and the letter of Leibniz to Burnet, January 20–30, 1699, A I 16 508). However, acknowledging the dependence of ideas on the truths of reason would have meant acknowledging the existence of an internal light—a divine part that does not perish with the body since it is not subject to material changes. In other words, it would have meant denying the theory of matter that Locke defends in his *Essay*, as well as Locke's claim that God could produce a change in matter that yields a thought as a result. Stillingfleet and others considered this claim to be the source of Locke's materialism and denial of the soul's immortality because it amounts to the idea that the body can think without a soul (see Bolton 2015). In summary, Leibniz believes that Locke's notion of substance is problematic, but this issue stems from Locke's epistemology of ideas. Although Locke criticizes Descartes' criterion of clear and distinct perception as evidence of the agreement of ideas, he still uses it in his philosophical arguments.

Against this backdrop, the following lines of the *Zusatz* about the controversy between Locke and Stillingfleet acquire a new meaning:

Moreover, one must remark on this book by Mr. Locke that, in his later writings against Bishop Stillingfleet, he altered most of his views on the nature of the body (*Leib*) discussed in the *Tentamine*, or Attempt Concerning Human Understanding. While he was closer to the new philosophers, especially the

Cartesians and Gassendists[.] In the *Tentamine*, he maintained that a body consists of nothing more than size, solidity, impenetrability, and movement or change of place. In his later writings, however, he begins to consider that there is something more to a body that cannot be explained by these qualities.

[Sonst ist bei diesem Buche des Herrn Locks anzumerken, daß er in seinen letzten Schriften gegen den Herrn Bischof Stillingfleet ein großes Theil seiner in diesem *Tentamine* oder Versuch von menschlichen Verstande enthaltenen Meinung, die Natur eines Leibes betreffend, geändert: indem er in dem *Tentamine* mit den neuen Philosophis insgemein, sonderlich den Cartesianis und Gassendistis, dafür gehalten, daß bei dem Leibe nichts, als Größe, Solidität oder Undurchdringlichkeit, und Bewegung oder Veränderung der Stelle anzutreffen; anjezo beginnt er dafür zu halten, daß sich noch ein Mehrers darin befinde, so durch diese nicht zu erklären] (Guhrauer 1838, 329–30, my translation).

Had Locke admitted that something more than the body is required to explain thought, he would have had to concede the existence of an internal natural light as a principle of change originating not from the body but from the active part of substances—the form or entelechy, whose nature is to be active, and whose activity is perception and appetite. He would also have agreed to the necessity of positing soul-like substances in animals that differ from minds because only the latter are capable of reflection and consciousness. Thus, he would have distanced himself from the Cartesians. He would have acknowledged the possibility of associations based on reason because he would have found a way to explain necessary truths. Indeed, the *Reflections* sent to Burnett also close with an exposition of Leibniz's own philosophy based on the notion of substance. This notion and his principle of pre-established harmony are also the object of his correspondence with Lady Masham, where he refers her and Locke to his comments to the entry *Rorarius* in Bayle's *Dictionaire* (Leibniz to Lady Masham, Hanover, 14. January 1704 in A II 4 187). In short, if Locke had truly begun to believe that the body is more than just extension, he would have agreed with Leibniz's philosophy.

As the final part of the review notes, the Locke of *An Essay* is misguided by these errors that led him to believe that ideas are derived from experience and that nothing in the intellect exists that was not previously perceived by the senses. Since substance cannot be perceived through the senses, it cannot be known, and our notion of substance is merely that of a *substratum* that we suppose as perduring through the changes of bodies, but that we cannot know. In the famous letter *What It Is Beyond Senses and Matter*, which is a reply to John Toland, a supporter of Locke who argues for empiricism, Leibniz also hints at the distinction between truths of facts and experience (Leibniz to Sophie Charlotte, Hanover, June 1702 A I 21 N. 224 328–46). This distinction is necessary to provide the subject with occasions to conceive and learn necessary truths and to recognize experience as the only source of knowledge. As he argued in his unpublished essay against Locke, the learnability of notions does not prove their dependence on experience for acquisition (see Oliveri 2021, Chap. 9). Therefore, we cannot infer that experience is the only reason we possess those ideas and necessary

truths. Without an internal light, the mind would not be able to learn truths that surpass experience because experience requires them to be possible in the first place. Thus, Leibniz hopes that Locke would agree with him.

Perhaps our gifted author will not entirely disagree with my view. For after devoting the whole of his first book to rejecting innate illumination understood in a certain sense, he nevertheless admits at the start of his second book, and from there on, that ideas which do not originate in sensation come from reflection. But reflection is nothing but attention to what is within us, and the senses do not give us what we carry with us already. In view of this, can it be denied that there is a great deal that is innate in our minds, since we are innate to ourselves, so to speak, and since we include Being, Unity, Substance, Duration, Change, Action, Perception, Pleasure, and hosts of other objects of our intellectual ideas? And since these objects are immediately related to our understanding and always present to it (although our distractions and needs prevent our being always aware of them), is it any wonder that we say that these ideas, along with what depends on them, are innate in us?

[Peut-être que nôtre habile auteur ne s'éloignera pas entièrement de mon sentiment. Car après avoir employé tout son premier livre à rejeter les lumières innées, prises dans un certain sens, il avouë pourtant au commencement du second et dans la suite, que les idées, qui n'ont point leur origine dans la sensation, viennent de la reflexion. Or la reflexion n'est autre chose qu'une attention à ce qui est en nous, et les sens ne nous donnent point ce que nous portons déjà avec nous. Cela étant, peut-on nier, qu'il y ait beaucoup d'inné en nostre esprit, puisque nous sommes innés à nous mêmes pour ainsi dire, et qu'il y a en nous: Estre, Unité, Substance, Duré, Changement, Action, Perception, Plaisir, et mille autres objects de nos idées intellectuelles? Et ces objects étant immediats et toujours presents à nostre entendement (quoyqu'ils ne sauroient estre toujours apperçûs à cause de nos distractions et de nos besoins), pourquoy s'étonner que nous disions, que ces idées nous sont innées avec tout ce qui en depend?] (NE 51-2/A VI 6 51-2).

In other words, Leibniz thinks that his notion of substance, which has some affinity with Aristotle entelechy, is only possible when supported by Platonic psychology and epistemology. According to this philosophy, the mind learns truths through the exercise of its own rational nature occasioned by experience. If we can know the essence of substance, it is because we are substance, and doing philosophy is merely learning to know ourselves. If this is not possible—if we cannot learn to know ourselves—we cease to be human and never exercise the most natural part of our nature: the *understanding*.

5. Conclusion

Leibniz's review of John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* demonstrates that he used reviews to reveal its shortcomings to a German audience. This strategy becomes apparent when comparing the first review, published

in 1700, with the 1701 *Zusatz*. While the first review seems to be an objective summary of the chapters added to the fourth edition of Locke's *Essay*, the second review is overtly critical and lists Locke's errors. However, a closer look at the first review shows that, beneath his approval of Locke's thesis of the associations of ideas and criticism of enthusiasm, Leibniz expresses doubt about whether one should also accept Locke's reasoning behind his thesis and criticism. The second review confirms Leibniz's critical stance. Locke's criticism addresses some epistemological questions correctly, but it also leads him to reject important metaphysical truths. By referencing the controversy with Stillingfleet, Leibniz suggests that Locke changed his mind about the notions of body and substance presented in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. A review of Leibniz's correspondence with Burnett reveals that Locke's flawed metaphysical beliefs stem from an incorrect epistemology that accepts what Locke himself criticized—that truth is based on the agreement or disagreement of ideas based on evidence, which makes a proof of agreement unnecessary. Leibniz's criticism of Locke is based on questions about knowledge and how to acquire it. This makes the controversy with Locke prominently epistemological and therefore metaphysical.

Does this analysis sufficiently support my thesis that Leibniz used reviews as tools to instill prejudices and influence their readership? Even if I cannot argue for the general thesis, I have provided evidence that Leibniz used reviews as philosophical tools to influence the German community of scholars at least once and in an important case. If he did so once, perhaps he did so more than once, or even systematically.

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Christian Thomasius and Reviewing as Philosophy

Marco Sgarbi

Abstract: Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) was a foundational figure of early Enlightenment philosophy, renowned for his contributions to law, theology, and the development of philosophical journalism. His approach, Eclecticism, emphasized intellectual flexibility, rejecting dogmatism and skepticism in favor of critically synthesizing diverse traditions. Thomasius innovatively used reviews as philosophical tools, blending excerpts, critique, and dialogue to assess and integrate ideas. Through periodicals like *Monats-Gespräche* and *Historia Sapientiae et Stultitiae*, he advanced a unique methodology that democratized intellectual discourse, encouraging readers to engage critically with multiple perspectives. His later journalistic work, such as *Summarischer Nachrichten von auserlesenen Büchern*, balanced historical and contemporary scholarship, underscoring the enduring value of reviews in philosophical inquiry. By situating reviews at the heart of his eclectic philosophy, Thomasius demonstrated their power to challenge rigid systems and foster the pursuit of truth. His contributions remain a cornerstone for understanding the interplay between philosophy, journalism, and Enlightenment ideals.

Keywords: Christian Thomasius, Eclecticism, Philosophical Journalism, Enlightenment, Critical Reviews.

1. Introduction

Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) stands out as one of the most important and influential figures in German philosophy. His influence is not solely due to the cultural ferment during the early Enlightenment or the rise of Pietism, but also because he revolutionized philosophy by using the German language, so much so that his work is often compared to the power of Lutheran preaching in the sixteenth century. The breadth and depth of his philosophical contributions left a profound mark on generations of intellectuals, including Immanuel Kant, and played a pivotal role in shaping eighteenth-century philosophical discourse (see Schneiders 1989; Vollhardt 1997; Beetz 2003; Tomasoni 2005).

Thomasius has attracted substantial scholarly attention because his impact reached beyond philosophy into law and theology. However, there is one aspect of his career that has received less attention than it deserves—his pioneering role in the development of philosophical reviewing. Thomasius was not only a philosopher and jurist but also a founder of what can be called philosophical journalism.

His periodicals, such as *Monats-Gespräche* (1688–1690), *Historia Sapientiae et Stultitiae* (1693), and *Summarischer Nachrichten von auserlesenen Büchern* (1715–1718), were innovative ventures and began a period of critical experimentation and

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innovation of literary genres in the German language. Scholars such as Hanns Freydanck, Thomas Woitkewitsch, Mark Lehmstedt, and Herbert Jaumann have examined Thomasius' contributions, focusing primarily on the role of journalism and literary criticism during this period of intellectual transition. However, one aspect that remains understudied is the influence of reviews on Thomasius' own philosophical outlook (Gierl 2004). Martin Gierl's monumental work *Pietismus und Aufklärung* touches on the importance of Thomasius' activity as a reviewer, linking it to the religious controversies surrounding Pietism. This paper seeks to expand on Gierl's insights by demonstrating how Thomasius' use of reviews was not just a theological tool, but also a vital instrument in his broader philosophical project—namely, the development of Eclecticism. Thomasius believed that reviews were an essential method of philosophical inquiry. Through them, he could critique, analyze, and synthesize various intellectual traditions in order to build a more comprehensive understanding of philosophy. Reviews allowed Thomasius to question established ideas and to search for truth, not just through original works but also by engaging critically with the works of others. Understanding Thomasius' philosophy through the lens of his reviews offers fresh insight into his intellectual contributions (see Mulsow 2003).

2. Eclecticism: a Philosophical Approach

Eclecticism, as promoted by Christian Thomasius, is best understood not as a distinct philosophical doctrine but rather as a method of inquiry.¹ Unlike systems of thought that adhere to rigid principles or specific traditions, Eclecticism draws from a variety of sources. It is an approach that rejects dogmatism in favor of intellectual flexibility, allowing philosophers to select the best ideas from different schools of thought and synthesize them into a coherent framework.

This philosophical approach emphasizes the need for critical engagement with the ideas of the past, rather than outright rejection or uncritical acceptance. Thomasius believed that no single philosopher or tradition could lay claim to possessing the ultimate truth. Instead, he argued that truth unfolds over time and is often dispersed among various thinkers and historical contexts. Eclecticism, therefore, is not about creating new dogmatic systems but about discovering truth by examining different philosophical positions and evaluating them critically:²

the eclectic sect [...], even if it could be called a new sect, does not elaborate new dogmatic assertions, but *excerpt*s its own from others and orders and collects the flowers of the sects of all philosophers (Thomasius 1688a, 18. Emphasis is mine).

For Thomasius, the purpose of Eclecticism was to avoid the pitfalls of dogmatism and skepticism. Dogmatism, in his view, was an intellectual stance that

¹ To account for the complex philosophical position of Eclecticism is a daunting task that would take us beyond the scope of the current research and for this the reader is referred to Michael Albrecht's extensive monograph. See Albrecht 1994.

² For the problematic nature of Thomasius' Eclecticism see Albrecht 1989; Tomasoni 2005, 17–67.

stifled critical inquiry by rigidly adhering to a particular system of thought. Skepticism, on the other hand, denied the possibility of certain knowledge, leading to intellectual paralysis. Thomasius believed that both dogmatism and skepticism were barriers to true philosophical understanding. Eclecticism offered a way to navigate between these two extremes by allowing for the selection and combination of the best aspects of various philosophical traditions.

Eclecticism,

because of the infinite variety of things to be known, is most necessary and most useful for the search for truth, and at the same time it is fair, which is not drawn by the interest of any part, but pursues all with equal affection (Thomasius 1688a, 43).

One of the key features of Eclecticism is the emphasis on intellectual autonomy. Thomasius advocated for independent thought, urging philosophers not to rely on the authority of any single teacher or tradition. Instead, he emphasized the importance of critical reasoning and personal judgment. The eclectic philosopher, in Thomasius' view, must engage deeply with philosophical traditions, but always maintain the freedom to assess their validity based on reason and evidence, rather than on the reputation of the thinker or the school from which they come.

Eclecticism also recognizes the limitations of human reason. Thomasius was acutely aware of the finite nature of human understanding and believed that no individual could grasp the full scope of truth. For this reason, he rejected the idea of constructing grand, all-encompassing philosophical systems. Such systems, in his view, were doomed to failure because they overestimated the capacity of human reason. Instead, Thomasius advocated for a more modest approach to philosophy, one that recognized the partiality of human knowledge and sought to improve it incrementally through critical engagement with the history of thought.

Eclecticism:

enjoins us not to depend on the words of one person, or to swear by the words of one teacher, but from the words and writings of teachers of whomsoever, whatever truth is good, not by the authority of the teacher, but by the weight of the arguments that it has learned, to collect in its storehouses, and therefore from time to time to add, and so to see with its own eyes rather than with those of others (Thomasius 1688a, 43).

With respect to this philosophical attitude, for the present article, the emphasis placed by Thomasius on excerpting, or on gathering the opinions of others, and on the critical examination that must be made of these same opinions, are particularly important. Given Thomasius' commitment to Eclecticism, it is not surprising that he, and his pupils and fellows placed such a high value on the practice of reviewing.³ Reviews, in his view, were a crucial tool for engaging crit-

³ His eclectic perspective was shared by authors like Nikolaus Hieronymus Gundling, Johann Gottlieb Heineccius, Johann Jakob Syrbius, Johann Georg Walch, Andreas Rüdiger, August Friedrich Müller, and Adolph Friedrich Hoffmann, so much so that it is possible to charac-

ically with the ideas of others. They allowed philosophers to assess the strengths and weaknesses of various works, select the best insights, and incorporate them into their own thinking. For Thomasius, reviewing was not just an ancillary activity but a central component of his philosophical method.

Thomasius' first major experience with reviewing came through his contributions to the *Acta Eruditorum*, the first learned periodical in Germany. Between 1683 and 1684, Thomasius wrote seven reviews for the *Acta*, primarily focusing on legal texts. These early reviews were characterized by their brevity and lack of critical engagement. Thomasius offered straightforward summaries of the works, without delving into deep analysis or critique. Nevertheless, these reviews represented his initial foray into philosophical journalism and laid the groundwork for his later, more sophisticated approach to reviewing.

Thomasius quickly became dissatisfied with the limitations of the *Acta Eruditorum*. The journal's neutral tone and lack of critical depth did not align with his vision for what philosophical reviewing should be. He believed that reviews should not merely summarize the content of a work but should offer a thorough and critical examination of its arguments. In his view, reviews should serve as a tool for advancing philosophical discourse by helping readers identify both the strengths and weaknesses of the works being reviewed. So, while it is true that Thomasius' first journalistic attempts were not in open opposition to the conception of the *Acta* (see Zedler 1745, XLIII, 1582–1583), as a matter of fact he chose a totally different path, an experimental alternative that would lead him in different directions and that earned him numerous criticisms.

3. Review as Dialogue

This dissatisfaction led Thomasius to experiment with new forms of philosophical journalism. His most ambitious project in this regard was the *Monats-Gespräche*, a periodical he founded in 1688 (See Habel 2007, 453–54). The *Monats-Gespräche* had a satirical edge, which added to its appeal and made it more accessible to a broader audience. However, this tone also attracted criticism from some quarters, particularly among theologians in Leipzig such as Valentin Alberti, who attempted to censor the journal.⁴ In the second issue Thomasius offers his

terize a Thomasian movement within Eclecticism. See Carboncini 1989; Mühlpfordt 1989; Eskildsen 2008. Not only was Thomasius interested in this philosophical and communicative medium, but intellectuals such as Nikolaus Hieronymus Gundling and Johann Georg Walch were editors of review journals such as the *Neue Bibliothec*, the *Neue Unterredungen* and the *Neue Bücher-Saal der gelehrten Welt*.

⁴ See Lehmsstedt 1992. The theologians disapproved of the satirical treatment of serious philosophical and theological issues. The publisher Moritz Georg Weidmann was asked to reveal the identity of the authors of the work. He was unable in “bona conscientia” to name the authors, except broadly that the work had been edited under the supervision of Thomasius. In defense of the journal and the identity of the authors, in a letter to the consistory of 23 January 1688 Thomasius wrote that a group of “illustrious people” asked him to publish a journal in the style of the *Journal de Scavans*, but in German and “cum iudiciis de autoribus,”

views on contemporary journalism, especially regarding how a review journal should be structured. He argues that, unlike the *Acta Eruditorum*, it would be more beneficial to translate excerpts from books written in other languages into German. This would allow Germans who did not understand French, Italian, or English to gain new knowledge. While Otto Mencke and the team behind the *Acta* aimed to establish German scholarly journalism on an international level, Thomasius had a different goal: to spread knowledge to as many Germans as possible. Thomasius valued the use of *excerpta* or extracts, which he considered interchangeable terms,⁵ because they provided a significant advantage: they allowed readers to understand the essence of a book “with little effort,” “minimal time loss,” and “without great cost” (Wustmann 1885, 224). This approach, centered on saving time, effort and money, enabled the advancement of knowledge in a practical manner. While Thomasius acknowledged the *Acta*’s contribution to the dissemination of knowledge, he found its purpose overly elitist.

Thomasius admired the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* more, both because it was managed by a single person and because it operated without significant financial support. What impressed him most about Pierre Bayle’s journal was not just the diversity of topics but also Bayle’s unique writing style, which blended profound thoughts with sharp, subtle humor. Thomasius praised Bayle’s direct style, which was capable of delivering criticism without causing offense. Thomasius sought to emulate this approach in his own journal.⁶

His attitude towards the *Bibliothèque universelle* was quite different. Although Thomasius appreciated the attempt, as stated in the preface to the first issue, to overcome biases and lack of objectivity in reviews, he argued that their method of excerpting certain texts was neither neutral nor historical as they claimed. Instead, it seemed biased, particularly regarding religious and philosophical subjects. Thomasius believed that absolute neutrality and impartiality were impossible to achieve when texts were extracted, and that the extract method often failed to present the full scope of an author’s work, as the logical connection between topics could be lost (Thomasius 1688b, 228–30). Moreover, he pointed out that extracts could encourage laziness in readers, who might be satisfied with reading a few pages rather than the entire work, potentially forming a distorted view of an author’s ideas if no critical commentary accompanied the review. Thomasius stressed that scholars should be free to challenge incorrect teachings in religion or philosophy when they encountered them in texts. If re-

which meant with the assessment of the authors, and not only of their works. (The letter is in Stadtarchiv Leipzig, Akte XLVI 159, 14r–15v.) With limited time to work on the journal, Thomasius informed the consistory that he had found a group of scholars who were willing to collaborate. He added that he would not disclose their names, following the practice of other journals where reviews were published anonymously. See Wustmann 1885, 201.

⁵ On extracts and *excerpta* see the special issue of the *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* entitled *Towards a History of Excerpting in Modernity*, Décultot- Krämer- Zedelmaier 2020.

⁶ Thomasius would complain about the style of the magazine when Bayle abandoned it in favor of Jacques Basnage, see Thomasius 1688b, 243.

viewers were not allowed to express disagreement, false ideas would spread unchecked, and reviews would become little more than summaries of indexes and prefaces, leaving readers unsatisfied.

For Thomasius, the methodological principles laid out in the *Bibliothèque's* preface were either not applied or had largely been compromised by the editors. His critique of their approach emphasized the partiality and bias that came with the review method, despite thinkers like Le Clerc advocating for the neutrality of extracts. Still, Thomasius considered this reviewing activity important because, regardless of impartiality or objectivity, it could help reveal the truth. The extract could become a powerful investigative tool for Eclecticism when the reviewer sought out what was valuable and refuted what was wrong in the text.

However, the extract must always be accompanied by criticism, even a judgment on the author if necessary. Thomasius believed that reviewers should not be afraid of being criticized for passing judgment on authors; if necessary, the authors' responses could be published in the same journal. For Thomasius, this approach—incorporating both criticism and author responses—meant that the review should take the form of a dialogue:

I therefore thought that it would not be unhelpful if the German journal [i.e. *Monats-Gespräche*] included both the simple and the rational judgements (*iudicia*), and, in order to make things go better, it would not be a bad idea to produce such a journal in the form of a dialogue and introduce one or a couple of silly fellows who would present their simple concerns, while the others would present their opinions with rational reasons, but in such a way that they would mostly express them more through objections (*per modum objectionum*) than definitive judgements (*iudicii decisivi*). For in this way one could not blame the author for standing up in the Republic of Letters, where all scholars are to be treated equally, as judge of them. In this way, even those authors who were rational would not be displeased if they heard that people were reviewing their books for and against (*pro & contra*). Indeed, because it is impossible for an author to maintain two repugnant opinions at the same time, the authors on whose judgements (*iudicia*) are taken would seldom be able to touch the journalist if he had not determined something certain (Thomasius 1688b, 244–45).

The dialogue genre meets Thomasius' speculative desire to promote Eclecticism and the choice is therefore not accidental and certainly not simply rhetorical. Dialogue creates a certain emotional engagement that draws the audience into reading the review, something that sterile summaries or extracts cannot achieve. It allows different perspectives on the same topic to be presented, enabling the reviewer to step outside their personal stance and showcase a wide range of opinions which the reader can actively consider. This approach prevents the formation of the basic prejudices that Eclecticism opposed. Since no biases or final judgments are imposed, the reader is encouraged to think critically for themselves, evaluating which argument is the strongest. In this way, the diverse opinions expressed in the review acknowledge and respect the variety of ideas held by the public at the time, helping to minimize any dissatisfaction. Because of this, the relationship be-

tween reader and reviewer becomes a kind of democratic community, where no single truth is imposed, but all viewpoints are explored with reasoned arguments. For Thomasius, dialogue, as a dialectical tool, is the means to discover the truth through the comparison of many different opinions (Beetz 2003, 46–8).

In 1688 the *Monats-Gespräche*, later published in two volumes, presents registers on three ways of considering the authors: (1) summaries interspersed with more or less long quotations mostly translated or paraphrased; (2) judgments of the authors, where the reviewer expresses his opinion; (3) mere quotations of the authors.⁷ The typologies are very flexible and indeed the dialogue itself often does not favor a great distinction, especially between the first two modalities. In any case, more than 65 summaries with quotations and more than 200 judgments of other authors are reported.⁸

An analysis of these reviews inserted in the dialogues clearly shows Thomasius' polemical attitude. For example, the examination of Spinoza's opinions is instrumental in discussing the relationship between theology and philosophy and the possibility of a *libertas philosophandi*. Therefore, he focuses above all on the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, in which, according to Thomasius, Spinoza:

claimed that in every republic everyone must be allowed the freedom to philosophize, and that this freedom cannot be taken away from them in good conscience. But under the freedom to philosophize he concealed an ungodly freedom to teach what one wants in matters of religion and faith, and in the same treatise he had hidden many dangerous and blasphemous opinions about the Holy Scripture as the foundation of the Christian religion, as well as other general articles of faith (Thomasius 1688b, 338).

Thomasius is convinced that he absolutely must reply to Spinoza's falsehoods.⁹ When dealing with Arnauld's theses, Thomasius speaks of "rather absurd opinions," such as "empty thoughts of a stubborn mind that imagined that his words would be given more credence than daily experience" (Thomasius 1688b, 361–62). This tone that Thomasius used in his dialogue-reviews probably did not sit well with many people.

The choice to adopt dialogue as a genre for the review is undoubtedly original, courageous and strategic. In the long run, however, it must have been rath-

⁷ The register of the first volume is actually imprecise because it speaks of this latter typology in terms of "excerpta," where, instead, it is clear that the authors are only "citiret," as is correctly stated in the second volume.

⁸ Among these, for their contribution to the development of an eclectic perspective, the reflections on Isaac Papin's *La vanité des sciences ou reflexions d'un philosophe chretien sur le veritable bonheur*, Spinoza's *Opera*, Antoine Arnauld's *Dissertation sur le pretendu bonheur des plaisirs des sens* and Tschirnaus' *Medicina mentis* certainly deserve consideration.

⁹ For example, with respect to the doctrine of the unity of substance thus exposed, "there is only one substance in the world, which is called God, and that this God of his is none other than all creatures," he replies, "Could anything more reckless have been thought up?". See Thomasius 1688b, 340.

er tiring to express one's thoughts effectively through dialogue. In a short time, he had to commit himself not only on a productive level, that is, to complete the issues, but also scientifically, that is, to say something meaningful on the topic and above all to say it in a very precise style. In the end, adopting the strategy of the other journals, writing short reports, must have been much simpler and easier, but it would not have been equally useful according to his eclectic perspective. However, starting from the year 1689, the form of dialogue was almost abandoned in favor of reviews of a certain length. At the beginning of the volume that collects the twelve issues, there are short accounts of the reviews, that is, summaries of the content of the review with their indexes. Sometimes these summaries collect the accounts of several reviews in a systematic unit. In total, there were 48 reviews in 1689, of which 25 were printed between October and December, thus exponentially increasing the pace of publication.

In this case, the eclectic perspective, applied to the attempt to search for truth in every philosophy and to the fight against pedantry and sterile scholasticism, emerges clearly in his review of the work of Confucius, published by Philippe Couplet in 1687 under the title of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus, sive Scientia Sinensis Latine Exposita*. Thomasius' reading of Confucius's work was born from the curiosity aroused by what he had read in François de La Mothe Le Vayer's *De la vertu des païens* about the analogy between the Chinese philosopher and Socrates. Furthermore, Thomasius' reading of the *Scientia Sinensis* was also largely influenced by other reviews that this work had already received in the *Journal des Scavans*, in the *Acta eruditorum*, in the *Bibliothèque Universelle* and in the *Historie des Ouvrages des Scavans* (on these reviews see Wenchao 2012). The impression he had formed from reading these reviews was of an exhortative and non-scientific work, and for this reason he was not interested in it, believing that he already knew everything about the subject from Greek and Latin philosophy. However, his interest was reawakened by a conversation with a friend who considered the book of Confucius to be one of the best books of philosophy ever written.

The narrative expedient is useful for Thomasius to directly criticize the other reviewers of the work and their methodology. In fact he writes explicitly, "I could not have discerned what he praised so highly from the extracts of various journalists" (Thomasius 1689, 602). So much so that he concludes that "the extractors often, through negligence, or perhaps even for deliberate reasons, leave out the best that a book contains" (Thomasius 1689, 603) and that "a book has not to be judged by its extracts but by the book itself" (Thomasius 1689, 605). These are rather strong words from someone who makes the extract an essential tool for philosophy. However, a more detailed examination of the text makes us understand that Thomasius was arguing against a certain form of journalism.

The overall opinion of the book that emerges from Thomasius's review is that

the books of *Scientiae sinensis* contain many extremely clever and subtle teachings of Confucius, which one would wish to study in high schools or in everyday life [...] however, there are also many unworthy things in them, at which one can hardly refrain from laughing (Thomasius 1689, 606).

Once again, the task of review is to distinguish, as Eclecticism demands, what is important and what is useless in a philosophy. Among the things he appreciates about Confucius is the method of first learning the wisdom of the ancients, then forming one's own perspective on it and then autonomously developing one's own thought that can be taught. In particular, he considers his idea of a philosopher as correct. A philosopher:

examines and judges everything according to the rules of true reason [...] and in this way he never deviates from truth and virtue. [...] This is a lesson for those who are accustomed to asking other truth lovers, who discover common errors and refute false doctrines, what their calling is in this (Thomasius 1689, 612–13).

Along with this, Thomasius takes up the Confucian critique of pedantism: "Confucius also left behind very beautiful teachings concerning the knowledge and difference between hypocrites and pedants and truly creative and virtuous scholars" (Thomasius 1689, 616). So criticism of pedantry and search for truth in the thoughts of the ancients are instrumental for autonomous and critical thinking. However, Thomasius writes:

while I hope that it will be clear from what has been said that Confucius was indeed an honest, clever and sensible man, I still maintain that we have no reason to regard his teachings as anything special among us (Thomasius 1689, 625–26).

Thomasius' review shows an interest in Confucian ideas, but he does not consider them superior to those of other ancient philosophers such as Epicurus and Seneca, with whom Confucius himself is juxtaposed, rather than Socrates. This shows not only how a review was influenced by other reviews, and how an author was influenced by reading many reviews, but also how Eclecticism could be a filter through which to understand an author's thought in a critical and not totally derogatory or laudatory way.

The 1690 volume that collects the issues from January to April changes literary genre again. Here we find announcements of publications, ten very long reviews, often collected in groups around a single topic, and one excerpt. The 1690 issues are no longer edited by Thomasius but by Johann Jakob Ryssel. The new editor, a follower of Thomasius' eclectic perspective, briefly mentions this change in the method of writing reviews:

Dialogues do sometimes provide a pleasant way to pass the time, but in order to make up for the shortcomings in this style of writing, I will have a letterhead put at the beginning of each month in which I will address one or another question from philosophy or a history that belongs to the *historia literaria*. I will save the explanation of these until the end of this year, but I will not be angry if someone wants to rack their brains over them in the meantime or even if they have found the right interpretation of the time (Ryssel 1690, 19–20).

Unfortunately, the issues ended in April and Ryssel never provided a true justification for his choice, but it is clear that the dialogue was abandoned in favor of a perspective that brought the reviews closer to *historia literaria*, a per-

spective substantially not dissimilar from that advanced by other magazines of the time such as the *Historie des Ouvrages des Scavans*.

That the reviews continued to serve Eclecticism even in 1690 is evident from the choices of works and their thematic grouping. The first two reviews, with long extracts, report a passage by Thomasius on pedantism taken from the *Introductio ad philosophiam aulicam* and the oration by Ulrich Huber on pedantism. They occupy almost seventy pages and the entire first issue. In the following issue the topic of the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* is addressed with the review of *Parallele des Anciens & des Modernes* (1688) by Charles Perrault, of the *Histoire poétique de la guerre, nouvellement déclarée entre les Anciens et les Modernes* (1688) by François de Callières, and *La guerre des auteurs anciens et modernes, avec la Requête et arrest en faveur d'Aristote* (1670) by Gabriel Guéret. These reviews, accompanied by extracts translated into German, absorb two issues, February and March.

Thomasius's first journalistic experience therefore ended between the end of 1689 and the beginning of 1690, when he began to be increasingly involved in writing books such as *Einleitung zu der Vernunft-Lehre* (1691), *Ausübung der Vernunft-Lehre* (1691), *Von der Kunst Vernünftig und Tugendhaft zu lieben* (1692), and the *Einleitung zur Sittenlehre* (1692).

4. *Historia*, Extracts, and the Latest Experimentations

Thomasius resumed his journalistic work and experimentation with reviews in 1693, when he published *Historia Sapientiae et Stultitiae* in three volumes, along with its German counterpart *Historie der Weisheit und Thorheit*. The two journals are not translations of each other, but have very different content. The aims of the project are articulated by Thomasius in the academic program "Observationes promiscuas, die Kirschen-Historie und Historiam Philosophica, wie auch sonst allerhand Erfindungen neuer Warheiten und Entdeckungen gemeiner Irrthümer betreffende" (1692) (Thomasius 1693). In this program he explains how the history of philosophy and church history have mostly been neglected in Germany, although they are important for the progress of knowledge. In what is a real plaidoyer of the value of the history of philosophy, Thomasius argues that history shows the way to acquire knowledge but also the many mistakes that have been made. For this reason, history can be called the history of wisdom and folly, in the wake of Erasmus. The historical approach would constitute an antidote against prejudice, ignorance and pedantry precisely because of its ability to reveal the truth that develops in time and the mistakes that are committed by philosophers. Thomasius' approach to reviewing works in this journal is historical, that of the *historia literaria* suggested by his pupil Ryssel. The reviews are mostly long extracts in the philosophical field particularly investigating the life of Abelard, and the lives and doctrines of Democritus and Descartes. Starting from the third volume of the *Historia*, the reviews consist of long extracts taken from Jakob Thomasius's *Schediasma Historicum* (1665) on mystical, Persian, Platonic and scholastic theology. There is nothing original in

these reviews except the selection of passages aimed at seeking an Eclecticism that combines philosophy and religion.

No different is the attempt of the *Summarischer Nachrichten von auserlesenen mehrentheils alten in der Thomasischen Bibliothek* published between 1715 and 1718. In the preface to the first issue Thomasius writes that in Germany, for about thirty years, extracts from new books have been published monthly or otherwise by learned individuals, contributing to the flourishing of the sciences and the improvement of knowledge (Thomasius 1715, 2). This practice continues, following the path he opened twenty-five years before with the *Monats-Gespräche*, although Thomasius is aware that such extracts, valuable in themselves, are not without flaws. Scholars in particular love to be praised and dislike it when their views are challenged, especially if errors are pointed out. Authors criticizing contemporary works, despite striving for impartiality, often find themselves influenced by hidden biases, leading to undeserved praise or unjust criticism. The sheer volume of new books increases every year, with few works failing to merit some form of remembrance, therefore the practice of excerpting, that is of writing extracts, is necessary (see Thomasius 1715, 4–5).

To avoid such problems, some scholars have opted to present new writings briefly without judgment or by offering universal praise, avoiding any potentially critical or negative remarks (Thomasius 1715, 5). This cautious approach, however, has satisfied few people, including Thomasius, and for several valid reasons. Notably, these extracts inadvertently encourage readers to focus only on new books, neglecting the old ones, even though old works are crucial for the development of new ideas in the sciences. Proper judgment is needed when reading older books, because, for Thomasius, many works of the past are widely known not for their quality or for their use in discovering and emending errors, but because they catered to popular tastes in times of profound ignorance (Thomasius 1715, 5–6). Conversely, according to Thomasius, useful books were often undervalued and are now rare, deserving better recognition through extracts. Therefore, it is fundamental to make a choice of the best old books as well as providing information about the newest ones.

In this sense, for Thomasius, Le Clerc's work with the *Bibliothèque choisie* is commendable, for unlike other journals, the French periodical includes extracts and summaries of older books. This approach avoids many of the aforementioned annoyances and shortcomings, and in Thomasius' opinion it is particularly useful because dead scholars cannot resent a lack of praise for their writings, nor can they harm the reviewer for disagreeing with their thoughts (Thomasius 1715, 7–8). Though the errors of these old authors still find defenders in the present, the criticism is less intense than that of contemporary authors. Indeed, judgments of the dead scholars should be framed to acknowledge errors and valuable opinions (Thomasius 1715, 8). Also in this framework Thomasius reveals the reason why making extracts is a practice useful for the purposes of Eclecticism.

Since opinions and assessments of old books are as important as those of new releases, in the *Summarischer Nachrichten*, with the support of several (never acknowledged) fellows, Thomasius decided to excerpt worthy books from his

own library. To inform those interested in joining this endeavor, calling to arms potential contributors to the journal, Thomasius published a list of at least fifty books or documents at the beginning of each issue, in a similar manner to that which other journals did at the end of their publications, including a register of new book releases and possible works to be reviewed. This is a practice still in use today, but in this specific case Thomasius chose what was worthy of review. This practice was maintained for the first two issues, while from the third issue onwards the list of suggested books to be reviewed was published at the end.

Thomasius' selection comprises books on law, philosophy and history, while generally it excludes medicine and theology. The reviewers, called by Thomasius "the excerpters," should add their comments modestly and without offense (Thomasius 1715, 10). If necessary, he might edit their words before publication, but they should not be bound by his opinions, and they were free to arrange their comments according to their own knowledge. Finally, Thomasius claims that if anyone has a rare book, which was not in his own library, the reviewers are free to excerpt it, adding summary information and criticism as appropriate.

What makes this latest experiment particularly interesting is that, in line with Thomasius' eclectic approach, reviewing is seen to be the same as excerpting, meaning reviews are primarily extracts. However, Thomasius' extracts are unique. They aren't just simple portions of text taken from notable works for review; they include critical analysis and contextual information. Unlike other journals of the time that focused on mere extracts, for Thomasius the act of reviewing is closely tied to the act of excerpting.

The *Summarischer Nachrichten* are thus divided into two parts, one consisting of the list of suggested important books to be reviewed and the other the reviews themselves.¹⁰ Reading the reviews, which are often more than thirty pages long, it becomes clear that there is a strong emphasis on understanding philosophy through the lives and histories of authors. This is the case of philosophers like Melanchthon, Hobbes, Theophrastus and Descartes.¹¹ Additionally, there is a particular focus on ancient philosophy, as well as on Pierre Gassendi and several seventeenth-century British philosophers, who are highlighted for their

¹⁰ The list of suggested books is also very useful for reconstructing Thomasius' library itself and his preferences and taste. There is a clear predilection for ancient authors and for their revivals or criticisms in modern times. He is interested in the works of Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus and Theophrastus. Among the Renaissance authors we find Vives, Machiavelli, Paracelsus, Jean Bodin, Francesco Piccolomini and Petrus Ramus. Among the modern philosophers we find Francis Bacon, Athanasius Kircher, René Descartes, François de la Mothe Le Vayer, Baruch Spinoza, Robert Fludd, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Kenelm Digby, Samuel Parker, Arnold Geulincx and Jean Le Clerc. These are all eclectic authors, or not perfectly catalogable within a philosophical school. What he appreciates is precisely the ability to examine the past and to rework it, presenting new ideas.

¹¹ For example, we find long reviews of the life of Melanchthon published in 1655 and of the life of Hobbes published in 1681, but among the suggested readings there is the life of Descartes printed in 1693, and that of Theophrastus which appeared in 1688.

skill in analyzing and critiquing ancient philosophical ideas.¹² The *Summarischer Nachrichten*, even more than the *Monats-Gespräche* and *Historia Sapientiae et Stultitiae*, reveal Thomasius' true intellectual interests and how he views the review as a primary tool for practicing philosophy. Throughout his experiments, Thomasius remains committed to an approach that treats reviewing as a form of non-dogmatic, critical philosophizing, allowing him to appreciate history without being constrained by its errors.

For Thomasius, philosophical reviews play a crucial and until his time overlooked role. They are essential tools for philosophizing, without which one cannot properly engage in philosophy. His use of reviews—whether in the form of dialogues, extracts, or summaries—reflects a methodological rather than doctrinal stance. Reviews are not meant to construct a grand philosophical system but to critique and select the most suitable material for philosophical inquiry. Thomasius' Eclecticism revolves around this anti-dogmatic principle, using the review as his primary weapon in the battlefield of competing opinions found in the numerous books published during that time.

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¹² Among the reviews on ancient philosophy, we find the *Philosophia et physiologia stoica* by Justus Lipsius (1644), the *Syntagma philosophiae Epicuri cum refutationibus dogmatum* by Pierre Gassendi (1659), and *De natura et constitutione philosophiae italicae seu pythagoricae* by Johannes Scheffer (1664). More accurate analyses of seventeenth-century philosophy are conducted on Francis Bacon's *Oeuvres morales et politiques* translated by Jean Boaudoin (1626), on Pierre Gassendi's *Exercitationes Paradoxae adversus Aristotelicos* (1649) and on Ralph Cudworth's *The true intellectual system of the universe* (1678).

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Filosofia e ‘conversazioni mensili’: l’arte della recensione nella *Frühauflklärung*

Riccarda Suitner

Abstract: The article examines the conversational structure that characterizes many philosophical reviews published in early eighteenth-century Germany, exploring the reasons behind the importance of dialogical form in the philosophical debates of the period. It analyses well-known examples of eighteenth-century journals, such as Christian Thomasius’s *Monatsgespräche*, lesser-known periodicals such as Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel’s *Monatliche Unterredungen*, and other philosophical texts marked by a pronounced hybridity that places them between scholarly journal, dialogue, student pamphlet, and *Streitschrift*.

Keywords: Dialogue, Reviews, Philosophy, Germany, Early Enlightenment, Thomasius, Tentzel.

1. Introduzione. Dialoghi e filosofia nella Germania del primo Illuminismo

Lo studio della storia della filosofia è indissolubilmente legato anche allo studio dei generi letterari e delle forme, testuali o iconografiche, in cui essa ha preso forma nei secoli, come un numero crescente di ricerche sta dimostrando: programmi accademici, biografie, ‘scritti volanti’ e ‘letteratura di strada’, manuali, dialoghi, dissertazioni, illustrazioni non sono meri involucri formali, ma parte integrante di veri e propri programmi filosofici.¹ Obiettivo delle pagine che seguono è indagare gli intrecci tra la recensione di testi filosofici e uno dei generi filosofici per eccellenza, quello del dialogo, nella Germania tra fine Seicento e primo Settecento, ovvero il periodo comunemente chiamato *Frühauflklärung*.

Il dialogo è, notoriamente, uno dei generi letterari più amati del Settecento. Si tratta anzitutto di una tipologia testuale che riflette una società che si costituisce progressivamente attraverso la discussione pubblica. La transizione dal dialogo didattico ed euristico dell’umanesimo (si pensi ad esempio ai catechismi in forma dialogica stampati nel primo periodo della Riforma, come il *Catechismo di Raków* o il *Dialogo de doctrina cristiana* di Juan de Valdés) a uno dal carattere

¹ Cfr. per es. Pozzo 2009 e 2011, Garber e Berger 2021, Seung-Kee Lee, Pozzo, Sgarbi, e Dagmar von Wille 2012 su manuali e programmi accademici; Pasini 2019 sulle biografie; Suitner 2016 su dialoghi, *Flugschriften*, incisioni e biografie; Marti, Friedenthal, e Seidel 2021 sulle dissertazioni.

più ‘aperto’ e ‘intertestuale’ rispecchia inoltre la vocazione didattica illuminista e le differenze rispetto alla pedagogia dei secoli precedenti (Schmeisser 2012; de Valdés 1979; Vickermann-Ribémont e Rieger 2003). Ulteriori punti di forza del dialogo di questo periodo sono l’attenzione per la performatività della lingua, il potenziale di teatralità intrinseco nel genere, la tendenza a una sorta di riproduzione letteraria della cultura dei *salons* e l’antidogmatismo. Quest’ultima attitudine, pur se comune a molti altri testi filosofici del periodo, si rivela particolarmente bene nel genere dialogico, grazie ai punti di vista plurali rappresentati dagli interlocutori, che tentano di convincere sia il loro oppositore che il lettore stesso, e talvolta, con le loro domande, si pongono in modo dubitativo o con distaccata ironia anche nei confronti delle loro stesse posizioni (Beetz 2003, 46-7).

La letteratura dialogica tedesca spicca nettamente nel panorama europeo per la fisionomia straordinariamente varia ed eterogenea, grazie alla confluenza di numerosi fattori. La crescente diffusione e fortuna in Germania dei *Νεκρικοί Διάλογοι* di Luciano di Samosata, dei *Dialogues des morts composés pour l’éducation d’un Prince* (1712-1718) di François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon e di due testi provenienti dall’ambiente libertino dell’Accademia degli Incogniti di Venezia, *De’ Ragguagli di Parnaso* (1612-1613) di Traiano Boccalini e *La Secretaria di Apollo* di Antonio Santacroce (uscito anonimo nel 1653), il clamoroso successo del periodico mensile di David Fassmann *Gespräche im Reiche der Toten* sono solo alcuni di essi.² A rafforzare decisamente l’associazione tra trattazione di questioni filosofiche e forma dialogica, che definirei addirittura sistematica per quanto riguarda la prima parte del secolo, sarebbero poi state le traduzioni tedesche da parte di Johann Christoph Gottsched delle opere principali di Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle: i *Nouveaux dialogues des morts* (1727), *l’Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* e *l’Histoire des Oracles* (1730).³ Si trattava di traduzioni non letterali, ma improntate a una veicolazione di valori cristiani, che rappresentarono un presupposto significativo per l’affermazione di un certo filone ‘moralistico’ del dialogo filosofico tedesco, rimasto tuttavia nel complesso minoritario nel quadro d’insieme (Suitner 2021).

Una particolarità prettamente tedesca, che avrebbe conferito al genere del dialogo filosofico un carattere totalmente nuovo, è inoltre la sua saldatura con proto-giornalismo, ‘letteratura di strada’ e pubblicitaria d’occasione (*Gelegenheitspublizistik*). Molta parte dei dialoghi che videro la luce nella Germania settecentesca furono

² Luciano di Samosata 2007; Fénelon 1712-1718; Boccalini 1612-1613; [Santacroce] 1653; Fassmann 1718-1739. Sulla ricezione tedesca di Boccalini cfr. Stötzner 1899, 107-47; Hendrix 1995; Firpo 1965, 23-50; De Pol 1990, 109-31. Sui dialoghi lucianei cfr. Desrousseaux 1885. Sull’Accademia degli Incogniti cfr. Spini 1983 e Miato 1998. Su quelli di Fénelon cfr. Baumbach 2002, 66-70, Graap 2001. Su Fassmann cfr. Dreyfürst 2014, anche per ulteriori informazioni bibliografiche. Sulla ricezione tedesca di queste opere nella Germania del primo Settecento cfr. Suitner 2016.

³ Fontenelle 1727; Fontenelle 1726; Fontenelle 1730. Le tre traduzioni sono state raccolte in Fontenelle 1760. Su Gottsched come traduttore di Fontenelle cfr. Krebs 1993. Sui *Nouveaux dialogues des morts* cfr. Frola 2001, Cosentini 1952 e Dagen 1971.

stampati in tempi ristrettissimi, venduti come *Flugschriften* (lett. 'scritti volanti', ovvero non rilegati) agli angoli delle strade e nelle università o pubblicati in riviste; erano adibiti a trattare questioni di ampio richiamo, avvenimenti e polemiche di stretta attualità, e garantivano un sicuro ritorno commerciale.⁴ Ne fecero massiccio uso eruditi di vario tipo, i quali non di rado se ne servirono per prendere posizione in controversie accademiche (*Streitschriften*) in corso, nei più svariati campi, non solo filosofico, ma anche storiografico, teologico, artistico, numismatico.

Rudolf Hirzel e Vittorio Hösle hanno osservato come il dialogo filosofico conosca una particolare fortuna nei momenti di crisi e di rivoluzioni: con la sofistica, nel Rinascimento e nell'età dell'Illuminismo.⁵ Entrambi gli studiosi intendono con *Aufklärung* un periodo posteriore a quello che qui si tratta. Gli anni Venti e Trenta del Settecento sono per la filosofia tedesca una fase di rottura, causata non solo dalla nascita e progressivo consolidamento di nuovi sistemi come quello di Christian Wolff, ma anche dal dibattito legato alla controversa eredità di filosofi del secolo precedente come Leibniz e Descartes. Non c'era mezzo migliore per rappresentare queste tensioni del genere dialogico, e le recensioni filosofiche in forma di dialogo di cui si tratta in queste pagine sono ovviamente parte di questo quadro.

2. I *Monatsgespräche* di Christian Thomasius: il frontespizio (e le sue incisioni) come programma filosofico e intellettuale

Per quanto concerne lo stato dei generi letterari, il primo Settecento è sicuramente in Germania una fase altamente 'sperimentale'. A un livello fatto di scritti d'occasione, pubblicistica periodica e di *Flugschriften*, i confini tra generi erano particolarmente fluidi. Una delle premesse di questa evoluzione fu certamente la connessione molto forte affermata tra giornalismo, forma dialogica e riviste di recensioni in lingua tedesca (le riviste in latino erano infatti solo marginalmente toccate dalle novità e dai meccanismi che qui si descrivono). L'impiego così massiccio della forma dialogica non trova alcun corrispettivo negli esempi stranieri; si trattava, tuttavia, di riviste più vicine al modello francese e olandese rispetto ai più conservatori *Acta eruditorum* di Lipsia. Il 'prototipo' delle riviste più innovative del periodo erano senz'altro i cosiddetti *Monatsgespräche* di Christian Thomasius, i cui titoli estesi sono *Schertz- und ernsthafter, vernünfftiger und einfältiger Gedancken über allerhand lustige und nützliche Bücher und Fragen* (annata 1688) e *Freymüthiger jedoch vernünfft- und gesetzmäßiger Gedancken über allerhand, fürnemlich aber neue Bücher* (annata 1689/90).⁶

⁴ L'espressione *letteratura di strada* è stata introdotta da Shepard 1973. Sulla letteratura di strada filosofica tedesca cfr. Suitner 2016.

⁵ Hirzel 1895, 443 sg.; Hösle 2006, 125. Altri studi sul dialogo filosofico sono Bigalli e Canziani 1990; Kinzel e Mildorf 2014; Cossutta 2004; Bénouis 1976.

⁶ Cfr. Jaumann 1997, 404; Habel 2011; Grunert 1997; Suitner 2016, in part. Introduzione e cap. 3. Sui *gelehrte Journale* tedeschi cfr. anche Gantet e Schock 2014 (sul periodico di Gottfried Zenner, cit. *infra*, vedi l'articolo di Schock nello stesso vol.).

Della filosofia di Thomasius, al di fuori degli studi in lingua tedesca, oggetto d'interesse è soprattutto il *De criminae magiae*, la celebre dissertazione del 1701 in cui si demolivano, con argomentazioni sia giuridiche sia filosofiche (anche basate sulle teorie di ascendenza cartesiana della separazione tra sostanze) le basi delle imputazioni di pratica di magia diabolica e di patti col demonio, all'epoca ancora perseguibili nella maggior parte dei territori protestanti di lingua tedesca. La sua rivista rimane invece, in contesto internazionale, ancora poco studiata, nonostante le sue caratteristiche di dirompente novità. Si trattava in sostanza di un intreccio tra bollettino di critica sul modello del francese *Journal des Sçavans* e satira filosofica, spesso antiaristotelica e antiscolastica, anche in forma di sferzanti dialoghi tra personaggi fittizi.

Svariati altri elementi rendevano i *Monatsgespräche* qualcosa di molto diverso da quanto si era visto fino a quel momento. Questi elementi appartengono a diverse sfere: a quella della storia filosofica, a quella della storia dei generi letterari, e a quella della cosiddetta *History of Knowledge* o *Wissensgeschichte*: quest'ultima indaga notoriamente questioni quali la circolazione del sapere, le gerarchie tra diverse forme di sapere in una data epoca storica, la dicotomia conoscenza/ignoranza, e ha trovato esplicita applicazione, nell'ultima ventina d'anni, anche nella disciplina della storia della filosofia e in riferimento allo specifico contesto del primo Illuminismo tedesco.⁷ Si tratta, in fondo, di un'ulteriore sfaccettatura del complesso – e mai risolto – rapporto tra storia intellettuale e storia filosofica o, come è stato definito da Riccardo Pozzo, tra storia *storica* e storia *filosofica* della filosofia (Pozzo 2014).

Il lungo titolo della rivista dichiara già, come in una sorta di manifesto programmatico, i suoi caratteri salienti e il suo scopo. Si tratta, leggiamo sul frontespizio, di una rivista mensile e in forma dialogica (*in einem Gespräch vorgestellt*). Il carattere dialogico, in realtà, non era esclusivo, ma preponderante. Anche il peso delle recensioni è dichiarato già dal titolo, in cui si parla di «libri e domande» (*Bücher und Fragen*). Le riflessioni (*Gedanken*) esposte all'interno sono non erano solo serie (*ernsthafft*), sensate (*vernünfftig*) e franche (*fremmüthig*), ma anche scherzose (*schertzhafft*). La maggior parte delle incisioni che accompagna il frontespizio illustrava personaggi in varie situazioni di conversazione: tre personaggi vestiti con abiti dalla foggia orientale (incisione introduttiva al fascicolo del luglio 1688, cfr. Fig. 1), una dama e un signore dell'alta società (ottobre 1688, Fig. 2), due amici in una stanza riscaldata da una *Stube* (dicembre 1688, Fig. 3).

⁷ Cfr. Mulsow 2002 e Suitner 2016. In Sgarbi 2025 (con contributi di Id., C. Gantet, M. Brancato, M. Storni, D. Bondi, T. Giesbers, R. Martinelli) si tratta di recensioni filosofiche in lingua tedesca sotto la lente interpretativa della *History of Knowledge*. In riferimento a molti temi trattati nel volume quali *networks* di autori e loro comunicazione 'clandestina', pubblici di riferimento, fattori pratici e 'materiali' nella circolazione di testi filosofici, plagi, importanza degli autori 'di secondo rango', carattere sperimentale e policentrico della pubblicistica e della discussione filosofica nella Germania settecentesca, parrebbe opportuno un rinvio ai due volumi cit. all'inizio della nota, qui assenti in bibliografia. Per il dibattito metodologico sui rapporti tra *History of Knowledge*, storia intellettuale, storia della filosofia e storia della scienza cfr. Burke 2015, Daston 2017 e Joas, Krämer, e Nickelsen 2019.



Figura 1 – [Christian Thomasius], *Schertz- und ernsthafter, vernünftiger und einfältiger Gedancken über allerhand lustige und nützliche Bücher und Fragen*. Incisione del frontespizio del fascicolo del luglio 1688, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.



Figura 2 – [Christian Thomasius], *Schertz- und ernsthafter, vernünftiger und einfältiger Gedancken über allerhand lustige und nützliche Bücher und Fragen*. Incisione del frontespizio del fascicolo dell'ottobre 1688, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

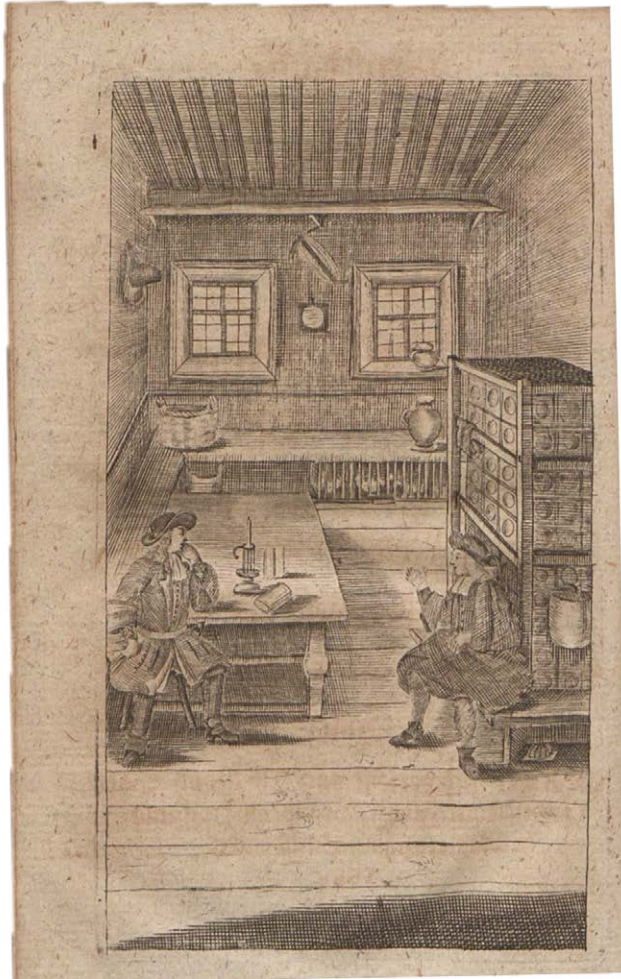


Figura 3 – [Christian Thomasius], *Schertz- und ernsthafter, vernünfftiger und einfältiger Gedancken über allerhand lustige und nützliche Bücher und Fragen*. Incisione del frontespizio del fascicolo del dicembre 1688, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

Esse sono assai rappresentative dei caratteri tipici delle incisioni del periodo, fase in cui – a differenza che nella seconda parte del Diciottesimo secolo – sono moltissimi i testi aperti da un frontespizio inciso. Come pure in questo caso, non si trattava solitamente di illustrazioni continuative, ma di un'unica incisione iniziale posta a lato del frontespizio, dall'alto carattere simbolico concordato tra autore e incisore, che in qualche modo presentava una 'messa in scena grafica' del contenuto filosofico del testo e serviva anche a rendere il libro più attraente ai compratori.⁸

I libri e le domande venivano caratterizzati da due aggettivi: divertenti (*lustig*) e utili (*nützlich*).

Valorizzando il *iudicium* dei suoi lettori, le conversazioni mensili, in contrasto con le pure riviste di recensione, hanno promosso lo sviluppo di un pubblico indipendente dalla classe, nel senso che difende la capacità di giudizio e di critica, la verità, l'onestà e la ragione, la struttura di conversazione facilitava la comunicazione di nuove conoscenze a un pubblico eterogeneo che Thomasius estendeva, almeno potenzialmente, a gruppi visti come *outsiders* dal punto di vista del consumo di letteratura filosofica come soldati, contadini, mercanti e donne (Peter 1999, 59 e 64).

Quanto a queste ultime, all'esclusione che riservavano loro caffè e società scientifiche corrispondeva anche una ghettizzazione nella letteratura filosofica loro dedicata, per lo più manualistica e scritta da altre donne in forma semplificata, come ad esempio il *Grundriß einer Weltweißheit für das Frauenzimmer* (1751) di Johanna Charlotte Unzer.⁹

Tra i lettori di Thomasius vi erano poi verosimilmente anche autodidatti, i quali cominciarono a essere presi in considerazione dall'opinione pubblica, anche in veste di autori, proprio nel corso del Diciottesimo secolo (Böning, D'Aprile, Schmitt, e Siegert 2015). A cavallo tra XVII e XVIII secolo, quantomeno i più facoltosi tra loro cominciarono a comprare la letteratura filosofica di lettura più agevole (sia perché scritta in uno stile nuovo che perché in tedesco anziché in latino) e opere di consultazione, come il *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon* (1732-1754) di Johann Heinrich Zedler.¹⁰ Tutti questi gruppi erano chiaramente molto interessati alle recensioni, che riguardavano sapere sia teorico che praticamente applicabile. Questo sapere non intendeva avere carattere esclusivo e, attraverso l'abilità retorica del critico, guadagnava una sorta di posizione inter-

⁸ Mutuo il termine da Schneiders 1990, cap. *Das Bild der Philosophie*, 52. Sulla rilevanza filosofica delle incisioni tedesche del Settecento e lo studio dei rapporti tra incisori e autori da una prospettiva di storia intellettuale cfr. Suitner 2016. E' ancora molto utile Wustmann 1907. Sulle incisioni dei frontespizi settecenteschi cfr. Zittel, Bertram e Büttner 2021.

⁹ Su Unzer vedi Dawson 2020; Dyck 2024, 141-49. Sul contesto generale cfr. Karremann e Stiening 2020 (sono dedicati alla Germania gli art. di A. Dröse, L. Tonger-Erk, G. Stiening, D. Hüning e S. Forst); Dyck 2021; Petschauer 1986; Koloch 2010.

¹⁰ Sull'innovativa e faraonica opera di Zedler, antecedente anche all'*Encyclopédie* di Diderot e d'Alembert, cfr. Schneider 2013.

media tra i discorsi degli studiosi e la nuova sete di conoscenza di un pubblico socialmente ampio (Jaumann 1997, 395-404; Peter 1999, 64-5).

Nel complesso, le caratteristiche della rivista thomasiana non sono comprensibili senza essere anche inquadrati in quel fenomeno, descritto sapientemente da Jürgen Habermas nel suo classico del 1962 *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, della progressiva 'emersione' della borghesia tedesca nel dibattito pubblico. D'altro canto, a mio parere i *Monatsgespräche* condividono anche alcuni elementi con la letteratura dialogica destinata all'educazione aristocratica. Penso ad esempio ai *Dialogues des morts* di Fénelon, facenti parte di un programma educativo dedicato all'erede al trono di Francia, il Duca di Borgogna.¹¹ L'importanza di padroneggiare l'arte della conversazione come uno degli elementi essenziali dell'educazione illuminista era infatti particolarmente valorizzata dal genere dialogico. Negli ambienti aristocratici, la capacità di condurre una conversazione brillante e di presentare argomenti a favore e contro una determinata tesi significava possedere una sufficiente padronanza dei codici di etichetta sociale e averne interiorizzato i valori (Kollbach 2009, 338). Nel caso di Thomasius è stato sottolineato che i suoi dialoghi offrono «modelli per una cultura educata della conversazione a vari livelli» (Beetz 2003, 37). Il genere del dialogo, con il suo eterogeneo target di lettori e la sua ibridità letteraria, che lo collocava all'incrocio tra moralistica, letteratura educativa, pubblicistica d'occasione ed erudizione, si rivelava un mezzo ideale per superare le barriere tra diverse classi sociali e gruppi di lettori nel primo Illuminismo.

L'immagine che si associa comunemente alla maggior parte dei filosofi di lingua tedesca del primo Settecento (se si esclude Christian Wolff; penso ad esempio allo stesso Thomasius, a Johann Franz Budde, a Nicolaus Hieronymus Gundling) è di scarsa *sistematicità*, o meglio, si è disposti a riconoscere loro una sorta di sistematicità nell'applicazione di un metodo eclettico (Albrecht 1994). Ciò riguarda però Thomasius solo fino a un certo punto: la sua preferenza per il genere del dialogo, ad esempio, è molto coerente con il ruolo della *Geselligkeit* (socievolezza) nella sua concezione giusnaturalistica (Thelen 2024).

3. Le recensioni di Christian Thomasius: *conversazione*, punti di vista, anonimata

I *Monatsgespräche* proponevano una conversazione intesa su più piani diversi. Il primo era chiaramente quello letterale. Come si è già visto, molta parte della rivista attingeva al genere dialogico; in particolare le recensioni beneficiavano dei particolari vantaggi di quella forma testuale in termini di immediatezza comunicativa verso il pubblico di riferimento (che non era esclusivamente accademico), antidogmatismo filosofico e possibilità per l'autore di celare la propria posizione personale, facendola però allo stesso tempo emergere per allusioni. Alcune recensioni sono definibili come dialoghi in senso letterale: quella dell'edizione

¹¹ Suitner, 2025. Sulla fortuna di Fénelon in Germania cfr. Just 1953; Schmitt-Maaß 2018; Schmitt-Maaß, Stockhorst, e Ahn 2014; Kollbach 2009; Meid 2021.

latina della *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* di Richard Simon, ad esempio, prevedeva una conversazione tra due interlocutori contrassegnati dalle lettere A e B (dicembre 1688, 706-97). Questi stavano rispettivamente per *Albericus*, per cui Thomasius alla fine ammette di parteggiare, pur lasciando ai lettori libertà di *iudicium*, e per *Basilius*, il cui appoggio a un'opera in cui si avanzavano interpretazioni così controverse circa la paternità dell'Antico Testamento appariva – coerentemente con l'opera filosofica di Thomasius – come troppo vicina all'ateismo. Non sempre, però, il carattere di conversazione della rivista si riferiva a dialoghi intesi in senso letterale. Contribuivano infatti all'impronta generale dei *Monatsgespräche* anche le conversazioni 'a distanza' e indirette, magari con i propri nemici (*Zueignungs-Schrift an meine Feinde*, introduzione al fascicolo del gennaio 1689, pagine non num.). Molte volte, inoltre, Thomasius inseriva in una sua prefazione numerose domande retoriche, che immaginava poste da ipotetici lettori o interlocutori, e che contribuivano anch'esse ad accentuare il carattere dialogico del tutto. La rivista prevedeva però anche alcune recensioni in senso tradizionale: ad esempio quella alla *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* di Pierre Daniel Huet (ottobre 1689, 807-34).

I *Monatsgespräche* presentavano anche altri importanti elementi caratterizzanti oltre a quelli enunciati sul loro frontespizio, che si presentavano nel corso della rivista in modo ricorrente, in particolare con riferimento alle recensioni. Un primo era l'imparzialità. In realtà gran parte della pubblicistica filosofica tedesca (soprattutto *Flugschriften* e periodici) tra la fine del Seicento e l'inizio del Settecento abbonda di professioni d'imparzialità. Non bisogna però farsi fuorviare dal termine *unpartheyisch* che, in quanto traduzione del neologismo *impartialis*, nasce solamente in età moderna. A un'osservazione attenta si nota che questi proclami, formulati in apparenza per dare sfoggio di superiorità etica, comparivano in realtà proprio nell'ambito di polemiche tra scuole filosofiche rivali.¹² Le conversazioni immaginarie che discutevano di libri filosofici e dei loro autori sotto l'etichetta di *imparzialità* contenevano solitamente prese di posizione più o meno sottili a favore della posizione di uno dei protagonisti.

Il secondo di questi elementi ricorrenti è l'anonimia. In Germania, e con le dovute differenze anche in altri paesi europei, nel primo Settecento non serviva una particolare ragione per pubblicare qualcosa in forma anonima. Non era solo il timore di ricevere accuse di eterodossia a poter far adottare questa soluzione, e non erano solamente i testi potenzialmente sovversivi a essere pubblicati senza il nome dell'autore. Anonime uscivano le recensioni e i contributi delle riviste, pamphlet e scritti polemici, raccolte di poesie, voci dei dizionari e *Flugschriften* (compresi quelli in forma dialogica). Le ragioni erano molteplici, e andavano dalla scarsa consapevolezza dell'importanza dei riconoscimenti di paternità intellettuale delle opere (che si accompagnava a una maggiore tolleranza verso i plagi rispetto alla seconda metà del secolo), a scelte strategiche

¹² Cfr. Murphy e Traninger 2014, in part. l'Introduzione delle curatrici e il contributo di R. Godel.

di editori o autori, a cui poteva convenire, nel dubbio sull'accoglienza da parte del pubblico, proporre un'opera in forma anonima. L'anonimato, tuttavia, era spesso solamente parziale. Pseudonimi, iniziali, fittizi editori e luoghi di stampa potevano consapevolmente fungere da spie, da segnali di un'appartenenza a un comune dibattito, a un gruppo che si riconosceva in determinati codici di comunicazione, più o meno allusivi.¹³ Solamente nella seconda parte del Diciottesimo secolo diversi autori, tra cui Wieland e Lessing, cominciano a proporre una «programmatica illuminista dell'anonimia», ovvero una consapevole scelta dell'anonimia, spesso sotto forma di elogio dell'uguaglianza delle voci che essa rendeva possibile, indipendentemente dal ruolo sociale e dalle differenze gerarchiche tra autori (Cfr. Pabst 2011).

4. L'eco di Thomasius: Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel e la pubblicistica filosofica studentesca

I *Monatsgesprache* furono ascritti dai contemporanei alla letteratura dialogica satirica nella tradizione dei dialoghi di Luciano di Samosata (Jaumann 1997, 404). Pur non trattandosi di dialoghi dei morti, la rivista era ricca di riferimenti all'«höchstes Gericht im Parnasso», ovvero il tribunale sul Monte Parnaso che in molti dialoghi pubblicati in età moderna, non solo in quelli già menzionati di Boccalini e Santacroce, ma anche in quelli lingua tedesca, fungeva da sede di giudizio delle anime dei morti da parte del dio Apollo ([Thomasius] 1690, 206-222; AletopHilus 1731).

Questi rimandi alla tradizione greca sono tuttavia un po' deboli per giustificare un paragone vero e proprio tra una rivista che era solo *parzialmente* dialogica e testi che appartenevano al genere del dialogo vero e proprio, e per lo più al suo sottogenere del dialogo dei morti. Ma vi è molto di più oltre ai rimandi letterali. I contemporanei scorgevano in entrambi i generi una connotazione satirica e dissacrante, che era senz'altro nuova in associazione alle riviste erudite ma aveva sempre caratterizzato i dialoghi dei morti, tant'è che Lutero era esplicitamente contrario alla loro pubblicazione per il loro carattere intrinsecamente blasfemo (Schelle 1984). Il dialogo dei morti, inoltre, non era tradizionalmente visto come una forma letteraria particolarmente qualificata, degna di trattare materie considerate di livello 'elevato'. Fino a Fontenelle, adoperare questo genere letterario per trattare questioni filosofiche aveva costituito un forte tratto di eccentricità, e lo stesso si può dire dei *Monatsgesprache*, il cui carattere innovatore era dato, tra le altre cose, dalla scelta del tedesco anziché del latino e dall'allargamento del potenziale pubblico di riferimento.

¹³ Su anonimia e pseudonimia in Germania tra fine Seicento e primo Settecento cfr. Mulsow 2006, Raabe 1991, Suitner 2016 (anche su plagi e *Raubdrucke*); specificamente sulle recensioni Habel 2007, 126-48. Per altri contesti cronologici e/o geografici cfr. Pabst 2011, Griffin 1999, 2002 e 2003, Mullan 2007, North 2003, Braida 2019, Darnton 1995 e, sul plagiarismo, Darnton 2002.

Non a caso, troviamo un paragone tra dialoghi dei morti e lo stile innovativo dei coevi periodici mensili anche in un *Besonders curieuses Gespräch im Reich der Todten zwischen Christian Thomasio und August Hermann Francken*, pubblicato anonimo nel 1729:

Come nel finire del secolo scorso gli intellettuali si diletavano di almanacchi storici con personalità elevate, distinti e famosi clerici di tutte e tre le religioni; etc. così pensarono, all'inizio di questo secolo, secondo il famoso proverbio: *Varietas delectat*, di intrattenere i lettori con alcuni altri tipi di scritti. I periodici mensili, che erano comparsi recentemente, venivano ora frequentemente stampati con titoli di ogni tipo. Presto comparvero riviste, estratti di riviste, lettere intercettate, missive, Fama, etc. e alcune altre dozzine [di pubblicazioni periodiche]. Tra tutte però hanno avuto più lunga durata gli *Acta Eruditorum*, gli *Europäische Fama* e i dialoghi nel regno dei morti. Quanto a questi ultimi, vi si raccontavano le vite e molti curiosi eventi, come realmente accaddero nella loro vita, di molti imperatori, re, principi e signori, famosissimi uomini politici, eccellenti intellettuali etc.¹⁴

Il passo è tratto da un corpus di dialoghi dei morti ad argomento filosofico pubblicati in forma anonima e di *Flugschriften*, che funsero da luogo ideale di messa in scena delle controversie che gravitavano attorno al wolffismo, alla filosofia di Descartes e di Leibniz, alla demonologia di Balthasar Bekker e alla scuola di Christian Thomasius. Nella loro realizzazione erano implicate figure che si muovevano sia nel mondo della 'pubblicistica di strada' che nei contesti accademici, soprattutto studenti e incisori. Si tratta di testi da analizzare su più piani, che rispondono a precise dinamiche di comunicazione tipiche sia della pubblicistica clandestina e anonima che della pamphletistica filosofica del periodo, oltre che alle leggi proprie del genere letterario cui appartengono e a quelle che regolavano il dinamico mercato librario degli 'scritti volanti'.¹⁵

Questi dialoghi si inserivano, esattamente come i *Monatsgespräche*, all'interno di una fase di sperimentazione che coinvolgeva i generi tradizionali. Anch'essi erano fortemente ibridi e contenevano al loro interno sezioni compilative, in cui venivano integrati estratti tratti da generi letterari più tradizionali come re-

¹⁴ 4: «Als im Ausgang des vorigen Jahrhundert die Gelehrten sich vergnügen an den Geschichts-Calendern hoher Häupter, vornehmer und berühmter Geistlichen von allen drey Religionen; etc. so war man sonderlich im Anfange dieses Seculi bedacht, nach dem bekanten Sprichwort: *Varietas delectat*, die Leser mit einigen andern Arten Schrifften zu divertiren. Die kurtz vorher angefangene Monath-Schrifften kamen nun häufig unter allerhand Tituln heraus. Bald sahe man Journale, Auszüge der Journale, aufgefangene Briefe, Missiven, Famen, etc. und so einige Dutzend mehr. Unter allen aber haben wohl am längsten gedauert die *Acta Eruditorum*, *Europäische Fama* und die *Gespräche im Reiche der Todten*. Was diese letztere betrifft, so hat man manches Käysers, Könige, Fürsten und Herren, hoch berühmter Etats-Männer, vortrefflicher Gelehrten etc. Lebens-Laufe und viele Merckwürdigkeiten, so in ihrem Leben sich begeben, mitgetheilet» (trad. mia).

¹⁵ Sui testi menzionati nelle pp. che seguono cfr. Suitner 2016. Su altri dialoghi dei morti della prima età moderna cfr. Rutledge 1974; Egilsrud 1934; Marcialis 1989; Keener 1973.

censioni, dissertazioni accademiche, biografie e sermoni funebri. Essi inoltre possedevano una sorta di embrionale serialità, dal momento che alcuni, come quelli appena citati tra Thomasius e Francke, si avvicendarono uno dopo l'altro in una sorta di numerose 'puntate', scritte da autori diversi e in concorrenza tra loro. Il legame con l'attualità era molto forte, in quanto i dialoghi furono pubblicati alla morte dei loro protagonisti e puntavano sulla curiosità sorta attorno a loro da parte di studenti, colleghi e privati cittadini. Anche gli autori di questi dialoghi beneficiavano della possibilità, garantita proprio dal genere impiegato, di esprimere certe opinioni in modo sottile e implicito, dietro lo schermo dell'anonimato e di una professata (ma mai attuata) imparzialità.

Vi erano tuttavia in questo corpus di dialoghi degli elementi diversi e in un certo senso più radicali rispetto alla rivista di Thomasius. Le fittizie conversazioni messe in scena tra filosofi appartenenti a generazioni diverse e la sede pensata per queste conversazioni creava una serie di cortocircuiti temporali che accentuavano ed esasperavano caratteristiche già presenti nei *Monatsgespräche*. La forma di dialogo dei morti permetteva agli autori dei testi di far entrare direttamente in scena filosofi di generazioni differenti, creando dei caratteri fittizi e distorcendo in modo tendenzioso il profilo 'storico' dei protagonisti: troviamo allora, tra gli altri, un Descartes antipietista e antiwolffiano e un Leibniz sostenitore della fisicoteologia e avversario delle poetiche che seguivano il metodo matematico wolffiano uscite negli anni Quaranta del secolo (Anonimo 1731; 1745). Ai protagonisti dei dialoghi venivano fatti commentare avvenimenti accaduti successivamente alla loro morte, principalmente con l'intento da parte degli autori di prendere posizione nelle controversie legate alla filosofia di Christian Wolff che infiammavano all'epoca il mondo accademico tedesco, in accordo con la situazione generale del genere del dialogo nella Germania settecentesca, che era molto usato come veicolo di polemiche intellettuali anche nelle controversie che coinvolgevano Wolff e i suoi avversari (cfr. per es. Anonimo s.a., [Tilesius] 2000). Lo stesso discorso valeva anche per libri e recensioni, che si immaginano letti e discussi nel regno dei morti dai protagonisti dei dialoghi: sia libri propri e di altri che recensioni, anch'esse di libri propri o di altri. I dialoghi contengono dunque di fatto numerose sezioni assai simili alle recensioni dialogiche dei *Monatsgespräche*. L'assidua comunicazione tra vivi e morti, la distinzione tra 'regno delle lettere' e 'regno dei morti', che riservava a chi si trova nel regno dei morti la possibilità di dire la verità senza ipocrisie, l'accesso alla lettura da parte dei filosofi, erano tutti escamotages che permettevano agli autori di immaginare caratteri e posizioni filosofiche completamente discordanti dalla realtà storica.

La galassia delle riviste e degli scritti in qualche modo a esse imparentati, che pubblicavano dibattiti e recensioni filosofiche in forma dialogica nella Germania della prima metà del Settecento è molto più complessa di così, e meritevole di essere indagata ulteriormente: possiamo ricordare *Gundlingiana* di Nikolaus Hieronymus Gundling (che nel 1715 ospitò un *Gespräch zwischen Michel Montaigne und dem Archimedes*), le *Neue Unterredungen* dello stesso Gundling (1702) e le *Novellen aus der gelehrten und curiösen Welt* di Gottfried Zenner (1692-1697). Inoltre, come nella rivista di Thomasius, giurista e filosofo, si recensivano anche pubblicazioni

afferenti ad altre sfere del sapere, poteva accadere anche il contrario, ovvero che riviste dirette da non filosofi, in accordo con la concezione thomasiana, toccassero anche temi filosofici. Ne è un esempio la rivista *Monatliche Unterredungen einiger guten Freunde von allerhand Büchern und andern annehmlichen Geschichten* pubblicata tra 1689 e 1698 da Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel, strutturata in forma di conversazioni proprio secondo il modello dei *Monatsgespräche*, che era divenuto da subito paradigmatico. Tentzel era il direttore del gabinetto numismatico (Münzkabinett) di Schloss Friedenstein a Gotha, il castello della dinastia Coburg-Gotha (e, nel suo ramo inglese, futura dinastia Windsor) e quello che si definiva all'epoca un *Polyhistor*, al centro di una fitta rete di corrispondenti, tra cui Leibniz e Magliabechi (Hartmann 2002; Mulsow 2013; Habel 2013). La sua rivista fu una delle prime sedi in cui in Germania fu presa in considerazione l'opera del cartesiano Balthasar Bekker: il numero di febbraio del 1692 aveva infatti ospitato una discussione tra le due figure fittizie di Leonardus e Antonius sulle dirompenti novità contenute nel *Betoverde Weereld*, e sul lungo processo intentato contro Bekker dopo l'uscita dei primi due volumi dell'opera (Tentzel 1692, 109-31). L'anonimia, le garanzie d'imparzialità, la struttura dialogica che abbiamo già visto in Thomasius si rivelavano strategie particolarmente preziose per gli intellettuali di corte come Tentzel, che se da un lato ci tenevano a presentarsi come personalità intellettuali indipendenti, dall'altro si muovevano evidentemente nella cornice di rapporti di dipendenza tipici del mecenatismo (Suitner, 2025).

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Reviewing Machiavelli: German Journals and the Politics of the Enlightenment

Pasquale Terracciano

Abstract: The essay explores how German learned journals between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries mediated the reception of Machiavelli and Italian Renaissance thought. Through the analysis of reviews in the *Acta Eruditorum*, *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen* and other periodicals, the paper shows how the figure of Machiavelli evolved from theological scandal to object of philosophical debate. The review becomes a lens through which the moral and political conscience of the German Enlightenment took shape—balancing virtue, power, and historical judgment. Particular attention is given to Christian Thomasius, who used reviewing as a form of moral reasoning, and to the vast critical debate surrounding Frederick II's *Anti-Machiavel*. Ultimately, the paper argues that the philosophical review was not a secondary genre but a space where modern political thought and the ethics of criticism were forged.

Keywords: Machiavelli, German Enlightenment, Journals, Anti-Machiavel, Thomasius.

1. The Framework of the Renaissance

The presence of Renaissance authors in German periodicals—Machiavelli aside—is noteworthy though not quantitatively overwhelming. We stand on the threshold of the *invention* of the Renaissance—a construct born, to put it succinctly, from the encounter between the French Enlightenment and, later, the philosophical and cultural traditions of the German world, until Burckhardt finally codified the historiographical myth of the Renaissance. Yet for certain Renaissance authors a crucial turning point in their posthumous fortunes was determined by the reinterpretation that classical German philosophy gave to their thought. It is therefore of particular interest to observe how these figures were registered and discussed in contemporary learned journals, how their works circulated in the European editorial landscape, and how their “subterranean persistence” can be traced within this cultural and geographical framework. In 1682, the *Acta Eruditorum* reported the publication of Pico della Mirandola's *Epistolarum liber*, edited by Christoph Cellarius (*Acta Eruditorum* 1682, 184). References to Pico appear sporadically in other texts, but his presence is, on the whole, limited. The same applies to Marsilio Ficino, of whom three reviews appear in connection with the 1744 Leipzig edition of the *Phaedo* edited by Winkler (*Nova*

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Acta Eruditorum 1745, 717–20). This relative scarcity must be contextualized: Pico's reputation in the early eighteenth century corresponded to the limited fortune of the platonic philosopher of the fifteenth century, which would grow in German territories in the centuries to come. The fortune of Giordano Bruno was instead in an ascending phase, as attested by the treatment devoted to him by Jacob Brucker in his *Historia Critica Philosophiae* (Brucker 1744, IV, pars 2, 786; V, pars 2, 12–62). From this point on, the publication of several Latin extracts and important biographical clarifications by Heumann in *Acta Philosophorum* stands out (Heumann 1724, 432). And yet it is interesting to note that, in the review of Gautier's *Bibliotheca philosophorum et eruditorum* published in the *Acta Eruditorum* in 1724, it is lamented that nothing has been transmitted about certain important authors whose texts are difficult to find—one of the examples given is that of Bruno (Heumann 1724b, 46).

More abundant are references to Giulio Cesare Vanini.¹ The 1709 *Acta Eruditorum* reviewed *De vita et scriptis famosi athei Julii Caesaris Vanini*, situating the renowned “Italian atheist” within a genealogy of unbelief rooted in Italy—a lineage including Aretino, Poggio, Pomponazzi, Campanella, Cardano, Machiavelli, Cesalpino, Cremonini and others. Vanini is placed among the disciples of Pomponazzi, portrayed as the intellectual father of all atheists; elsewhere he is described as even worse than “Peretto” (*ipso non satis bono, longe deterior*). Lutheran theologians reconstructed his biography following the *Lexicon* of 1709, weighing accusations of atheism (Raynaud, Lacroze, Schramm, Morhof) against exculpatory readings as those of Olearius, Arpe, Diecmann (*Acta Eruditorum* 1709, 260–64).

Thus, Italian thinkers were portrayed, on the one hand, as irreligious, and on the other, as victims of Rome's intolerance—two well-established themes of Protestant polemic that shaped the German intellectual perception of the Renaissance. Machiavelli's case follows this general pattern shared by other Renaissance authors, though with a moment of rupture that significantly alters the picture, as we'll see.

2. The Afterlife of Machiavelli

At this point, it is worth briefly retracing the thread of Machiavelli's presence in Germany. The Italian Renaissance played a distinctive role in shaping German thought, and within it Machiavelli occupied a singular position—not merely as a symbol of intrigue, but as a key voice in debates on *racion di Stato* and as a potential interlocutor for a politically fragmented Germany seeking unity (Procacci 1995). For this reason, studies on his reception in German-speaking Europe are by no means lacking; yet even recently it has been pointed out that the history of Machiavelli in Germany is still far from fully written (Macor 2015; Robertson 2017; Biasiori-Presezzi 2025).

¹ *Acta Eruditorum* 1709, 260–64; *Acta Eruditorum* 1711, 419–24; *Acta Eruditorum* 1713, 173–74; *Acta Philosophorum* 1715, 10; *Acta Philosophorum* 1716, 568, 585, 600–1; *Acta Philosophorum* 1718, 230, 388.

A crucial vehicle for the diffusion of Machiavelli's thought and myth beyond Italy was Italian emigration—particularly that motivated by religious exile. The first Latin edition of Machiavelli, printed in Basel by the Lucchese émigré Perna at the end of the sixteenth century, provoked controversy yet made his writings accessible to scholars across Europe (Kaegi 1940; Terracciano 2016).

Another major channel for the spread of the Machiavellian myth in the German world was the Catholic *anti-Machiavellian* campaign, especially through the activity and publications of the Jesuits. One of the most emblematic episodes occurred at the Jesuit college of Ingolstadt, where Machiavelli's portrait was publicly burned in effigy, described in scathing terms as that of a “cunning and deceitful man, author of diabolical ideas, assistant to the devil.” (Schoppe 1619) The episode is recorded in a manuscript by Caspar Schoppe—the same author who reported the burning of Giordano Bruno. Schoppe, a Protestant convert to Catholicism, sought through his notes to mitigate Machiavelli's most scandalous aspects, an endeavor that culminated in his *Paedia Politices*, published in Rome in 1623. The work aimed at a moral and philosophical “normalization” of Machiavelli's figure, possibly nourished by Schoppe's encounter with Campanella.

It is for this reason that Schoppe's work was reprinted in 1663 by the Protestant Hermann Conring, who a few years earlier had completed a new Latin translation of *Il Principe* accompanied by a commentary (Machiavelli 1660). Conring's scholarly intention was to strip the text of the layers of polemical pamphleteering that had accumulated over time, treating Machiavelli instead as a genuine political theorist whose ideas should be evaluated independently of moral judgment.

Not everyone, however, was ready to abandon the “black legend.” Reacting against Schoppe's *Paedia Politices*, the Jesuit Heinrich Wangnereck published the *Vindiciae politicae adversus pseudo-politicos* (1636), reiterating the Counter-Reformation condemnation of the Florentine Secretary and describing yet another burning in effigy of Machiavelli at Ingolstadt—this time as part of a satirical theatrical performance organized by university students. A similar tone and vocabulary appear in *Promontorium Male Spei* by the Jesuit Paul Zehentner (1643).²

The true turning point, however, came with Hermann Conring's 1660 translation of *Il Principe*. For Conring, Machiavelli remained above all a theorist whose objective was to describe the universal laws governing all forms of government; his interpretation, therefore, did not differ substantially from that of Schoppe. Yet this new translation marked a shift: from the earlier pamphlet-driven controversies to a more philological and scholarly engagement. From the final decades of the seventeenth century onwards, discussions about *The Prince* increasingly entered the learned republic of letters.

Although their concerns remained primarily erudite, the proliferation of references to Machiavelli laid the groundwork for a broader reconsideration of his work—a process through which the Florentine thinker began to emerge not

² In connection with the framework outlined above, see Terracciano 2024.

merely as a moral problem, but as a foundational yet deeply problematic author in the genealogy of modern political thought, one whose warnings demanded careful attention. In other terms the history of Machiavelli's reception in Germany between 1678 and 1810 evolved significantly, moving from explicit demonization to nuanced philosophical and dramatic exploration of political pragmatism.

3. Machiavelli in the Journals

Across the German learned journals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one can identify roughly seventy references to Machiavelli—encompassing not only a) editions of his works, but also b) texts related to Machiavellian themes and c) reflections inserted within reviews of other authors. This wide spectrum of mentions attests to the persistent, though evolving, fascination exercised by Machiavelli within the *Respublica litteraria*.

The *Acta Eruditorum* of 1692 offers a telling example, briefly but sympathetically noting a new French edition of the *Discorsi* (*Discours politique de Machiavel, – Nicolai Machiavelli ad primam Decadem Historiarum Titi Livii Discorsi Politici* Amsterdam, H. Desbordes 1691), likely penned by Otto Mencke,—mathematician, polymath, and, together with Leibniz, founder of the *Acta*. The notice praises Machiavelli's "profound knowledge of political science" in analyzing the rise of the Roman Republic and regards his *Discorsi* as worthy of continued study despite ecclesiastical hostility. It reads:

This is a new edition of a book that is not new, having passed through the hands of scholars for more than a century and a half, now accompanied by a French translation. It is a work written in 1530 by Niccolò Machiavelli, a famous man who, in the catalogues of prohibited books commonly used in the Roman Church, is honoured with the title of atheist and pseudo-politician. Yet no one can easily deny that he revealed a profound knowledge of political science in his commentaries on the Decades of Livy, in which he narrates the origins and expansion of the Roman Republic. Thus, his book, once greeted with applause, has been deemed worthy by learned men to be translated not only into Latin under the title *Disputationum de Republica*, but also into French and English. The author, after suffering the hatred of the Roman clergy, seems to have deserved well of his fellow citizens, having decided to republish this book adapted to the style of the age so as to make it more pleasing to readers (*Acta Eruditorum* 1692, 178–179).

No mention is made here of *Il Principe*, yet the passage provides an important early testimony of appreciation for the *republican* Machiavelli—the thinker of civic virtue and political prudence, rather than the theorist of princely manipulation. The *Acta Eruditorum*'s acknowledgment of his "profound knowledge of political science" signals a shift in tone: it is a cautious rehabilitation within a learned context that begins to distinguish between Machiavelli's historical analysis and his moral reputation. This review stands as one of the first marker of the German Enlightenment's willingness to engage with Machiavelli not as

a moral scandal but as a political classic—a thinker whose republican writings could now be read with scholarly sympathy, detached from the polemical excesses that had long defined his image.

In 1714, the *Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen der Aufklärung* reported a German edition of several Machiavellian works—*The Prince*, the *Life of Castruccio Castracani*, and a *Life of Borgia*—published under a fictitious imprint as *Lebens und Regierungsmaximen eines Fürsten* by Peter Marteau. Translator Carol Arnd, professor at the University of Rostock, prefaced it accusing Machiavelli of blasphemy and of being “a man without conscience,” and placing him first among the “false politicians,” a reminder that moral suspicion lingered even within Protestant academia, where Machiavelli was habitually reduced to a symbol of cynical statecraft and impiety. Yet even this hostile reception attests to the continued vitality of his name within the German learned public: the very need to denounce him proves his ongoing intellectual presence (*Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen der Aufklärung* 1714, 94–96).

A turning point in the more balanced reassessment of Machiavelli came with the publication of *De Nicolao Machiavello libri tres* (1731) by Johann Friedrich Christ, promptly reviewed in the *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. A student of Christian Thomasius, academic, and later rector of the University of Leipzig, Christ embodied one of the first genuine attempts within European scholarship to read and interpret the Florentine Secretary’s works historically and without prejudice. The *Neue Zeitungen* review, published in May of the same year, praises precisely this methodological rigor and the author’s commitment to restoring intellectual accuracy to the study of Machiavelli:

Since this study pertains to the history of scholarship and to a deeper understanding of the theory of the State, and since it is, to some extent, necessary in order to avoid various errors, it is essential to have reliable information about the life, writings, and opinions of the famous Machiavelli. However, such information has so far proved deficient and difficult to obtain from other sources. This has led the author to believe that his new investigation will be both useful and welcome to most scholars. To this end, he has provided in an extensive preface the reasons that motivated him to undertake it, and has defended his inquiry with humility against various objections (*Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen* 1731, 324–25).

Christ’s *De Nicolao Machiavello libri tres* thus marks a fundamental moment in the German Enlightenment’s intellectual encounter with Machiavelli. No longer the diabolical counselor or “atheist politician” of Counter-Reformation polemic, Machiavelli begins here to emerge as a historical figure whose works can be examined critically, philologically, and politically. The Leipzig scholar’s insistence on accurate documentation and systematic interpretation paved the way for the later eighteenth-century rediscovery of Machiavelli as a political thinker, not merely a moral problem—a development that would culminate, only a decade later, in the great European debate surrounding Frederick II’s *Anti-Machiavel*.

Among the most intriguing and intellectually rich references to Machiavelli in the German learned journals is an intervention by Christian Thomasius, which belongs to the third category of allusions—not to editions or explicit treatises, but to broader reflections embedded in other critical discussions. It appears in an article entitled *Schertz- und ernsthaffter, vernünfftiger und einfältiger Gedancken über allerhand lustige und nützliche Bücher und Fragen* (1689), concerning Robert Knox's *Reise Beschreibung von der in Ost-Indien gelegenen Insel Ceylon in Englischer Sprache heraus gegeben durch Robertum Knox, Schiff-Capitein in Engelland*. Thomasius, writing in the *Monatsgespräche* (1689), argued that polemics against Machiavelli had produced little effect: princes did not need Machiavelli to govern tyrannically, since tyranny arose from corrupted will, not from political theory. Such observations revealed skepticism toward the very genre of antimachiavellian literature that would soon gain prominence.

The text is particularly significant for three reasons: first, it is one of the earliest citations of Machiavelli within the corpus under consideration; second, it comes from one of the most prominent figures of German early Enlightenment thought; and third, it anticipates several themes that would later recur in more systematic treatments of Machiavelli, influencing subsequent authors such as Christ and Reimmann. Knox's travel narrative—*An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon in the East Indies*—contains a vivid description of a tyrannical regime ruling over the island. It is in this context that Thomasius introduces his extended excursus on Machiavelli. He writes:

As often as a politician, who has superficially memorized Gracián's *Homme de Cour* and wishes to apply it in practice, seeks to make his fortune at this king's court, just as often does the king himself act according to the teachings of Machiavelli. And now that I mention Machiavelli—has not this poor devil been written against and disputed over to such an extent that, in an excessive desire to refute him, men have fallen into the opposite extreme, giving rise to a new sect, the Monarchomachs? I have long pondered these common errors. I do not intend to defend Machiavelli's doctrines, nor to excuse him as though he had satirically mocked the illegitimate rule of the Italian princes. Yet it seems to me that the disputes against him have had little or no success. [...] The fault of tyrannical princes lies not in their understanding, but in their will. Even if their intellect were greater, do the anti-Machiavellians truly believe that princes will read their magnificent works? When the will is corrupt, it is not necessary for great lords to take lessons from Machiavelli or others like him on how to establish a tyrannical government. The King of Conde-Uda, for instance, has never seen a book by Machiavelli, and yet his understanding in this matter seems in no way deficient. Once pride and cruelty have taken root, his own intellect spontaneously suggests to him the Machiavellian means to apply. The learned Weise of Zittau has already depicted this vividly in a charming comedy entitled *Der Bäurischer Machiavellus* ('The Peasant Machiavelli'), defending Machiavelli with subtle humour. What use is it to teach the young to refute Machiavellian doctrines with syllogisms in *Barbara and Darapti*, when they see Machiavellian

selfishness practiced everywhere, by great and small alike? Or when, through the example of the anti-Machiavellians themselves—who often observe more faithfully in their deeds the doctrines they condemn—they are inevitably led to imitation? True learning does not consist in the art of attacking false opinions, but in the search for truth that leads to a virtuous life (Thomasius 1689, 580–98).

Thomasius's passage is of remarkable depth. It criticizes the futility of intellectual polemic against Machiavelli's doctrines when, in practice, those very doctrines are continuously enacted by both rulers and their moral critics. The real issue, he argues, is not intellectual error but the corruption of the will—tyranny is born not of ignorance, but of moral vice. Hence, genuine erudition should aim at the pursuit of truth and the cultivation of virtue, rather than the sterile refutation of abstract ideas. Thomasius's reference to Christian Weise's drama *Der Baurischer Machiavellus* (1679) enriches the discussion. Weise—a Protestant writer, political theorist, and former pupil of Hermann Conring—used the infernal mythology surrounding Machiavelli to stage a celestial court, presided over by Apollo, where the Florentine is accused of corrupting mankind. A character called "Gentilletus" (an evident echo of Innocent Gentillet) repeats the traditional anti-Italian and anti-Medicean argument according which Machiavelli's writings indirectly caused the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Machiavelli defends himself by asserting that his intention was satirical: to expose, not to encourage, the vices of tyrants. Nonetheless, he is admonished as a paradigmatic example of the misuse of intellectual gifts.

In Thomasius's reading, however, Machiavelli acquires a subtly utopian dimension: the possibility of transforming political knowledge into moral reflection. His remarks, beyond their moral thrust, anticipate the approach later adopted by Johann Friedrich Christ—the call to study Machiavelli concretely, historically, and without prejudice.

4. The *Anti-Machiavel* and the Eighteenth-Century Debate

The decisive moment in the German debate on Machiavelli and Machiavelism: the publication of Frederick II's *Anti-Machiavel*, with its successive clandestine and authorized editions around 1740–1741—a work that would crystallize the Enlightenment's moral and philosophical confrontation with the Florentine Secretary. The book, as it is very well known, was composed by the young Frederick of Prussia, and edited and brought to press by Voltaire in 1741. The book was quickly reviewed in leading German periodicals. Frederick II's *Anti-Machiavel* opens with its now-famous statement:

In the field of morals, Machiavelli's *Prince* is what Spinoza's work represents in the field of faith: Spinoza undermined the foundations of religion, seeking above all to destroy it; Machiavelli corrupted politics with the intent of annihilating the principles of sound morality. The errors of the former were speculative, those of the latter practical. Yet whereas theology has warned us against Spinoza, only a few moralists have attacked the pages of the Florentine (Frederick II 1958, 169; English translation is mine).

Machiavelli's writings, Frederick insists, "corrupt the young and the naïve," but their greatest danger lies in the fact that—being a handbook for rulers—they corrupt those who govern: "and kings with a corrupted morality do greater harm than natural cataclysms." (Frederick II 1958, 169).

The publication of *Anti-Machiavel* unleashed a veritable flood of reviews across the German learned press, most of them enthusiastic or at least deeply respectful of the young Prussian prince's philosophical ambition. The first notice appeared in the *Frankfurtische Gelehrte Zeitungen* in June 1740, on the Amsterdam edition published by von Duren: "There are only few who think about such matters as they should, and among them the author surely deserves the first place" (*Frankfurtische Gelehrte Zeitungen*, June 1740, 102–103). Equally positive were the reviews printed in the *Hamburgische Berichte von neuen Gelehrten Sachen*, the *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*, and the *Nöthiger Beytrag zu den Neuen Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. The *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen* published two separate notices in 1741—one distinctly enthusiastic, the other briefer and more neutral in tone.³

In March 1742, the *Acta Eruditorum* reviewed Frederick's treatise in explicitly celebratory terms:

We begin with the mention of a small work that stands nobly against illustrious adversaries. The author himself possesses an enlightened and noble mind, formed by God as a rare example, and brought onto the stage of the world to unite humanity with virtue, both by precept and example. This great hero—another Antoninus the Philosopher—wrote down, a few years ago, thoughts dictated by his luminous spirit. Though young, he was wholly devoted to wisdom and virtue. He resolved to instill within himself precepts of prudence so composed that they may serve as a *speculum principis* and as a source of salvation and happiness for all mankind. The author entrusted the manuscript to Voltaire, who, with the permission of the Most Serene Author, brought it to light. Since Machiavelli's poison now circulates publicly, it is fitting that the antidote should as well. It is indeed extraordinary that an author so exalted, neither born nor raised in France, has composed in that language a work so noble, vigorous, and pure.

This tone of almost reverential admiration dominates most of the German reception. Yet a few notices stand apart, revealing the complexity of the debate. Of particular interest is an anonymous essay published in the *Frankfurtische Gelehrte Zeitungen* on 27 June 1741, situating the review of the *Anti-Machiavelli* within the broader context of justice in public administration and the judiciary. The writer acknowledges his inspiration from "a work praised with many eulogies in the learned journals under the title *Anti-Machiavel*, said to be authored by a great prince and edited by the famous French poet Voltaire." Developing

³ *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen* (1741, 73–5; 184); *Hamburgische Berichte von neuen Gelehrten Sachen* (1741, Bd. 10, 107–11); *Nöthiger Beytrag zu den Neuen Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen* (1741, 237–38; 253–54; 776).

his own reflections on justice, he warns against the seductions of power: “The greater the power, the more easily one may permit oneself arbitrariness against justice—or, as we say, govern and judge in a Machiavellian manner.” The treatise closes in a quasi-apocalyptic tone: “Thus it remains in accordance with the word of God: let the wicked remain wicked, and the righteous remain righteous; for His judgment is that of God, to render to each according to his works.”

Although veiled in theological rhetoric, the text seems to imply a certain distance from Frederick’s own political conduct—a subtle skepticism that perhaps recognized the contradiction between his theoretical critique of Machiavelli and his practical pursuit of *Realpolitik*.

This ambivalence emerges even more clearly in the reception of Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre’s *Réflexions sur l’Anti-Machiavel* (1740), the philosophical and critical essay written in response to Frederick II. Saint-Pierre’s work is not a direct attack on Machiavelli, but rather a moral and political reflection on the ideal of the “just prince,” contrasted both with Machiavellian thought and, to some extent, with the moralistic simplifications of Frederick’s text. As an Enlightenment reformer and utopian thinker, Saint-Pierre advances a rational and pacifist vision of political power, grounded in principles of justice, the common good, and fair administration.

The *Hamburgische Berichte von neuen Gelehrten Sachen* of 1742 review the work approvingly, noting how Saint-Pierre turns Frederick’s arguments toward a pacifist ideal: the rejection of Machiavellianism becomes, here, an appeal to reason and peace, transforming Frederick’s moral protest into a program of perpetual concord (1742, 21–3).

Equally significant is the notice published that same year in the *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen on Machiavel Républicain tegens den Anti-Machiavel verdedigt* (“The Republican Machiavelli Defended against the Anti-Machiavel”). The tone is calm and measured, yet the very act of defending Machiavelli in print against Frederick’s assault marks a new phase in the European debate (1742, 491–92). The *Nöthiger Beytrag*, by contrast, dismisses the same work harshly, reaffirming the Prussian monarch’s moral authority (1742, 215–17).

Through these layered and often contradictory reactions, the German learned press of the 1740s constructed a polyphonic image of Machiavelli: between condemnation and rehabilitation, moral critique and political admiration. The Enlightenment thus transformed the Florentine’s legacy into a mirror of its own internal tensions—between virtue and power, moral law and political necessity.

5. Conclusion

The long trajectory traced through German learned journals—from Thomasius’s early remarks to Christ’s systematic inquiry and the wave of reviews prompted by Frederick II’s *Anti-Machiavel*—shows how the German engagement with Machiavelli unfolded less as a coherent intellectual program than as an uneven, often contradictory exploration of pressing philosophical and political questions. Over the course of half a century, the Florentine Secretary

became not so much an emblem of Enlightenment progress as a testing ground for competing interpretive needs: moral suspicion and historical curiosity, political anxiety and scholarly rigor.

In the German context especially, Machiavelli's presence exposes fractures rather than synthesis. Journals in Leipzig, Hamburg, Göttingen, and Frankfurt did not simply "refine" or "rehabilitate" him; they used his name to probe the tensions between princely authority and civic virtue, between erudition and polemic, between normative theory and the observation of political reality. Through these shifting appropriations—admiring, hostile, or ambivalent—Machiavelli emerged as a sensitive indicator of the unresolved dilemmas that marked early modern debates on power, responsibility, and the conditions of political order.

Rather than a reinvention, his German reception appears as a fragmented itinerary: a mirror in which the intellectual uncertainties of the age repeatedly came to the surface.

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Christian Wolff's Reviews of His Own Books

Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero

Abstract: Although Christian Wolff was an exceptionally prolific book reviewer and self-reviewer, this part of his output is largely unexplored. This chapter investigates Wolff's philosophical and mathematical self-reviews to argue that, in spite of their adherence to the source works and lack of self-criticism, they offer valuable insights into his thought. In particular, the chapter aims to show that Wolff's self-reviews may help us understand his intentions and strategies especially in that they complement, emphasize, or reformulate the information contained in the respective source works. The longest section focuses on Wolff's Latin reviews of his German works, with special attention to the Latin rendition of his German metaphysical terminology. The self-translations Wolff performs in these cases—I will argue—are often revealing of his deepest philosophical concerns. The term "perception" is a case in point.

Keywords: Christian Wolff, Self-Reviews, Translation, Metaphysics, Perception.

1. Book Reviews and Self-Reviews

Christian Wolff is among the most prolific authors of philosophical book reviews in history. He debuted at the age of 26 with a review of Italian mathematician Francesco Bianchini's work in the 1705 *Acta Eruditorum* (Wolff 2001 I, 3–8). This marked the beginning of an intense and longstanding collaboration with the journal, whose founder and editor, Otto Mencke, Wolff had met in Leipzig. A reputed mathematician, the young Wolff soon had the opportunity to review Newton's *Opticks*.¹ From mathematics, his expertise gradually extended to the journal's other five categories: he reviewed books on theology, law, medicine and physics, history and geography, and philosophy and philology.

In 2001, Hubert A. Laeven and Lucy J. M. Laeven-Aretz edited five volumes containing four hundred eighty-five book reviews by Wolff. This impressive collection does not exhaust his output: it includes the reviews published in the *Acta Eruditorum* between 1705 and 1731, excluding any he may have written for the *Nova Acta Eruditorum* (the post-1731 rebranded version of Mencke's jour-

¹ Wolff 2001, vol. I, 27–32. This was Wolff's "first major review for *Acta*" (Dyck 2024, 59). On the beginnings of Wolff's collaboration with the journal and his reviews of British authors, see Dyck 2024, 34–8.

nal) or for other scholarly journals.² We should also bear in mind that, since all book reviews in the *Acta Eruditorum* appeared anonymously, the list of Wolff's reviews is actually a list of reviews attributed to him.³

In this paper, I focus on a specific subset of the corpus. Of the four hundred eighty-five book reviews edited by Laeven and Laeven-Aretz, twenty-eight⁴ are reviews of Wolff's own works. Thematically, this sub-corpus reflects the wide scope of Wolff's intellectual output. The self-reviewed works include twelve works of philosophy (including logic, metaphysics, and practical philosophy), nine works of natural philosophy (including experimental and theoretical physics, the life sciences, and natural teleology), five works of mathematics, one miscellaneous work, and Wolff's report on his own mathematical and philosophical teaching.

In reviewing the works of his followers, Wolff also took the opportunity to talk about himself and his own work. Thus, his reviews of authors such as Ludwig Philipp Thümmig and Georg Bernhard Bilfinger can be considered partial self-reviews. A case in point is his review of Georg Heinrich Riebow's 1729 edition of Hieronymus Rorarius's essay on animal reason. Dwelling on Riebow's *Dissertatio historico-philosophica*, which "constitutes the greatest part of the book", the reviewer also praises Riebow's earlier defense of Wolff's *German Metaphysics* against "the objections of the anti-Wolffians".⁵ Referring to the *Dissertatio* and, in particular, to Riebow's historical outline of the doctrine of the animal soul, he emphasizes that this author rightly follows the Wolffian precepts for writing "literary history [*historia literaria*]" and also "retains the definitions that Wolff has given in the *German Metaphysics*" because it would be absurd to "change what has been well established by others" (Wolff 1730c, 175–6).

Another form of partial self-review involves Wolff's reviews of books that include his own contributions, such as prefaces or entire chapters. An example of the former is his review of a juridical treatise by his disciple Johann Ulrich Cramer. Wolff devotes the final lines of the review to promoting his own preface:

Since this excellent specimen of legal reasoning [*demonstrationum in Jure*] can serve as a model [*instar ideae exemplaris*] for others [...], Wolff in the Preface [...] teaches readers the methodical devices [*methodi artificia*] that the Author successfully employs and that they should imitate (Wolff 1731b, 415).

An example of the latter is Wolff's review of Thümmig's 1727 collected papers, which also include two essays by Wolff himself, originally published in 1709 and 1717, respectively (see Thümmig 1727, 265–338 and 339–72). Wolff confines the description of these two contributions to a short final paragraph:

² Wolff collaborated, for example, with the Dutch *Journal littéraire*: see de Vleeschauwer 1952.

³ On the identification of the journal's reviewers, see Laeven 1990 and Laeven and Laeven-Aretz 2014. On Wolff in particular, see the editors' introduction to Wolff 2001, vol. I, IX–XXVIII.

⁴ Or rather, twenty-seven out of four hundred eighty-four, since the reviews of Wolff's *Luculenta commentatio* and *Monitum ad commentationem luculentam*, which the editors list separately (see Wolff 2001, vol. V, 2223), are in fact one single review (Wolff 1723a).

⁵ Wolff 1730c, 175. The work mentioned is Riebow 1726.

Thümmig has added two dissertations by Wolff [*duas* *Dissertationes Wolfianas*]*—*the second one being on the concept of the divine intellect illustrated through the works of nature*—*because he judged them worthy of being rescued from the oblivion that easily afflicts dissertations [*ab interitu vindicentur, qui dissertationibus facile accidere solet*].⁶

Thus, Wolff can also be regarded as one of the most prolific *self*-reviewers of all time. In one instance, he even reviewed his own work twice, namely both the first (1720) and the third (1728) edition of his *Vernünfftige Gedancken von der Menschen Thun und Lassen*.⁷ Obviously, the caveats regarding the professed scope of the 2001 collection and the attribution problem also apply to self-reviews, leaving us to wonder whether the list provided is complete.⁸

In the case of self-reviews, the requirement of anonymity shapes some of Wolff's stylistic choices. When reviewing his own works, he cannot speak in the first person about himself; he must refer to the author in the third person. Effectively, he must split himself into two, so to speak: the work's author and the review's author. Linguistically, this pretense involves using third-person indexicals to refer to the work's author and first-person indexicals to refer to the reviewer. In a passage from his *Ratio praelectionum*, for instance, Wolff refers to the beginning of his career in the first person: "When I was first teaching philosophy in Leipzig [...]"⁹ The corresponding passage in the book review expresses the same spatio-temporal reference by replacing "Leipzig" with a first-person indexical: "[W]hen he [*sc.* Wolff] was teaching philosophy *apud nos*", that is, at "our" university (Wolff 1719, 122). The "University of Leipzig" mentioned in the book becomes "our university" in the review.¹⁰ However, Wolff wrote this review some twelve years after settling in Halle, so Leipzig was no longer *his* university. By using the first-person plural to refer to Leipzig, the anonymous reviewer not only identifies himself as a Leipzig journal staff member (which Wolff indeed was), but also suggests that he is based in Leipzig (which Wolff no longer was). Thus, nothing disabuses the reader of the belief that the book review is written by someone other than the book's author.¹¹

⁶ Wolff 1728b, 133. This mention of the 1717 *Specimen physicae* provides further evidence that Wolff considered this dissertation—which is not included in any volume of his *Gesammelte Werke**—*to be his own work. See Favaretti Camposampiero 2009, 332n.

⁷ See Wolff 2001, vol. III, 1185–95, and vol. IV, 1820–23.

⁸ A more complete list of reviews of Wolff's works, including ones published after 1731 or in journals other than the *Acta Eruditorum*, can be drawn from Ludovici 1748, 604–51. However, Ludovici's catalog does not always specify whether a review was actually written by Wolff himself.

⁹ Wolff 1718, Sect. II, Ch. 3, par. 5: "Cum primum Lipsiae Philosophiam docerem".

¹⁰ Wolff 1718, Sect. II, Ch. 7, par. 3; Wolff 1719, 124.

¹¹ A similar function of the first-person plural indexical has been observed in the self-reviews of another notable eighteenth-century self-reviewer, Albrecht von Haller. See Gantet 2025, 37–8: "The 'we' form, of course, concealed the self-review and gave it an external authority—as if the review had been written by a society of scholars, a university tribunal".

Although quantitatively exceptional, Wolff's engagement in self-promotion was less unusual than it might seem. In nascent early modern journalism, self-review was a relatively widespread practice. As noted by recent scholarship, several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century journals accepted—or even solicited—book reviews directly from the authors, a choice often prompted by the difficulty of finding reviewers competent and scrupulous enough to read the books before reviewing them (see Lécho 2017).

Whereas the intrinsic scholarly value of “normal,” third-party book reviews is beyond question, self-reviews may raise doubts. This phenomenon is certainly relevant to the history of journalism and literary practices; but is the content of self-reviews themselves also worthy of attention? In what follows, I will address this question primarily through Wolff's case. Rather than examining the social dynamics among self-reviewers, journal editors, publishers, and readers, I will focus on the textual relationships between self-reviews and their source works.

Third-party book reviews are primarily interesting insofar as they record an intellectual encounter. Wolff's reviews of British, German, French, Italian, scholastic, Cartesian, Leibnizian, Newtonian, or eclectic authors often provide valuable insights into his readings and reactions. By contrast, his reviews of his own books do not seem to document a genuine encounter, since the distinction between the book's author and the reviewer is mere pretense. One might even argue that these are not genuine reviews. Yet it is worth considering that even self-reviews may document an intellectual encounter—that between the author and their own work. I will adopt the working hypothesis that the self-review of a given work possibly opens up a perspective on the work which corresponds to the point of view of its author—not the author of the work in the making, but the author of the finished work. The distance between writing a book and reviewing it allows the self-review to contribute something non-trivial to the work itself.¹² The following sections focus on some types of discrepancies from the source work that make self-reviews informative and, thus, worth reading.

2. The Metatextual Dimension

Generally speaking, book reviews are metatextual in character—they are texts about other texts. This is especially true of Wolff's self-reviews: they serve as an extended commentary in which the author retraces his own steps and describes his works from a relatively external vantage point. As a genre,¹³ Wolff's self-reviews belong to the broader family of his various metatextual outputs, which include not only portions of his “first-level” works (such as self-prefaces, scholia, descriptions of his works in letters) but also independent compositions

¹² This is consistent with the idea that self-reviews can serve not only as a means of self-promotion but also as a means of self-criticism: see Sgarbi 2025, 9. However, Wolff never seems to exploit this possibility.

¹³ Sgarbi 2025, 8, lists self-reviews as a subgenre of book reviews, along with “critical evaluations, summaries, abstracts, extracts, announcements or advertisements, [...] and letters”.

in the form of self-commentaries and reports on his own teaching or writings. Taken together, these texts provide a metatextual framework that helps us to correctly understand his first-level works. From this perspective, of course, self-reviews of self-commentaries, such as Wolff's review of his 1723 *Monitum ad commentationem luculentam* or of his 1724 *Anmerkungen*, actually belong to a meta-meta-level: they are texts about texts about other texts.

This structural feature of self-reviews is consistent with their function. Indeed, one use of self-reviews in Wolff's dissemination strategy is to provide metatextual information about the origin and internal structure of the reviewed work. They also provide intertextual references that situate the work within the framework of his scholarly output. In particular, Wolff's self-reviews supplement the intertextual information in his first-level works by referencing his earlier publications, announcing forthcoming ones, outlining his program for future activity, informing readers of his German works about his Latin ones, and vice versa.

The review of the *Aërometriae elementa*, for example, points out that Wolff's use of experiments to prove the existence and properties of air conforms to the laws he established "in the *Acta* [*Eruditorum*] of last year" (Wolff 1709b, 26), specifically in the 1708 article on *Leges experientiarum fundamentales*. Thus, Wolff emphasizes the consistency between his treatise on aerometry and his general experimental method. As late as 1713, the review of the *German Logic* refers to the same journal article as containing the essentials of Wolff's doctrine of experience in summary form (Wolff 1713a, 134), while tracing his account of the origin of concepts back to an earlier contribution to the Leipzig journal: his 1707 *Solutio nonnullarum difficultatum circa mentem humanam obviarum* (Wolff 1713a, 133; and see 1707, par. 3-4). A number of references to previous works and their respective reissues and self-reviews appear in the 1720 review of the *German Metaphysics*, which begins as follows:

In the *Acta* of 1717, p. 88 [i.e. in the review of the *Mathematisches Lexicon*], we have mentioned that the Author, Rector Magnificus of the University of Halle, devoted himself to mathematics chiefly for the sake of method, in order to raise the philosophical disciplines—especially ethics and metaphysics—to a higher degree of certainty and self-evidence. Both his *Logical Treatise on the Understanding* [i.e. the *German Logic*]—which we reviewed in the *Acta* of 1713 [...] and which was reprinted in 1719 with the addition of many more examples and especially several rules—and his *Ratio praelectionum*, reviewed in last year's *Acta*, demonstrate more than sufficiently how much he progressed in the knowledge of method (Wolff 1720a, 371).

Here, Wolff also elucidates the method adopted in the *German Metaphysics* by comparing it to the method of his mathematical handbooks. This emphasizes the systematic use of internal references, or *citations*:

Concerning the method by which the Author wrote this metaphysical work, it should be considered to be the same method he used in composing the *Elementa matheseos universae*, even though he did not insert the headings

“definition,” “axiom,” “proposition,” “corollary,” or “scholium,” but preferred to use a continuous nexus of words and break down the chapters into articles, the number of which is 1089. Nevertheless, he employed continuous citations, just as in the *Elementa mathematica* [...] (Wolff 1720a, 372).

Connection is the hallmark of Wolff’s concept of a system. His German and Latin works both make systematic use of internal citations to strengthen the connectedness of their respective philosophical systems. Connection means order: truths that ground others must come first. Thus, by citing the paragraph—whether from the same work or from earlier volumes—where a given proposition has been demonstrated, the philosopher shows that his system complies with this methodological rule.¹⁴ In this sense, even Wolff’s frequent references to his other works in self-reviews serve to present his intellectual output as cohesive and systematically organized.

The above-mentioned 1719 review of the *Ratio praelectionum* was a landmark for Wolff. In later self-reviews, he refers to it as summarizing the essentials of his practical philosophy (Wolff 1721, 36; and see 1719, 124–25) or the empirical foundation of his physics (Wolff 1722, 31; and 1723b, 468; see Wolff 1719, 124). In terms of metatextual content, this self-review is also noteworthy in that it explains how the chapters of the second, philosophical section are organized:

Concerning the single philosophical disciplines, [Wolff] 1) examines the principles upon which he builds his doctrines and reveals how he arrived at them; 2) expounds on the method he uses to teach the various disciplines; and 3) demonstrates their usefulness (Wolff 1719, 121).

In presenting his works to the journal’s readers, Wolff is especially careful to track the parallel development of his bilingual projects. Reviewing his 1710 German handbook of mathematics, he informs “the reader that the Latin edition, too, is already being printed to assist, by the same labor, the efforts of those who do not master the German language, or take more pleasure in Latin” (Wolff 1710, 487). In 1713, the review of the *German Logic* introduced this book as the first in a series of German philosophical works:

Understanding that not many people disapproved of his *German Elements of Mathematics* [i.e. *Anfangs-Gründe aller mathematischen Wissenschaften*], the Author decided to publish some *German Elements of Philosophy* as well. Here is like the first part of it, which expounds the elements of rational philosophy (Wolff 1713a, 133).

In 1724, after publishing a commentary on his *German Metaphysics* to save it from misinterpretations and polemics, he closed the review of this commentary with one eye to the future and the other to the present, while recalling the past:

¹⁴ On this role of internal references or *citationes*, see the Preface to the first edition of the *German Metaphysics*: Wolff 1720b, *Vorrede*, unpaginated.

[The Author] does not deem it necessary to waste time measuring swords with his opponents [...] Thus, in the near future, he will continue and complete the third part of *Physics* on the use of parts [i.e. the *German Teleology*], which was being printed before he left Halle. However, he has decided that, once this is finished, he will devote himself to publishing [his] *Philosophy* in Latin, so that even non-German people [*exteris*] will be able to form an opinion about the Author's doctrines and his opponents' skill [*genio*]. But since the work he has in mind will take several years, in the meantime the *Institutiones philosophiae Wolfianae* that Thümmig is going to publish [...] will serve this purpose (Wolff 1724b, 319–20).

In these final lines, Wolff essentially incorporates the work of his longtime assistant, Thümmig, into his own publication program.

Wolff's self-reviews of his Latin system also reference his German works. Reviewing the *Logica*, Wolff mentions the success of its German precursor, but also emphasizes the new treatise's merit in terms of completeness:

In the 1713 *Acta*, we reviewed the *German Logic* as soon as it came out. It was reprinted five times, and eight thousand copies of it found their way partly into the hands of scholars, partly into the hands of young students. However, it contains only the first rudiments of the present work (Wolff, 1728c, 459).

This book review also provides an interesting list—which does not appear in the source work—of the philosophical disciplines that Wolff considers his own original additions to the traditional division of philosophy:

In addition to the parts of philosophy that are commonly known, the Author also lists: *universal practical philosophy* [...]; *technology*, or the science of arts and artifacts; *philosophical grammar*, *rhetoric*, and *poetics*; the *art of discovery* [*ars inveniendi*], distinct from logic; *general cosmology*, which he was the first to establish as part of metaphysics; *teleology*, which explains the ends and uses of natural things; and the *logic of probability* [*probabilium*] (Wolff 1728c, 457).

Two years later, the review of the *Philosophia prima, sive ontologia* seized the opportunity to promote both the fourth edition of the *German Metaphysics* and the forthcoming *Cosmologia generalis*:

Since Wolffian philosophy captivates the souls of those who long for a certain and useful knowledge of things, the *German Metaphysics*—which we have reviewed in the 1720 *Acta* [...]—came out for the fourth time last year. The Author prefaced this edition with a preliminary discourse in which he clearly shows what weapons it provides to defend natural religion, and what things you would search for in vain in other books. He also teaches how this work should be read, in order for the weapons it offers to be recognized. The *Philosophia prima*, which the Author presents to the learned world as the first part of his metaphysical work, will be soon followed by the *Cosmologia transcendentalis*, treated according to the same method (Wolff 1730d, 86).

In addition to referencing his own works, Wolff's self-reviews also cite other authors. The most significant case is Leibniz, whose mentions in these self-reviews do not always correspond to those in the respective source works. This gives the

impression that Wolff sometimes used his self-reviews to comment on the thorny issue of his debts to Leibniz, an issue which his opponents frequently emphasized to question his originality.

Wolff's first public acknowledgment of Leibniz's impact on his thought is his famous claim in the preface to the *German Logic* that he received "a great light" from Leibniz's 1684 *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis*.¹⁵ Reporting this claim, the review of the *German Logic* explains that Wolff borrowed from Leibniz the criteria for distinguishing concepts according to their clarity and distinctness. At the same time, however, the review points out that Wolff "adds for his part [*de suo*] how we come to obscure or clear, and confused or distinct notions, and when notions finally become adequate" (Wolff 1713a, 133).

The claim to originality even when adopting Leibniz's ideas also appears in Wolff's review of his *Ratio praelectionum*. Whereas this work touches upon the link between the contingency of the actual world and the plurality of possible worlds without mentioning Leibniz,¹⁶ the review credits Wolff with providing a demonstration that Leibniz had failed to supply: "From the nature of contingent things, our [Author] demonstrates the possibility of more than one universe, which Leibniz assumes in the *Theodicy*".¹⁷

The same point is made in the review of the *German Metaphysics*, which informs us that in the theological chapter of this work, Wolff "also demonstrates what Leibniz asserts without demonstration in the *Theodicy*, namely that God contemplates the whole universe in the smallest part of space".¹⁸ This self-review makes similar claims concerning both the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the Principle of Indiscernibles. As for the former, the review acknowledges Leibniz's pioneering effort to "introduce" this principle "in metaphysics", but points out that Wolff "gives a double demonstration of it, whereas Leibniz used to prove it solely by induction" (Wolff 1720a, 372). As for the latter, the review emphasizes that Wolff establishes the Principle of Indiscernibles not only by means of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, "as with Leibniz", but also by means of "the notion of contingent beings".¹⁹ Although this second deduction of the Principle of Indiscernibles is indeed carried out in the *German Metaphysics*,²⁰ its independence from Leibniz is explicitly asserted only in the book review.

¹⁵ Wolff 1713b, *Vorrede*, unpaginated. See Leibniz, A VI 4, 585–92.

¹⁶ See Wolff 1718, Sect. II, Ch. 3, par. 25.

¹⁷ Wolff 1719, 123. This claim echoes Wolff's above-mentioned dissertation on the divine intellect, in which he asserts that Leibniz "assumes, but does not prove, that several worlds [*plures mundos*] are possible" (Wolff 1717, par. 26). See Favaretti Camposampiero 2016, 142.

¹⁸ Wolff 1720a, 382. The corresponding passage from the *German Metaphysics* (Wolff 1720b, par. 964) does not mention Leibniz.

¹⁹ Wolff 1720a, 378. The *German Metaphysics* attributes the Principle of Indiscernibles to Leibniz (Wolff 1720b, par. 589) and mentions his empirical argument for it (par. 590).

²⁰ See Wolff 1720b, par. 587. In a nutshell, this interesting argument assumes that every composite being entails a whole world to rule out the possibility of two perfectly similar things existing in one and the same world.

Thus, Wolff's self-reviews align with his general strategy of claiming originality for his own contributions whenever possible, particularly by crediting himself with proving what Leibniz left unproved. In one case at least, comparing the self-review with the original work shows Wolff downplaying Leibniz's role. Concerning the *ars characteristica combinatoria* (or, to use Wolff's German term, *Verbindungs-Kunst der Zeichen*), the *German Metaphysics* cites a letter to Oldenburg and a passage from the *Miscellanea Berolinensia* as evidence that "Leibniz had an idea [*Begriff*] of this art", and that only the "imperfect state of sciences" prevented him from developing it.²¹ By contrast, the review reduces this to the claim that the "bare name" of the art occurs in one of Leibniz's letters (Wolff 1720a, 375), thereby suggesting that Leibniz introduced merely a name rather than an idea.

3. Zoom Lenses

Apart from metatextual and cross-referential information, what do Wolff's self-reviews contribute to his works? The possible answers range between two extremes, namely from the negative view that they are entirely unoriginal to the positive view that they should be valued as much as his independent, original works. While the positive extreme is hardly plausible, the negative extreme may appear justified at first sight: Wolff's self-reviews are primarily intended to summarize his books. Their approach is almost entirely descriptive rather than evaluative. Just like his reviews of other authors, they provide a clear, orderly, and reasonably detailed overview of the work's content. This is consistent with their purpose of attracting readers while also making the works' contents known to a broader audience than Wolff's actual readership. This is especially true of his Latin reviews of his German works: Latin summaries were essential for dissemination abroad. Moreover, insofar as they were informative rather than critical, privileging description over evaluation, they were less likely to expose him to the widespread prejudice against self-reviewers, who were generally suspected of lacking the impartiality necessary for writing book reviews (see L  chot 2017; Gantet 2025, 36).

Yet, it would be hasty to conclude that Wolff's self-reviews are mere summaries. An obvious difference lies in their material conditions. Like all printed texts, book reviews have intrinsic space limitations, a fact of which Wolff was acutely aware. In some cases, he adduces these constraints as the reason for omitting parts of a book. For example, when reviewing the philosophical section of his *Ratio praelectionum*, he mentions that he would have "more things to report", if he did not "fear that the review would exceed the set limits" (Wolff 1719, 121). In the same vein, at the end of his (unusually long) review of his *German Metaphysics*, he regretfully mentions the theological topics that the review is forced to omit due to

²¹ Wolff 1720b, par. 324. See Leibniz to Oldenburg, 28 December 1675, in Wallis 1699, 621; and Leibniz 1710, 23.

lack of space. Even major theological topics addressed in the final chapter of the *German Metaphysics*—such as the creation and conservation of the world, the permission of evil, and God’s attributes—cannot be included in the book review,

because they are tied together in such a cohesive connection [*adeo concatenato nexu cohaereant*] that they cannot be expounded in few words. And that is the reason why in the review, even if very lengthy, we were compelled to indicate almost only the names of subjects [*nomina argumentorum*] and to abstain from the things themselves (Wolff 1720a, 384).

These lines illustrate the challenge of summarizing systematic writings. Since reviews must condense lengthy arguments into a small amount of space, they cannot reproduce the chain of reasoning that constitutes a system (in Wolff’s sense). For the most part, reviewers can only mention the main topics and theses found in a work, thus leaving much unexplained. Reviews of systematic books, such as Wolff’s, cannot be systematic themselves; they must forgo both systematicity and completeness.

This seems to make the position of self-reviews even worse. The summaries they provide cannot even count as complete (albeit scaled-down) reproductions of the respective works. However accurate, they remain inevitably partial and fragmentary. Yet, from another perspective, precisely this discrepancy from the source work is what makes (self-)reviews more than dull summaries. Forced to select some contents while neglecting others, book reviewers create their own perspective view of the work. They alternate zooming in and zooming out, thereby foregrounding some parts or subjects at the expense of others.

Wolff’s self-reviews are no exception. Rather than allocating space to each topic proportionate to the corresponding section of the work, he often prefers to focus on the specific content he wants to highlight. A case in point is his aforementioned review of his *Anfangs-Gründe aller mathematischen Wissenschaften*. This four-volume work comprises some two thousand pages, ranging from pure mathematics (arithmetic, geometry, algebra etc.) to applied mathematical disciplines (architecture, mechanics, optics, astronomy etc.). Wolff’s review of this massive handbook spans five pages. Unable to outline the content of each section in detail, Wolff focuses on general issues concerning the mathematical method, the applicability of mathematics to science and technology, and the educational purposes, tools, and strategies of his handbook. Specific topics are only mentioned by way of example. At the end of the review, however, Wolff addresses a specific problem regarding the exegetical implications of astronomy. He introduces this subject as an addition to the review:

We do not add anything more specific [*specialiora*], except to note that the Author only follows Kepler in theoretical matters [...]. But for this reason, he is compelled to defend the Copernican system, against which people usually invoke the authority of Scripture (Wolff 1710b, 491).

The review then summarizes Wolff’s attempt to reconcile Copernicanism with the Scriptural episode of the Sun standing still. In short, he argues that

Scripture should be read as a historical text describing both natural and supernatural phenomena as they would appear to onlookers, rather than a scientific text explaining the causes of such phenomena (see Favaretti Camposampiero 2022). In the book, this hermeneutic doctrine is discussed in less than four pages out of two thousand (see Wolff 1710a, vol. III, 345–48). In the review, the corresponding account takes up all the last eighteen lines, which is to say roughly half a page out of five. This disproportionate conclusion to an otherwise compendious review is clearly intended to highlight a “philosophical” passage that might easily escape notice in the depths of a four-volume mathematical work. At the same time, the reviewer’s concern with this specific topic demonstrates its importance to Wolff.²² Although quantitatively irrelevant, the paragraphs on Biblical exegesis are philosophically paramount. The review restores their real significance by adjusting their proportion to the entire work.

4. Reformulations

Even summaries may differ from the source work, insofar as they express the same content differently. Summarizing entails reformulation, which allows for the addition of information, at least in terms of clarity and disambiguation. The brevity of book reviews may prompt reviewers to avoid roundabout expressions and be more straightforward. By retrospectively reformulating their own claims, self-reviewers have the opportunity to clarify the intended meaning of certain passages, provide further explanations, or even venture stronger, less cautious formulations.

A case in point is Wolff’s review of his first book, the 1709 *Aërometriae elementa*. Nearly one-sixth of the review is devoted to the Preface, which actually takes up little more than one-thirtieth of the book, thus offering another example of the disproportion between parts of the source work and parts of the review. The Preface was a milestone in the development of Wolff’s metaphilosophy, as it first publicly expounded his definition of philosophy as “the science of all possible things”, or “the science of possible things as such [*rerum possibilium, qua talium, scientiam*]” (Wolff 1709a, Preface, unpaginated). In his subsequent works, Wolff steadily draws on this definition whenever addressing metaphilosophical issues. However, he never repeats the original formulation, instead trying out various alternatives which arguably involve a gradual shift in meaning (see Favaretti Camposampiero 2023). This process of reformulation already begins in the review of the 1709 book, where the definition is reported as follows: “For him [*sc. Wolff*], *philosophy* is the science of possible things insofar as they are possible [*rerum possibilium, quatenus possibiles sunt, scientia*]” (Wolff 1709b, 24). Four years later, the first edition of Wolff’s *German Logic* adopts a German version of this formulation.²³ However, replacing the original “as such” formulation with

²² The topic is also prominent in Wolff’s review of his *Logica*: see Wolff 1728c, 458–59.

²³ See Wolff 1713b, “Vorbericht,” par. 1: “Die Welt-Weisheit ist eine Wissenschaft aller möglichen Dinge, insoweit sie möglich sind.” See Favaretti Camposampiero 2023, 449n.

an insofar-clause also paves the way for the mature formulation, which splits the notion of possibility into two different modal concepts: “Philosophy is the science of possible things insofar as they can be [*scientia possibilium, quatenus esse possunt*]”.²⁴ Thus, Wolff’s 1709 self-review documents an early stage in this evolution. Two decades later, his self-review of the *Philosophia rationalis sive logica* reports the final stage: according to the definition given in the *Discursus praeeliminarius de philosophia in genere*, philosophy has the task of explaining “how the possible can become actual [*actum consequi*]”.²⁵

In some cases, the review specifies a concept that the book expresses more generically. The review of the *Ratio praelectionum*, for example, summarizes the twenty-six paragraphs devoted to natural theology in just six lines. Nevertheless, whereas the source work simply mentions two different “notions” of God—God as the substance representing all possible worlds to itself, and God as the self-subsistent being—the review distinguishes the one from the other as two different types of definition:

Although [Wolff] establishes that God’s essence consists in the power to distinctly represent all universes, in proving His existence he assumes the nominal definition that God is the substance which contains the sufficient reason for the existence of the universe (Wolff 1719, 123).

This detail, also repeated in the review of the *German Metaphysics*,²⁶ may be relevant to reconstructing the logic of Wolff’s a priori and a posteriori arguments for God’s existence, and their relationship to one another.

In other cases, the review describes the content of the book by employing expressions drawn from Wolff’s vocabulary that do not themselves occur in the text, thereby offering helpful hints to interpreters. A case in point is the theory of cognition expounded in Wolff’s logical works. As mentioned above, this theory owes a great deal to Leibniz’s *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis*. In addition to the distinctions between degrees of conceptual clarity, Wolff also borrows from Leibniz the distinction between intuitive and symbolic thought, which he further develops in his psychological works as a distinction between intuitive and symbolic cognition. Since these terms never occur either in the *German Logic* or the *Latin Logic*, one might be led to conclude that the Leibnizian distinction between two modes of cognition is absent from Wolff’s logic

²⁴ Wolff 1728a, “Discursus praeliminaris de philosophia in genere,” par. 29n.

²⁵ Wolff 1728c, 456. See the corresponding passage in Wolff 1728a, *Discursus praeliminaris*, par. 31. Halfway between 1709 and 1728, Wolff’s *Ratio praelectionum* recovers the “as such” formulation (“Est nempe mihi Philosophia scientia omnium possibilium qua talium”: Wolff 1718, Sect. II, Ch. 1, par. 3). However, when reviewing the book, he omits this expression and simply defines philosophy as “the science of all possibles” (Wolff 1719, 121).

²⁶ See Wolff 1720a, 382: “Atque ita Deum definit definitione nominali, quod sit ens a se, in quo continetur ratio sufficiens existentiae universi”. The source text does not specify the nominal character of this definition. It simply points out that the self-subsistent being is that which “we usually call God” (Wolff 1720b, par. 945).

and pertains only to his psychology. In fact, however, the doctrine of the use of words that Wolff develops in both *Logics*—and especially his claim that the production of intelligible speech is independent of the speaker's actual grasp of its meaning—is grounded precisely in Leibniz's distinction (see Favaretti Camposampiero 2009). Wolff's reviews of both works provide conclusive evidence for this interpretation, as they explicitly employ the Leibnizian terminology. For example, the review of the *German Logic* describes the content of its second chapter by evoking the opposition between the intuition of ideas and the use of symbols:

Among other things, [the Author] points out that we seldom directly inspect [*coram intuitu*] the notions of the things we speak about; rather, it usually suffices, when employing symbols, to recall in a confused way that we once inspected those notions directly. From this he infers that intelligible words do not always correspond to an idea [*verbis intelligibilibus non semper respondeat idea*] (Wolff 1713a, 134).

The review of the *Latin Logic* is even more explicit in linking Wolff's cognitive doctrines to the intuitive/symbolic distinction. Its summary of the "theoretical part" of the work concludes with the following remark:

In treating the individual operations of the mind, [the Author] scrupulously observes the distinction between intuitive and symbolic cognition, and in the first place teaches how deceptive notions [*notiones deceptrices*] derive from the latter (Wolff 1728c, 461).

5. Gained in Translation

Reformulations are even more significant in Wolff's reviews of his German works. Like all other articles in the *Acta Eruditorum*, these reviews had to be written in Latin. This linguistic requirement, however, also served Wolff's dissemination strategy. By reviewing his German works in Latin, he could reach a non-German-speaking audience and thus partially fulfill his international ambitions even before beginning the rewriting of his whole system in Latin. These self-reviews made doctrines originally formulated in German also available in Latin. Because of this shift in language, they are of particular terminological interest. In this case, the reformulation of the source text entails translation from one language into another. By reviewing his books in Latin, Wolff *de facto* attempted an abridged translation of his German system, foreshadowing his subsequent series of Latin works.

As is well known, Wolff's German works were foundational for the development of German philosophical terminology. The self-reviews that accompanied their publication reveal which Latin terms Wolff had in mind when introducing certain German expressions into his philosophical vocabulary, thereby shedding light on their intended meaning. We might even regard these self-reviews as a sort of laboratory in which Wolff tested linguistic strategies for rendering his philosophical system in Latin. As the following examples show, the terminology of metaphysics is especially illuminating in this respect.

5.1 Metaphysics, Its Certainty, and Its Parts

Wolff's review of his *German Metaphysics* is a treasure trove of noteworthy Latin renderings of German expressions. The title, *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*, is translated as *Meditationes de Deo, universo, et mente humana, entibus omnibus in genere*. In the context of metaphysics, the choice of the term "meditations" to render "rational thoughts" arguably betrays a Cartesian inspiration.²⁷ The translation of *Seele* with *mens* is also striking, although the review switches rather freely between *mens* and *anima* (see, e.g., Wolff 1720a, 374). However, the most significant interlingual equivalence in this title is between *Ding* and *ens*, for it shows that, in his earliest exposition of ontology as a branch of metaphysics, Wolff chose the term *Ding* as the German equivalent of the traditional scholastic *ens* (and not *res*). This confirms that Wolff's use of this German term should be translated as "being" rather than "thing," in keeping with the very definitions he provides.²⁸

The *German Metaphysics* consists of six chapters. In the first, Wolff takes the knowledge of our own existence—the Cartesian *cogito*—as the paradigm of certainty. By investigating how we know that we exist, he seeks to explain what makes a cognition certain, that is, as certain as the cognition of our existence. In his account, we cannot doubt that we exist because this proposition follows from two premises whose certainty is "undoubted" (Wolff 1720b, par. 9): the "undoubted experience" of self-consciousness and the axiom that "those who are self-conscious exist" (Wolff 1720b, par. 6–7). Since our inability to doubt our existence rests on the fact that this proposition is the conclusion of a syllogism or "demonstration," Wolff concludes that "everything that is demonstrated in geometrical fashion is as certain as that we exist" (Wolff 1720b, par. 8–9).

In the book review, "certainty" is rendered as *evidentia*. The question at stake is why it is so evident to us that we exist. Wolff's summary of his account of self-evidence introduces the concept of form, which in the source work remains implicit. As the reviewer notes, the author of the *German Metaphysics* "explains more distinctly the manner of inference [*modum illationis*] and derives from this the form of geometrical demonstration", namely the form that demonstrations typically display when subjected to a "perfect analysis" (Wolff 1720a, 372). This specification of the formal character of self-evidence is by no means trivial: certainty here proves to be a matter of logical form. It is the form

²⁷ Two other self-reviews use the expression *Meditationes metaphysicae* to refer to the *German Metaphysics*: see Wolff 1723a, 517; and Wolff 1724b, 310–11. By contrast, the same review mentions the *German Logic*, or *Vernünfftige Gedancken von den Kräfte des menschlichen Verstandes*, as the *Tractatus logicus de intellectu* (Wolff 1720a, 371). Another rendition of "rational thoughts" appears in the review of the *German Logic*, whose title is translated as *Cogitationes rationales de viribus intellectus humani* (Wolff 1713a, 133)—the same title that Wolff would later use for his Latin translation of the work (Wolff 1730a).

²⁸ See esp. Wolff 1720b, par. 16, and Wolff 1730b, par. 134.

of demonstration—its syllogistic structure—that preserves the undoubtedness of the premises and transfers their self-evidence to the conclusion.

The remaining five chapters of the *German Metaphysics* expound Wolff's doctrines concerning: 1) the first principles of knowledge and beings in general, 2) the soul in general, 3) the world, 4) the essence of soul and spirit in general, 5) and God. Rather than listing these subjects in this way, Wolff's review specifies the content of each chapter by naming a discipline: "the second chapter encompasses Ontology or the general cognition of being, the third and fifth chapters Pneumatology, the fourth metaphysical Cosmology, and the sixth natural Theology" (Wolff 1720a, 372). On the one hand, this passage shows that, by 1720, Wolff had already resolved to use the Latin terms *ontologia* and *cosmologia metaphysica* (later *generalis*) to designate the doctrine of being and the doctrine of the world, respectively—terminology consistent with his Latin system. Accordingly, the warning in the German text that the second chapter does not exhaust everything that could be said "about beings in general" (Wolff 1720b, par. 190) becomes, in the Latin review, the caution that this chapter does not present "all ontological notions [*notiones ontologicas*]" (Wolff 1720a, 374). On the other hand, unlike the later Latin treatises, the science of the soul is not yet called *psychologia*; Wolff still employs the more general term *pneumatologia* (literally, the science of spirits). Such details help us understand how the complex structure of Wolff's metaphysics developed from his earliest outlines to the full-fledged Latin system.

5.2 Perceptions

Wolff's complex reception of Leibnizian monadology also presented him with a linguistic challenge, particularly with regard to the theory of perception. Although Wolff was famously skeptical of attributing perceptual power to substances that are not souls—such as Leibniz's "bare" monads—both philosophers at least concur in regarding perception as the fundamental activity of all souls. However, the review of the *German Metaphysics* reveals two puzzling and otherwise elusive differences between the vocabulary of Wolff's psychology and that of Leibniz's monadology. The first concerns Leibniz's doctrine of small perceptions, a key component of his account of both cognition and volition.²⁹ In reviewing the *German Metaphysics*, Wolff explicitly evokes small perceptions to explain the origin of passions from the representation of goods or evils:

More vehement appetites are passions [*affectus*]. Thus, [the Author] shows that every passion involves a confused representation of several goods or evils, which are no more distinguishable than the small perceptions [*perceptiunculae*] of shifting rays of light in the sight of colors, or of the sound of individual waves in the murmur of the restless sea (Wolff 1720a, 376).

²⁹ Leibniz had personally informed Wolff of this doctrine in their early correspondence: see Leibniz to Wolff, 20 August 1705, in Gerhardt 1860, 32.

The Leibnizian comparison between confused representations and the acoustic perception of sea waves also appears in the *German Metaphysics*, where it serves to explain how a number of concomitant, indiscernible representations of goods produces joy in the soul (See Wolff 1720b, par. 446). With regard to appetite and repulsion in general, the work describes them as composed of “many small inclinations”, which are no more discernible from one another than the “many representations” from which they arise (Wolff 1720b, par. 435, 437). However, the German text contains no expression equivalent to “small perceptions” or *perceptiunculae*. The fact that Wolff uses this term only when reviewing his German work in Latin indicates that he had grasped Leibniz’s idea of *petites perceptions* but was somehow reluctant to express it in German and incorporate it into his own system. This hesitation appears to have been more linguistic than theoretical. In the Latin of his later *Psychologia rationalis*, Wolff had no difficulty explaining the composition of confused perceptions of qualities from small perceptions of shapes, sizes, and motions, once again employing the term *perceptiunculae* introduced in the 1720 review.³⁰

The second issue concerns the very concept of perception. Whereas perception is a central notion in Wolff’s Latin psychology,³¹ his German vocabulary lacks a term to express this general concept.³² Consider, for instance, the metaphysically crucial distinction between perceptions and material images: Wolff maintains that whenever the mind represents something to itself, a corresponding representation occurs in the machine of the brain. Although both representations share the same content, they differ in nature, for one is mental while the other is physical. In Wolff’s review of the *German Metaphysics*, the distinction is indeed between “perceptions [*perceptiones*]” and “corporeal representations of things in a machine [*repraesentationes rerum corporeas in machina*]” (Wolff 1720a, 380). Whereas the latter expression simply translates the German phrase *materialische Vorstellungen der Dinge in einer Maschine*, the German phrase rendered in Latin as *perceptiones* is *Gedanken der Seele*, “the soul’s thoughts” (Wolff 1720b, par. 740). In Wolff’s terminology, *Gedanken* denotes a “conscious modification of the soul” (see Wolff 1720b, par. 144); it is thus a less general term than “perception,” whose meaning does not necessarily involve consciousness.

Furthermore, this Latin review explains the metaphysical distinction between mental and corporeal representations as follows:

[The Author] teaches in general that perceptions are representations of the composite in the simple, and differ from painted and sculpted images in that these are representations of the composite in the composite (Wolff 1720a, 380).

³⁰ See Wolff 1734, par. 94 and par. 97. Shortly after Wolff’s 1720 review, the term *perceptiunculae* occurs in Thümmig’s 1721 *Demonstratio immortalitatis animae*, par. 14 (in Thümmig 1727, 166).

³¹ See the definition of *perceptio* in Wolff 1732, par. 24.

³² Significantly, Anton Bissinger resorted to the term *Wahrnehmung* to translate Wolff’s *perceptio*, yet he could find no relevant occurrence in Wolff’s German texts. The instance of *wahrnehmen* he cites (Wolff 1713b, Ch. 1, par. 1; see Bissinger 1970, 67) reveals that Wolff actually employs this verb to denote an act of apperception rather than perception.

Once again, the review generalizes a doctrine that the original work formulates in more specific terms. Indeed, in the *German Metaphysics*, both sensations (*Empfindungen*) and imaginations (*Einbildungen*) are described as representations of composite beings in a simple being, and therefore different from corporeal images such as paintings or sculptures (see Wolff 1720b, par. 749–51). In the German text, Wolff only distinguishes material representations from thoughts, sensations, or imaginations. The Latin review, however, shows that his real intention was to distinguish material representations from perceptions in general, as he would later do in the *Psychologia rationalis* (see Wolff 1734, par. 87 and par. 189). One might say that the 1720 Latin review reveals a gap in the German psychological vocabulary that Wolff failed (or deemed unnecessary) to fill.

Considered together, both issues point to the same absence: just as saying “many representations” instead of “small perceptions” omits their unconscious character, so speaking of thoughts, sensations, and imaginations instead of perceptions in general leaves unconscious perceptions out of the inventory of mental furniture. The Latin review provides evidence that this omission was primarily due to a limitation in the available vocabulary.³³ In Wolff’s terminology, the only German term that possessed a comparable degree of generality was indeed *Vorstellung*, “representation.” Its frequent use in Wolffian and post-Wolffian philosophical language was arguably also a consequence of its use as a substitute for (the missing German term for) “perception.”

5.3 Objectivity and Modalities

Another Latin term for which Wolff appears to have no German equivalent is the adjective *objectivus*, “objective.” The cosmological chapter of the *German Metaphysics* revolves around the mechanistic idea that the world is a machine—a composite being in which all parts are connected in an orderly way, so that every change has a sufficient reason in this connection. Since order is the source of truth, the mechanical structure distinguishes the true world from a dream. Whereas in his Latin works Wolff will call this metaphysical truth “transcendental” (to distinguish it from the logical truth of propositions), in the *German Metaphysics* he simply calls it “truth” (see Wolff 1720b, par. 142 and par. 558–60). Significantly, the Latin review already specifies the kind of truth at stake: “[The Author] shows that the world is a machine and therefore there is truth in phenomena; moreover, in every composite the mechanism is the source of objective truth [*veritatis objectivae*].”³⁴ This expression likely paved the way for

³³ The term *perceptiunculae* is not the only linguistic oddity in this review. To emphasize the idea that bodies are composite beings arising from simple beings or “elements,” Wolff uses the term *elementata* here (Wolff 1720a, 378), which has no counterpart in the *German Metaphysics* (see Wolff 1720b, par. 603) but later reappears in the *Cosmologia generalis* (Wolff 1731a, par. 131n).

³⁴ Wolff 1720a, 377. The Latin word *phaenomena* renders the German *Begebenheiten*, which clearly has fewer metaphysical implications.

Baumgarten's distinction between objective and subjective truth (see Baumgarten 1750, par. 424).

Furthermore, the *German Metaphysics* argues that this orderly mechanistic connection makes all events certain, though not absolutely necessary. Following Leibniz, Wolff carefully distinguishes between absolute or geometrical necessity and hypothetical or "natural" (i.e. physical) necessity [*natürliche Notwendigkeit* or *Notwendigkeit der Natur*] (see Wolff 1720b, par. 575). The Latin review observes that "physical necessity" is merely the popular name for what should more properly be called "objective certainty"—an expression absent from the German work: "The same mechanism is the source of certainty, whose difference from necessity [the Author] perspicuously explains, although people commonly call the objective certainty [*certitudo objectiva*] of phenomena *physical necessity*".³⁵

Some hints for understanding the structure and development of Wolff's modal doctrine can also be gleaned from his self-review of the *Annotations to the German Metaphysics*. When justifying the claim that possibilities do not depend on God's will, the German text employs the Latin expression *possibilitas intrinseca* to denote "the inner possibility of beings, in which their essence consists" (Wolff 1724a, par. 197). In the later Latin system, this concept is formally introduced as part of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic possibility (see Wolff 1731a, par. 111). However, an early formulation of this distinction—along with a remarkable attempt to situate it within a broader modal metaphysical framework—already appears in the review of the *Annotations*:

In every being, [the Author] distinguishes the intrinsic possibility, by virtue of which the being's concept is free from any repugnancy to exist [*repugnantia ad existendum*]; the extrinsic possibility, which is like a sort of disposition to exist [*quasi quaedam ad existendum dispositio*]; actuality itself [*actum ipsum*]; and finally the certainty of future actualization [*futuritionis certitudinem*], commonly called hypothetical necessity.³⁶

5.4 Infinity

In the same set of paragraphs from the *German Metaphysics* discussed in the previous section, Wolff also draws on Leibniz's argument for contingency from infinite analysis. When we attempt to explain why something occurs in the actual world, we can only point to a proximate cause, which in turn is the effect of a previous cause, and so on. This search for reasons leads upstream along an endless chain of contingent causes, none of which can serve as the chain's first, uncaused link. This regress manifests the distinction between contingent facts and necessary truths:

³⁵ Wolff 1720a, 377. Cf. Wolff 1720b, par. 578: physical necessity "should be called only *certainty* [*nur Gewisheit solte genennet werden*]."

³⁶ Wolff 1724b, 313. There is not enough space here to compare this early distinction with the later one, but I suspect that Wolff's position evolved in the meantime.

[C]ontingent events can be actualized only through a series of innumerable other beings that preexisted or coexist with them. Thus, if one seeks to indicate their reason, this always leads to a new reason, without ceasing [*ohne Aufhören*]. By contrast, in what is necessary, one soon arrives at the end; for eventually one finds a reason at which one can stop (Wolff 1720b, par. 579).

In the 1720s, Wolff's opponents cited this passage as evidence of his endorsement of Spinoza's infinite regress in the chain of finite causes. As I have shown elsewhere (see Favaretti Camposampiero 2021, 255), part of Wolff's defensive strategy consisted in denying the charge. Concerning the passage just quoted, he emphasized his use of "innumerable" instead of "infinite" as evidence that he did not intend to commit himself to an infinite regress (Wolff 1724a, par. 201). When I first questioned the sincerity of Wolff's retrospective self-interpretation, I unfortunately overlooked the strongest evidence against it, which appears in his self-review of the *German Metaphysics*. Outlining this work in Latin, Wolff summarizes the argument for contingency quoted above as follows: "Contingent things [*contingentia*] are determined to actuality by an infinite series of causes [*per infinitam seriem causarum*]" and are therefore not comprehended by a perfect analysis" (Wolff 1720a, 377). The Latin reformulation shows no reticence to describe the causal chain as "infinite," contradicting Wolff's later self-declared intention and thereby confirming my reconstruction of this episode. In 1720, his argument for distinguishing contingent events from necessary truths was indeed based on the idea of an infinite causal regress.

In conclusion, if we value philosophical book reviews solely for their capacity to take a critical stance, raise objections, and spark debate, Wolff's self-reviews will inevitably fall short of our expectations. By contrast, if we take the time to compare them with their source works and read them as variations in the way he expressed his ideas, they cease to be mere summaries and instead function as complements to those works. We can then reassess self-reviews as valuable guides for exploring the complexities of Wolff's thought, and appreciate their ability to preserve information that would otherwise be lost.

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Recensire la filosofia ebraica nella Germania dell'età moderna: il caso di Johann Franz Budde

Guido Bartolucci

Abstract: The article examines Johann Franz Budde's ambitious attempt to integrate Jewish philosophy – particularly the Kabbalistic tradition – into the historiography of philosophy within the intellectual landscape of the German Protestant world between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Through a reconstruction of Budde's work, from his early contributions to the *Observationes Literariae* to the *Introductio ad historiam philosophiae Hebraicae*, the study highlights how he positioned ancient Jewish wisdom as the original source of true philosophical knowledge and as a corrective to the perceived corruptions of Aristotelian scholasticism. Central to the article is the analysis of three major contemporary reviews, published in Amsterdam, Hannover, and Leipzig, which evaluate, distort, or neutralize Budde's project. These reviews illuminate how early modern philosophical criticism functioned as an instrument of canon formation, contributing to the subsequent marginalization of Jewish thought in European intellectual history and shaping the boundaries of what counted as “philosophy.”

Keywords: Johann Franz Budde, Jewish philosophy, Kabbalah, Early Modern Reviews, History of Philosophy.

1. Introduzione

Nel corso del Rinascimento, l'ebraismo smise di essere semplicemente una presenza marginale o polemica nel panorama culturale cristiano, e iniziò ad affermarsi come depositario di una sapienza primigenia, capace di dialogare – e in alcuni casi di fondare – le correnti più alte del pensiero europeo. A partire da Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) e Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), l'idea che esistesse una *prisca theologia* – una sapienza antica e rivelata, comune alle più nobili tradizioni religiose e filosofiche – divenne uno dei cardini della nuova cultura umanistica.¹

Nel solco di questa visione si colloca una delle operazioni intellettuali più ambiziose della cultura tedesca tra XVII e XVIII secolo: la riscoperta della filosofia ebraica, non come semplice curiosità filologica o testimonianza dell'“altro” teologico, ma come chiave per rifondare la teologia protestante e il suo rapporto

¹ Sul concetto di *prisca theologia* e il suo rapporto con la riscoperta della tradizione mistica ebraica nel Rinascimento si veda Bartolucci 2017, 16-9; Hanegraaf 2012, 80-6.

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con la filosofia. Questo progetto trovò un protagonista d'eccezione in Johann Franz Budde (1667-1729), teologo luterano, che tentò di collocare la cabala e la speculazione ebraica al centro di una nuova storia della filosofia, capace di spiegare, attraverso la distinzione tra sapienza originaria, rivelazione e corruzione pagana, lo sviluppo delle eresie cristiane e i limiti dell'aristotelismo scolastico.

Budde non era solo: le sue riflessioni si collocavano all'interno di un più ampio movimento di revisione dei fondamenti dell'ortodossia luterana, in dialogo con il pietismo e la nuova filosofia illuminista. E proprio nel contesto accademico della Germania protestante – tra Halle, Lipsia, e Jena (solo per citare alcune importanti università) il suo tentativo di integrare l'ebraismo nella storia della filosofia conobbe fortuna, opposizione e oblio. Questo articolo ricostruisce il progetto filosofico e teologico di Budde, analizzando il contesto intellettuale in cui prese forma, e la sua ricezione, attraverso l'analisi di alcune recensioni, le quali ci permettono di comprendere il modo in cui venne progressivamente marginalizzato in favore di una narrazione della filosofia come tradizione puramente greco-cristiana.²

2. L'eredità della filosofia ebraica tra erudizione patristica e crisi dell'ortodossia luterana

Nel 1704, all'Università di Greifswald, venne discussa una *dissertatio* inaugurale dal titolo provocatorio: *Aristoteles utrum fuerit Iudaeus* (Bollhagen e Bottiger 1704). L'autore, Laurent Bollhagen (1683-1738), si confrontava con un'antica leggenda – già presente in Eusebio di Cesarea, Origene e poi in autori del Rinascimento come Marsilio Ficino – secondo cui Aristotele sarebbe stato influenzato, se non addirittura educato, da maestri ebrei (Del Soldato 2020, 83-6; per Ficino, Bartolucci 2017, 60-1). L'obiettivo di Bollhagen non era tanto ristabilire la verità storica (che ormai nessuno metteva più in discussione), quanto misurarsi con un tema carico di implicazioni teologiche e culturali: il rapporto tra filosofia greca, tradizione ebraica e storia del cristianesimo.

Pochi anni prima, altre tesi simili erano state discusse ad Amburgo (1700) e Rostock (1705), con al centro la figura di Pitagora e la sua presunta ebraicità o conversione all'ebraismo (Mayer e Bandeco 1700; Roflerer e Buchholtz 1705). Anche in questo caso, la messa in discussione della tradizione ebraica associata al filosofo greco si era dimostrata falsa da tempo. Nonostante ciò, il rapporto tra la filosofia greca e la tradizione ebraica continuava ad essere oggetto di discussione.³

² Questo articolo fa parte di un progetto più ampio che intende indagare il dibattito europeo in età moderna sulla filosofia ebraica. Riprenderò alcuni temi in parte discussi in Bartolucci 2025a; 2025b.

³ Marchetti 1996; 1998; 2004. Sulle *dissertationes* discusse nelle università luterane in questo periodo su argomenti ebraici si veda Veltri e Miletto 2012; Veltri 2012; Bartolucci 2025a. Questa critica comprendeva anche il ruolo che i Padri della Chiesa avevano svolto nella storia del cristianesimo e il loro rapporto con la filosofia platonica. Tale attacco, almeno all'interno del mondo luterano, si inseriva in un più ampio dibattito sull'ellenizzazione del cri-

La questione non riguardava più semplicemente la confutazione erudita di affermazioni risalenti alla patristica greca, ma diventava un problema urgente all'interno del mondo accademico luterano: come conciliare la filosofia pagana con la religione cristiana. Questo dibattito investiva direttamente l'insegnamento della filosofia e il suo rapporto con la teologia, così come si era andato definendo dai tempi di Lutero fino alla fine del Seicento. In quel periodo, la Chiesa luterana si trovava a fronteggiare sfide provenienti sia dall'interno che dall'esterno: tra queste, la pubblicazione del *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* di Baruch Spinoza nel 1670, l'ascesa del pietismo e le crescenti critiche all'ortodossia luterana e ai suoi presupposti aristotelici (Marchetti 2004). A partire dalla seconda metà del XVII secolo e per tutta la prima metà del XVIII, la discussione si intensificò all'interno delle università protestanti, dando origine a una vasta produzione di testi che riflettevano sul ruolo della tradizione ebraica nel contesto più ampio della tradizione filosofica occidentale.⁴

In principio (vale a dire a partire dal XVI secolo), la filosofia greca era stata riconosciuta come una delle fonti della corruzione del cristianesimo, in particolare da Lutero. Ben presto, però, il confronto con altre confessioni (calvinismo e cattolicesimo), aveva costretto il luteranesimo a riconsiderare la sua posizione sulla filosofia e, in particolare, sul pensiero aristotelico, inserendolo all'interno del proprio sistema educativo (Malusa 1993, 52-8). Nel corso del Seicento, il rapporto tra filosofia e teologia fu oggetto di attacchi sempre più decisi e sistematici, in un contesto segnato dall'emergere di nuovi metodi filosofici, da una rilettura critica della storia del luteranesimo e da sfide teologiche provenienti sia dall'interno sia dall'esterno della Riforma.⁵ La storia della filosofia acquisì così un ruolo sempre più importante nel dibattito polemico all'interno del mondo luterano. Studiare la storia delle diverse scuole di filosofia significava riflettere sui diversi metodi filosofici utili per comprendere non solo la storia della sapienza umana, ma anche, e forse soprattutto, la storia del cristianesimo, e la storia del rapporto tra i due. In questa prospettiva alcuni autori di questo periodo come Jakob (1622-1684) e Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) e Johann Franz Budde (1667-1729) svilupparono un nuovo modo di interpretare la storia della filosofia.

3. Johann Franz Budde a Halle e le *Observationes Literariae*

A partire dal 1660, e soprattutto dopo la fondazione dell'università nel 1694, la città di Halle si trovava all'incrocio del conflitto che stava attraversando il mondo luterano ed era soprattutto un luogo in cui l'opposizione all'ortodossia stava crescendo, insieme a un'apertura verso il movimento illuminista. La presenza

stianesimo, che però al momento esula dall'ambito di questo saggio. Vedi Hanegraaf 2012, 77-152; Lehmann-Brauns 2004, 7-20.

⁴ Moller e Schwindel 1707; Feverlino e Regenfus 1717; Hoppe e Oldermann 1706; Schramm e Bütemeister 1708; Ritmeier e Bergmann 1709; Hammerer e Culmann 1726; Scharbau e Schröder 1712.

⁵ Si veda Bottin e Longo 2011. Si veda anche Marchetti 1999.

di Christian Thomasius e Budde, per quanto riguarda l'università, e la comunità pietista, in particolare August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), per quanto riguarda la vita religiosa, creò un ambiente predisposto a una critica all'ortodossia luterana su più piani e favorì un ripensamento profondo della cultura prodotta dalle sue istituzioni accademiche (Hunter 2004). Questo fronte aveva degli obiettivi comuni, la critica al dogmatismo, ma aveva anche dei presupposti diversi, come per esempio una diversa idea della natura umana e del suo statuto dopo la caduta, o il ruolo che la filosofia aveva avuto all'interno della storia del cristianesimo (Bottin e Longo 2011). Al centro della riflessione di questi autori stava soprattutto il rapporto tra rivelazione e tradizione classica, attraverso un attento studio della storia della Chiesa e delle scuole filosofiche. Studiare la loro origine e sviluppo diventava un modo per ripensare la relazione tra la teologia luterana e il pensiero filosofico greco e, in particolare, quello aristotelico. In questa nuova fase, la produzione delle università, sia all'interno delle facoltà teologiche che di filosofia, concentrava la propria attenzione proprio su questi temi. Lo studio parallelo della storia della Chiesa e della storia della filosofia era inscindibile per alcuni autori, perché non era pensabile una storia del cristianesimo e delle sue eresie, senza un'attenta analisi di quali fossero state le scuole filosofiche che avevano influenzato, fino a corromperlo, l'originale messaggio cristiano (si veda Marchetti 2004; Longo 2011).

Uno dei prodotti di questo gruppo riunito a Halle (e in particolare di Christian Thomasius e Budde) fu la rivista *Observationes Literariae*, pubblicata tra il 1700 e il 1704, che raccoglieva saggi di vari autori che mettevano in discussione i pilastri della cultura luterana ortodossa, come la centralità della filosofia aristotelica.⁶ Il primo contributo del primo volume, dunque una posizione privilegiata all'interno del progetto, era stato scritto da Johann Franz Budde e aveva come argomento le origini della filosofia mistica e il suo rapporto con la cabala ebraica (Budde 1700a). Dopo aver studiato con luterani ortodossi ma anche con esponenti più innovatori, Budde iniziò una prolifica carriera accademica. Prestò servizio come professore all'Università di Halle, per poi trasferirsi a Lipsia e infine ritornare a Jena come professore di teologia. Nel corso della sua carriera, Budde fu un autore estremamente prolifico: i suoi scritti spaziavano dall'etica alla legge naturale, dalla metafisica all'ermeneutica biblica, offrendo un contributo rilevante ai dibattiti teologici e filosofici del suo tempo. Al centro della sua riflessione vi era la convinzione che la comprensione della storia della Chiesa e della teologia richiedesse un confronto approfondito con la filosofia, nelle sue diverse tradizioni. Per questo analizzò con attenzione le principali scuole filosofiche, valutando l'influenza esercitata sul cristianesimo e individuando i momenti in cui tale interazione aveva favorito derive dottrinali, come l'eresia o l'ateismo. In questo percorso, riservò un'attenzione particolare all'ebraismo, consideran-

⁶ Su quest'opera si veda Mulsow 2005; Bartolucci 2025b; Heumann 1742. La raccolta di saggi non era omogenea, conteneva diverse prospettive, in particolare in relazione alla tradizione ebraica.

dolo non solo come una realtà storica, ma anche come una chiave interpretativa per esplorare il legame tra concetti teologici e filosofici.⁷

In questo primo saggio, dunque, l'autore sosteneva che la vera sapienza non era da ricercare né nella ragione autonoma né nella filosofia greca, ma in una tradizione rivelata trasmessa dagli antichi patriarchi e custodita dal popolo ebraico: la cabala.⁸ A differenza della teologia mistica cristiana, che mirava all'unione estatica con Dio, la *philosophia mystica* – secondo Budde – possedeva una dimensione conoscitiva: era un sapere ordinato sulle cose divine e naturali, rivelato da Dio stesso ai suoi eletti. In questo senso, la cabala precedeva e fondava ogni filosofia autentica, perché basata non sulla speculazione, ma sulla rivelazione. La difesa di Budde di questo sapere, che egli poneva all'origine della storia della conoscenza umana, era costruita utilizzando una serie di fonti che affondavano le loro radici nella riscoperta rinascimentale dell'ebraico e nella sua diffusione in tutta Europa.

La storia dell'interesse cristiano per la tradizione ebraica, infatti, aveva attraversato i secoli, iniziando come un'attività legata soprattutto alla polemica antiggiudaica.⁹ Conoscere l'ebraico e alcuni testi postbiblici come il *Targum* o il *Talmud* significava dotarsi degli strumenti per contestare le verità religiose ebraiche, ma anche per approfondire le radici della fede cristiana. Nel clima del Rinascimento, segnato dalla riscoperta dei classici greci e latini dopo la caduta di Costantinopoli, si intensificò anche l'attenzione verso le fonti religiose. Soprattutto a partire dalla seconda metà del '400, il valore dell'ebraico assunse un ruolo particolare. Pensatori come Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e Marsilio Ficino iniziarono a vedere nella tradizione ebraica, e in particolare nella mistica cabalistica, non solo uno strumento per correggere le traduzioni latine della Bibbia, ma una via d'accesso ai significati più profondi della religione cristiana

⁷ Sulla vita di Budde si veda Schmidt-Biggemann 2001.

⁸ Budde 1700a, 2-5: «Mysticae autem sive theosophicae philosophiae nomine, eam intelligo naturalium divinarumque rerum scientiam, quam Ebraeis olim receptam, et forte ab ipsis patriarchis ad eos derivatam, et ita iusta serie propagatam, non nisi sanctis purisque mentibus, et virtutis studio unice deditis, obtinere docent, qui eam profitentur. Cumque non omnes capiant, nec capere possint, quae in ea traduntur, interdum etiam studio occultata sit, hinc mystica dicitur. [...] Sed ad philosophiam theosophicam mysticamque ut redeam, non tantum ipsi qui hanc profitentur, ex ipsa Ebraeorum Cabbala originem eius accersunt, sed et qui eam oppugnant, et tantum non ut ineptam ridiculamque plane reiiciunt, eosdem illi natales assignant. Quo ipso dum adducere eam in contemptum omniumque ludibrio exponere annituntur, mea quidem opinione errant vehementer, cum hoc potius in eius laudem cedat, eamque omnibus reddat commendabilem, quod scilicet enata sit ex ea philosophia, quam sanctissimi quique viri in gente Ebraea magno studio diligentiaque coluerunt. Nisi forte Cabbalae nomine intelligant doctrinam quandam heri aut nudius tertius a Iudaeis inventam, et antiquis gentis huius doctoribus plane ignoratam: in quo rursus eos errare ex iis, quae dicuntur, manifestum fiet». Sulla visione di Budde della filosofia ebraica, vedi Schmidt-Biggemann 2001; Schmidt-Biggemann 2013, 243-70; Marchetti 2004; Mahlev 2014. Riprendo qui alcune questioni discusse in Bartolucci 2025a; 2025b.

⁹ Si veda su questo punto il recente Nirenberg 2016.

stessa.¹⁰ Si consolidò allora un'interpretazione secondo cui l'ebraismo conteneva una parte antica e autentica – custode dei misteri divini – e una parte più recente, degenerata nella rigidità legalistica. Questa lettura era già presente negli scritti dei Padri della Chiesa come Origene ed Eusebio, e fu ripresa da alcuni umanisti per sostenere che i grandi filosofi greci, da Pitagora a Platone, avessero attinto alla sapienza ebraica. Grazie anche ai contatti tra intellettuali ebrei e cristiani – come quelli tra Pico e Flavio Mitridate (1450-1489?), Elia del Medigo (1458-1493) o Yohanan Alemanno (1435-1504) – la cabala venne inserita in un sistema di corrispondenze tra filosofia pagana, teologia cristiana e sapienza ebraica. Nel XVI secolo, questa prospettiva trovò seguito in autori come Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522), Francesco Zorzi (1466-1540), e Guillaume Postel (1510-1581), che nei loro scritti ribadirono l'origine ebraica della vera filosofia.

Budde inseriva dunque la sua discussione all'interno di una tradizione nota e riconosciuta, facendo rivivere le idee dei Padri della Chiesa secondo i quali la filosofia greca aveva ripreso i propri concetti principali dalla tradizione ebraica e citava platonici inglesi, come Robert Fludd (1574-1637), che avevano confermato questi principi.¹¹ La seconda parte del saggio discuteva l'importanza della cabala per comprendere i principali dogmi della religione cristiana, arrivando a sostenere che tale tradizione era stata conosciuta e usata sia da Gesù, che dagli apostoli e che grazie ad essa era possibile indagare i testi del Nuovo Testamento (e non solo le profezie dell'Antico).¹² Al termine di questo saggio, infatti, Budde dava anche degli esempi, interpretando attraverso alcuni principi cabalistici, come le *sefiroth* la preghiera del *Padre nostro* o il libro dell'*Apocalisse* (Budde 1700a, 13-5). L'approccio del filosofo di Halle non era nuovo, egli lo riprendeva soprattutto dal testo di riferimento che aveva imposto al mondo tedesco ed europeo la cabala, vale a dire la *Kabala denudata* di Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636-1689) (si veda Knorr von Rosenroth 1677, 1684). Quest'ultimo, infatti, traducendo parti dello *Zohar* e di scritti della scuola cabalistica di Safed, che trasmettevano il pensiero di Isaac Luria (1534-1572), aveva sostenuto la possibilità di dimostrare la compatibilità tra il testo cabalistico e il Nuovo Testamento. Ma il testo di Knorr von Rosenroth aveva avuto anche il merito di catalizzare esperienze e interpretazioni diverse della cabala in un unico spazio, i due volumi pubblicati rispettivamente nel 1677 e nel 1684. Il lettore, infatti, poteva trovare il pensiero di Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698), lo stesso Rosenroth, ma anche le

¹⁰ Burnett 2012; Dunkelgrün 2017; Bartolucci 2017 e i saggi contenuti in Busi Greco 2019.

¹¹ Budde 1700a, 5-6. Budde citava anche testi pseudo-paracelsiani pubblicati nel 1618 con il titolo *Philosophia Mystica*. Budde 1700a, 5: «Possemus ceteroquin provocare ad Theophrastum Paracelsum celeberrimum mysticae huius philosophiae restauratorem». Vedi Paracelso e Weigel 1618. Su questo libro si veda Žemla 2020.

¹² Budde 1700a, 9: «Ecce luculentissimum Cabbalae Symbolicae exemplum. Dubium ergo nullum est, quin et Apostolus Paulus cultus Levitici partes ad Messiam applicando et ceteri scriptores sacri Novi Testamenti, dicta V.T. in quibus de Messia non agitur, itidem ad Messiam referendo Cabbalam Ebraeorum fuerint secuti».

opere in parte critiche del platonico di Cambridge Henry More (1614-1687).¹³ Budde si collocava così all'incrocio tra erudizione cabalistica, apologetica cristiana e riforma luterana. Il suo obiettivo non era un sincretismo irenico, bensì mostrare che la vera filosofia – quella che poteva correggere la degenerazione aristotelica dell'ortodossia luterana – si trovava proprio là dove l'accademia cristiana l'aveva sempre ignorata: nella mistica ebraica. Questo progetto lo portava in aperto conflitto con autori come Johann Georg Wachter (1673-1757), che negli stessi anni (*Der Spinozismus im Judenthum*, 1699) identificava la cabala come fonte del panteismo spinoziano e, quindi, dell'ateismo moderno. Budde rispose con un'altra dissertazione polemica, *De Spinozismo ante Spinozam* (1706), in cui cercava di disinnescare l'equazione cabala uguale spinozismo, attribuendo piuttosto le origini del pensiero di Spinoza allo stoicismo antico e alla tradizione dei filosofi gentili.¹⁴ Ma soprattutto la cabala, lungi dall'essere fonte di eresia, era – per Budde – il rimedio contro di essa, perché conservava un sapere che precedeva ogni degenerazione filosofica pagana. In quest'ottica, la distinzione tra cabala antica e cabala moderna era essenziale: la prima, autentica, portava alla verità cristiana; la seconda, corrotta da influenze neoplatoniche e arabe, era suscettibile di fraintendimenti e deviazioni. Nel secondo saggio pubblicato sulle *Observationes*, Budde approfondì proprio questa distinzione, attaccando frontalmente Thomas Burnet (1635-1715), autore dell'*Archaeologiae philosophicae*, che negava l'autenticità e l'utilità della mistica ebraica (Budde 1700b; Burnet 1692). In polemica con Burnet e rifacendosi a Henry More (che nella *Kabala denudata* aveva criticato la cabala luriana), Budde tracciava una storia della mistica ebraica in due fasi: un'età primordiale, legata alla rivelazione orale di Mosè, e un'età tarda, segnata dalla decadenza e dalla contaminazione.¹⁵

La sua rilettura della cabala si inseriva in una tradizione cristiana di lungo corso, che da Pico a Reuchlin, da Zorzi a Postel, aveva cercato di distinguere tra un ebraismo rivelato e uno corrotto. Ma Budde andava oltre: non si limitava a recuperare la cabala come 'figura' della verità cristiana, ma la inseriva all'interno di una storia della filosofia che fosse anche storia della Chiesa. Per questo, nei suoi articoli successivi, si soffermò proprio su quegli autori – Postel, Zorzi – che avevano tentato di articolare un pensiero cristiano ispirato a strutture e concetti cabalistici (si veda Budde 1700c; 1700d). Il fatto che Budde dedicasse a questi autori due saggi nelle *Observationes* dimostrava quanto percepisse il le-

¹³ Su quest'opera e il pensiero di questi autori si veda Coudert 1999; Vilenò Wilkinson 2019, Vilenò 2017; Di Biase 2022; Rivera 2025.

¹⁴ Sul dibattito sulla Cabala e la filosofia ebraica, in particolare tra Budde e Johann Georg Wachter, si veda Schmidt-Biggemann 2014, 214-42; Wachter 1699; Budde 1706.

¹⁵ Buddeus 1700b, 223: «Quae omnia evincunt satis virum istum doctissimum, quocum nobis res est, perperam illud pro dogmate Cabbalae Iudaicae statim venditare, quod ex R. Izchak Loria R. Abraham Cohen Irira similibusque recentioribus Cabbalisticis hausit, seduloque hic semper distinguendum esse inter Cabbalam veterem sive puram, et Cabbalam recentiore sive impuram».

game profondo tra il progetto rinascimentale della *prisca theologia* e il proprio tentativo di rifondare la teologia luterana.¹⁶

4. *Introductio ad historiam philosophiae Hebraicae*: un'opera-recensione

Se le *Observationes Literariae* rappresentavano il luogo della sperimentazione critica e della polemica intellettuale, l'*Introductio ad historiam philosophiae Hebraicae* costituì il tentativo, più sistematico e monumentale, di trasformare quella visione in una narrazione coerente (Budde 1702).

Budde considerava il susseguirsi delle scuole filosofiche come una catena del pensiero umano, e collocava la tradizione ebraica sullo stesso piano del platonismo e dell'aristotelismo. Tuttavia, a differenza di questi ultimi, la prima si distingueva per la sua origine divina, poiché fondata su una sapienza che superava quella puramente umana delle filosofie pagane (si veda Bottin Longo 2011, 347). Egli, nella prefazione, ribadiva che la storia della filosofia e della teologia erano legate, e che la storia delle sette filosofiche antiche permetteva di identificare le origini delle diverse eresie che avevano contraddistinto la storia della Chiesa (Budde 1702, 5v). Solo gli ebrei avevano conservato la vera sapienza: compito dello storico (della filosofia e della teologia) era quello di distinguere tra le fonti autentiche (antiche) e quelle corrotte (moderne) (Budde 1702, 6v-7r). Tra le prime Budde riconosceva la tradizione cabalistica come uno dei luoghi all'interno dei quali tale filosofia si era preservata.

Lo schema presentato dall'erudito tedesco si fondava sul seguente principio: ogni conoscenza di tutte le cose umane e divine procedeva dalla ragione e dalla tradizione. Dal momento che l'uso esclusivo della ragione aveva spesso portato ad allontanarsi dalla vera conoscenza (la filosofia), quest'ultima era possibile solo nel momento in cui si rendevano note le origini delle cose che si volevano conoscere, che era possibile apprendere solo attraverso la tradizione.¹⁷ E la storia antichissima degli inizi di tutte le cose era stata preservata nel solo popolo ebraico. Utilizzando la tradizione ebraica, e inserendola nella più ampia storia dell'antica saggezza (*prisca teologia*), Budde intendeva indebolire il ruolo svolto dalla filosofia di Aristotele e sostenere lo sforzo di riformare la tradizione luterana. La filosofia ebraica, dunque, era uno strumento per ripensare le basi del cristianesimo e avvicinarlo ai principi delle origini della Riforma.

¹⁶ L'inclusione della tradizione ebraica all'interno della storia della filosofia era stata utilizzata anche nell'opera di uno studioso vicino all'ambiente pietista, Johan Wilhelm Zierold (1669-1731). Si veda Longo 2011. Sui legami tra storia della filosofia e pietismo, vedi Gierl 1997; Carré 1913; Osculati 1990.

¹⁷ Budde 1702, 7v: «Omnis enim rerum omnium divinarum humanarum cognitio ex duplici procedit fonte, ratione et traditione. In iis, quae ex ratione, intellectus humani vi cognosci possunt, non est quod magis ad Ebraeos quam ad Graecos respiciamus. [...] De rerum naturalium principiis, de existetia spirituum, de hominis et origine et natura et quae alia sunt gravissima totius philosophiae capita, frustra disputabis et anfractus saltem atque flexus inexplicabiles tibi dispones, nisi vocata in subsidium traditione, hoc est historia antiquissima de rerum omnium initiis, quae in sola gente ebraea conservata, et ita ad alias gentes propagata fuit».

La struttura dell'opera rispecchiava questo intento. La prima parte tracciava una storia della filosofia ebraica 'dalle origini': da Adamo a Mosè, fino alla trasmissione orale della *legge* (la cabala) secondo lo schema già proposto da Pico della Mirandola nella sua *Apologia*.¹⁸ In questa narrazione, la rivelazione sinaitica rappresentava il punto culminante, da cui si diramavano due strade divergenti: da un lato, la linea esoterica e autentica, custodita da pochi e rappresentata da testi come il *Sefer ha-Bahir* e lo *Zohar*; dall'altro, la linea essoterica e degenerata, che sfociava nella letteratura talmudica e nella filosofia aristotelica di Maimonide.¹⁹ Tale tripartizione – cabala, *Talmud*, filosofia – non aveva solo valore descrittivo. Essa rifletteva un giudizio gerarchico: la cabala, sola, conservava l'unità originaria di sapere e rivelazione; il Talmud, per la degenerazione dell'interpretazione della legge, e la filosofia, per la commistione con la tradizione pagana, rappresentavano le due grandi derive dell'ebraismo. Budde applicava così al pensiero ebraico la stessa logica classificatoria che aveva usato nella lettura della storia della Chiesa: distinguere tra fonti antiche e corrotte, tra ortodossia ed eresia, tra sapienza e filosofia.

La seconda parte era interamente dedicata all'esposizione dei concetti fondamentali della cabala: le *sefirot*, il concetto di *Ein Sof*, la dottrina della *tsimsum*, ecc.²⁰ Ma anche qui, Budde elaborava un'analisi storica: distingueva tra dottrine autentiche e dottrine inquinate, sostenendo che anche la cabala aveva subito un processo di corruzione.²¹ La *Kabala denudata*, pur rappresentando la fonte principale, veniva filtrata criticamente: Budde usava il lavoro di Knorr von Rosenroth, ma lo sottoponeva a un vaglio teologico che ne isolava gli elementi compatibili con il suo progetto, concentrandosi soprattutto sull'opera di Henry More (Budde 1702, 209-45). La terza parte si concentra sull'eresia valentiniana, esempio paradigmatico, per Budde, di come la contaminazione tra filosofia pagana e cabala corrotta avesse potuto dare vita a esiti teologicamente pericolosi per il cristianesimo.²²

¹⁸ Budde 1702, 35-8. Per il concetto di cabala in Pico si veda almeno Wirszubski 1989; Busi Ebgi 2014, 295-306.

¹⁹ Sulla nascita della *Mishnah* e del *Talmud* si veda Budde 1702, 97-107. Sullo *Zohar* si veda Budde 1702, 107-114. Sulla filosofia Budde 1702, 122-135. Budde non era così netto nel distinguere tra *Talmud* e tradizione cabalistica. Egli infatti sosteneva che alcune tracce dell'antica sapienza si erano conservate anche nella letteratura post-biblica ed erano state riscoperte da alcuni rabbini. Si veda Budde 1702, 101-2.

²⁰ Budde 1702, 265-408. Sul concetto di *tzimtzum* in Budde si veda Schulte 2023.

²¹ Budde 1702, 369: «De his autem omnibus illud adhuc observandum quod haec ceteraque Kabbalisticæ doctrinae capita non statim pro priscae illius philosophiæ Ebraeorum monumentis sint habenda, partim quod nonnulli aliarum sectarum opiniones huic philosophiæ admiscuerint, partim quod per tot casus et infelicia gentis ebraeae fata, non potuerit priscom sapientia incorrupta permanere».

²² Budde 1702, 411: «Quod vero ex depravata Ebraeorum philosophia praecipui eius errores fluxerint, non perinde forte omnibus observatum fuit, ideoque paucis illud demonstrare simulque ortum, progressum, finem et dogmata Valentinianorum luculunter exponere haud abs re fuerit».

La scommessa teorica di Budde era chiara: solo reintegrando la cabala nella storia della filosofia era possibile smascherare le origini filosofiche dell'errore cristiano. La sua *Introductio* non era allora soltanto un gesto erudito o un'operazione apologetica, ma una proposta filosofica, che usava la tradizione ebraica (filtrata dalla tradizione rinascimentale) per riformare il pensiero teologico. Se la filosofia doveva tornare a essere vera, doveva tornare a essere ebraica – almeno nella misura in cui essa riconosceva la propria origine rivelata.

5. Recensire la filosofia ebraica: Amsterdam, Hannover e Lipsia

Le reazioni all'*Introductio ad historiam philosophiae Hebraicae* di Johann Franz Budde rappresentano un banco di prova emblematico per osservare in azione il potere della recensione filosofica. Questa, infatti, non è stata uno spazio neutro di riassunto o comunicazione, ma un genere filosofico in cui si formò, si definì e si legittimò ciò che poteva essere considerato 'filosofia' in un determinato contesto (Sgarbi 2025, 10). In questo senso, le tre recensioni dell'opera di Budde – apparse rispettivamente ad Amsterdam (*Nouvelles de la république des lettres*), a Hannover (*Monathlicher Auszug*), e a Lipsia (*Acta Eruditorum*) – non solo riflettono le tensioni culturali dell'epoca, ma contribuiscono direttamente a definire il destino storiografico della filosofia ebraica nel pensiero europeo moderno.

La prima recensione, pubblicata nel maggio 1702 sulla rivista fondata da Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), esprimeva un rifiuto netto e ironico della proposta di Budde.²³ L'idea che la cabala potesse avere un valore filosofico veniva liquidata come infantile, oscura e fundamentalmente incompatibile con le esigenze della ragione moderna.²⁴ Il testo era profondamente critico con l'opera del teologo tedesco, e soprattutto rifiutava l'uso della cabala, la quale, secondo l'autore, era un insieme di conoscenze così oscure da risultare incomprensibile. In altri termini la recensione era un rifiuto definitivo dell'interpretazione delle origini della filosofia ebraica come cabala e del suo sviluppo storico, proprio perché fondata su una tradizione che l'autore completamente rifiutava. In più, in conclusione del testo, il recensore si domandava ironicamente perché fosse necessario inserire nella filosofia e nella religione riflessioni così complicate e oscure, che lo stesso autore, Budde, faceva fatica a comprendere.²⁵

²³ *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, ottobre, 1702, 389-406.

²⁴ *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, ottobre, 1702, 392: «Il s'étend beaucoup à expliquer ce que c'est que cette Cabale, pour laquelle il témoigne avoir un grand penchant, quoi qu'il avoue, qu'elle contient des choses assez inutiles, des puérilités indignes d'un Philosophe, et des obscuritez dans lesquelles il est bien difficile de pénétrer».

²⁵ *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, ottobre, 1702, 405: «Je ne puis comprendre pourquoi on veut embarrasser la Philosophie et la Religion, par des expressions mystérieuses, qui ne se trouvent point dans l'Écriture, et qui sont sujettes à mille équivoques. Est-ce qu'on craint d'être trop entendu? Quand il n'y auroit dans la Philosophie du *Divin Platon*, dans celle du *Mystérieux Pythagore*, et dans les recherches épineuses des Juifs Cabalistes, que cette obscurité affectée, cela suffiroit pour les rejeter absolument. Notre Auteur lui même, qui paroît avoir si bien pénétré dans toutes ces obscuritez, n'est pas toujours bien certain du sens qu'on doit donner à toutes ces sublimes doctrines. La vie n'est pas assez longue pour bien

Più complessa è la seconda recensione, pubblicata nel giugno 1702 nel *Monathlicher Auszug aus allerhand neu-herausgegebenen nützlichen und artigen Büchern* (1702, 41-54).²⁶ La rivista fu pubblicata a Hannover tra il 1700 e il 1702, sotto la cura di Johann Georg von Eckhart, storico e linguista tedesco, nonché stretto collaboratore di Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (si veda Dutz 1990). Questo periodico mensile si proponeva di offrire estratti e recensioni di libri recentemente pubblicati, coprendo una vasta gamma di argomenti utili e piacevoli. Eckhart, nato nel 1664, fu un erudito che, dopo aver studiato teologia, si dedicò alla filologia e alla storia. La sua collaborazione con Leibniz iniziò nel 1694, quando divenne suo assistente, beneficiando del suo patrocinio e della sua amicizia. Attraverso la pubblicazione di estratti e recensioni, il *Monathlicher Auszug* mirava a informare il pubblico colto sulle novità editoriali, facilitando l'accesso alle opere più recenti e promuovendo il dibattito intellettuale. Nonostante l'ambizione e la qualità dei contenuti, la rivista ebbe vita breve, cessando le pubblicazioni nel 1702. Le ragioni precise della sua interruzione non sono documentate, ma potrebbero includere difficoltà finanziarie, limitato interesse del pubblico o la concorrenza di altre pubblicazioni simili. Il testo della recensione si apriva con la presentazione del fine dell'opera di Budde, vale a dire la dimostrazione del legame tra pensiero filosofico ed eresie che aveva contraddistinto la storia della Chiesa. A questa affermazione seguiva un'attenta e puntuale analisi del ragionamento sviluppato da Budde, la sua presentazione della storia della filosofia ebraica, gli snodi centrali della sua trasformazione e alla fine una descrizione della teoria cabalistica descritta dal teologo tedesco, senza nessuna critica al modello presentato come invece era emerso nella recensione di Amsterdam. Si potrebbe quasi dire che l'autore della recensione condividesse la posizione di Budde e approvasse i presupposti e le conclusioni.

Completamente diversa, e in parte sorprendente, è la terza recensione, la quale comparve negli *Acta Eruditorum* di Otto Mencke (1644-1707) di Lipsia (si veda Laeven 1990). Questa era la rivista con la quale Budde collaborava più frequentemente. Qui egli aveva pubblicato molte recensioni. Tra quelle più note, per esempio, c'erano state le quattro dedicate alla monumentale edizione della traduzione latina della *Mishnah* pubblicata ad Amsterdam da Willem Surenhusius (1664-1729) (si veda *Acta Eruditorum* 1701; 1702; 1703; 1704). Era dunque una rivista che Budde conosceva bene.

L'inizio della recensione era simile alla seconda, ma più ampio e articolato: il recensore, infatti, insisteva sul progetto di Budde di dimostrare la interdipendenza delle due discipline (storia della Chiesa e storia della filosofia) relazione senza la quale non era possibile comprendere la penetrazione delle eresie all'interno della prima a causa della presenza delle sette filosofiche che costituivano gli anelli che componevano la seconda.

développer les mystères de la Nature; pourquoi l'employer à déchiffrer ceux de ces Auteurs Mystérieux, qui ne s'entendoient, peut-être, pas eux-mêmes?».

²⁶ Su questa rivista si veda: <http://idrz18.adw-goettingen.gwdg.de/zeitschriften_detail/monatlicher-auszug.html> (2025-06-23).

La descrizione dell'opera di Budde era puntuale nell'evitare ogni riferimento alla tesi centrale della sua trattazione, vale a dire il fatto che il popolo ebraico aveva conservato, fin dalla sua origine, una sapienza originaria, la quale era stata trasmessa da alcuni e che aveva preso la forma della pura cabala. Il recensore fin dall'inizio aveva deciso di omettere alcuni snodi importanti. Per esempio, non c'era alcun riferimento alla ricezione della cabala da parte di Mosè e la sua sopravvivenza all'interno del popolo ebraico attraverso la trasmissione orale. Anzi, per limitare la centralità della mistica nella riflessione di Budde, l'autore ricostruiva la storia della filosofia ebraica come distinta in tre momenti posti sullo stesso piano: la riflessione sulla legge esemplificata dal *Talmud*, l'interesse per la filosofia aristotelica rappresentata dalla figura di Mosè Maimonide e infine la cabala (*Acta Eruditorum* 1702, 250). Come abbiamo ricordato, invece, secondo Budde, sia la tradizione rabbinica, sia la filosofia di Maimonide avevano rappresentato una corruzione della 'vera filosofia', cioè la cabala.²⁷ Ma era l'ultima parte della recensione che determinava una spaccatura netta con l'opera. L'autore, infatti, invece di dedicare una trattazione separata alla lunga analisi che Budde aveva fatto della dottrina cabalistica e delle sue caratteristiche peculiari, si concentrava sulla terza parte. Qui egli non seguiva quello che aveva scritto Budde, cioè che la dottrina valentiniana era il frutto di una interpretazione distorta della cabala. Piuttosto sosteneva che essa era stata un prodotto della cabala così come l'aveva descritta Budde nella seconda parte della sua introduzione. In altri termini, tradendo il pensiero di Budde, il recensore non descriveva la cabala, come una tradizione divisa tra una conoscenza originaria e fondante, e una corrotta e causa di eresie. Egli riconosceva un'unica cabala, negativa e fonte dell'eresia valentiniana.²⁸ Ne risultava così una critica radicale all'opera di Budde e alla sua idea di filosofia ebraica, la quale, nelle righe della recensione perdeva ogni tipo di specificità diventando o una riflessione sulle formalità cerimoniali del *Talmud*, o un interesse per Aristotele a imitazione degli arabi e dei cristiani o infine la cabala, che però era stata, nella storia della Chiesa, causa di eresie al pari delle sette filosofiche pagane. In altre parole, la recensione rappresentava il tradimento dell'opera di Budde senza però esplicitare un'aperta critica.

Qui la recensione funzionava come vera e propria 'riscrittura'. Non criticava Budde frontalmente, ma ne rovesciava l'intento, trasformando la sua apologia della cabala in una diagnosi del suo fallimento. Come spesso avviene nella storia delle recensioni, la strategia non è il rifiuto esplicito, ma la 'trasformazione

²⁷ Burnett 2012; Dunkelgrün 2017; Bartolucci 2017 e i saggi contenuti in Busi Greco 2019.

²⁸ *Acta Eruditorum* 1702, 251-52: «Egit vero hoc potissimum eruditissimus auctor, ut ductis altius initiis sectae totius originem, progressum et reliqua explanaret et quae maxime Valentinianorum sententiae fuerint et a quibus petitae, proderet accurate ac explicaret. Et quod ad errandi materiam attinet, fixam deliberatumque ipsi est, non ex philosophia ethnica, sed Kabbala natam esse, atque adeo illos, qui aliter statuerint perperam existimasse. Id quod ostendit et scite conficit, quando Kabbalistarum ac Valentinianorum placita invicem contendit, mutuamque similitudinem ac aequalitatem demonstrat».

silenziosa' del testo recensito. L'opera veniva così disinnescata e riassorbita nel quadro teologico dominante: si trattava di un uso politico della recensione, volto a controllare la circolazione delle idee e a garantire la continuità del canone (si veda per esempio Brancati 2025, 17).

In sintesi, le tre recensioni non si limitarono a registrare reazioni divergenti: esse mostrarono tre strategie diverse di gestione del sapere filosofico. La prima escludeva la cabala come non-filosofia; la seconda la accettava come elemento funzionale; la terza la neutralizza attraverso una riscrittura selettiva. Tutte e tre, tuttavia, partecipavano a un processo comune: la ridefinizione del concetto stesso di filosofia in età moderna, e la progressiva marginalizzazione della tradizione ebraica al suo interno.

6. Conclusione. Filosofia, ebraismo e il potere delle recensioni

Le recensioni sono testimoni della varietà di reazioni che l'opera di Budde suscitò nei suoi lettori. Ciascuna rispecchiava altrettanti atteggiamenti caratteristici dell'epoca nei confronti della tradizione ebraica e della cabala: il rifiuto radicale, l'accettazione, oppure il riconoscimento della sua pericolosità.

Ma questi atteggiamenti nascondevano qualcosa di più profondo. Nella prima parte del suo lavoro, Budde fu tra i primi a tentare una ricostruzione della storia del pensiero ebraico, mettendone in luce le tappe principali attraverso lo studio diretto delle fonti primarie, come la *Mishnah*, o di autori come Mosè Maimonide e Isaac Abravanel. Al di là dell'interpretazione sulla cabala, Budde aveva conferito una legittimità filosofica e una profondità storica alla tradizione ebraica nel suo insieme.

Il contrasto tra Budde e i suoi critici, di cui le recensioni sono un evidente segnale, rappresentò uno snodo importante: non soltanto definì i limiti entro cui si sarebbe parlato di filosofia ebraica nei decenni successivi, ma rivelò anche quanto le categorie stesse di 'filosofia' e 'rivelazione' fossero plasmate da esigenze polemiche e controversistiche. Tuttavia, come ha dimostrato la ricezione dell'opera di Budde, questo ambizioso disegno fu ostacolato e, in parte, cancellato da un sistema culturale che stava consolidando, anche grazie alle recensioni, i confini epistemici e confessionali della filosofia moderna. Le tre recensioni apparse tra il 1702 e il 1706 – ad Amsterdam, Hannover e Lipsia – non sono documenti neutrali, ma veri e propri atti di giudizio, capaci di includere o escludere un'intera tradizione dal canone filosofico. Esse rivelano che il dibattito sulla filosofia ebraica non si giocava solo sul piano delle idee, ma anche su quello delle forme di legittimazione intellettuale. Le recensioni in età moderna erano spazi di valutazione, selezione e autorità. In questo senso, le recensioni all'opera di Budde non si limitarono a commentarne i contenuti: esse riscrissero la sua proposta, la disinnescarono, o la delegittimarono – contribuendo a costruire l'immagine di una filosofia moderna che era greca, razionale, cristiana, e che non aveva posto per una sapienza ebraica di origine rivelata.

Di lì a poco uscì la *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742-44) in cui Jacob Brucker (1696-1770), che era stato studente di Budde a Jena, dedicò sì una lunga

trattazione alla filosofia ebraica, ma collocandola fuori dal canone filosofico propriamente detto: perché fondata sulla rivelazione e non su un autonomo esercizio della ragione, per cui non poteva essere definita «vera filosofia».²⁹ La cabala, in particolare, divenne per Brucker la prova dell'inestricabile intreccio tra misticismo e superstizione; per questo egli polemizzò con i tentativi rinascimentali di conciliazione – da Pico della Mirandola a Reuchlin e Zorzi – presentandoli come pericolosi esperimenti di sincretismo che minavano la tradizione. In opposizione al suo stesso maestro Budde, egli trasformò l'interesse per l'ebraismo in un'argomentazione volta a escludere l'ebraismo medesimo dal perimetro della filosofia.

Il risultato di questo spostamento fu duplice. Sul piano storiografico, la *Historia critica philosophiae* – destinata a diventare il modello per ogni manuale settecentesco – fissò l'idea che la filosofia avesse origine esclusivamente greca e uno sviluppo lineare fino alla modernità cristiana, relegando l'ebraismo a una funzione ancillare, biblico-esegetica. Sul piano ideologico, la polemica contro la cabala fornì un'arma efficace per difendere l'ortodossia luterana da ogni incontro con dottrine estranee.

A distanza di pochi decenni, il progetto di Budde appariva dunque svuotato del suo nucleo e la filosofia ebraica era vista come 'altro' rispetto al corso principale della tradizione europea. Questa esclusione non nacque da una presunta inferiorità concettuale della tradizione ebraica, ma da esigenze teologiche e confessionali. Laddove il Rinascimento aveva intravisto nella lingua ebraica un tramite privilegiato tra rivelazione e sapere classico, il Settecento luterano – sulla scia di Brucker – finì per restringere lo studio dell'ebraico al mero ausilio filologico, separandolo dal dibattito filosofico. Così la 'sapienza ebraica', riconosciuta nei secoli precedenti come componente della *prisca theologia*, venne progressivamente confinata ai margini della cultura europea.

Il contrasto tra Budde e i suoi critici, di cui le recensioni sono un evidente segnale, rappresentò uno snodo importante: non soltanto definì i limiti entro cui si sarebbe parlato di filosofia ebraica nei decenni successivi, ma rivelò anche quanto le categorie stesse di 'filosofia' e 'ragione' fossero plasmate da esigenze polemiche e controversistiche. Rileggere oggi quella controversia significa comprendere come la storia della filosofia europea sia stata costruita anche attraverso esclusioni e silenzi, e riconoscere il debito, spesso rimosso, nei confronti di tradizioni pensate come 'altre'.

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²⁹ Brucker (1742-1744). Su questa questione si veda Bartolucci 2025b; Westerkamp 2008; 2009.

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Christoph August Heumann's *Acta philosophorum* and the Rise of the History of Philosophy in the Age of Enlightenment

Roberto Bordoli

Abstract: Heumann distinguishes *historia philosophica* (written by historians) from *historia philosophiae*, written by philosophers and conceived as a new philosophical discipline like the soon-to-appear philosophy of history and esthetics, all modern disciplines formulated in the Age of Enlightenment. History of philosophy expresses judgments on philosophies of the past and compares philosophies and traditions, considering what is useful, true and virtuous in them for the present. Philosophers need philosophical history of philosophy in order to produce better philosophy more attuned to their own time. Heumann deals with method and ends of history of philosophy, with philosophical historiography and highlights the independence of philosophical thought from theology, religion and myth. Though somewhat ambiguously, he sees philosophy as a discipline also suited to women and wrote a first history of female philosophers. It was not by chance that this appeared in a periodical that ran for about fifteen years for a total of around 3000 pages; the new discipline was immediately seeking and found its readership.

Keywords: History of Philosophy, Aufklärung, Christoph August Heumann, Modern Philosophy.

1. The belief that prior to Hegel no one thought that in order to study philosophy it was indispensable to know its history implies that philosophy sees itself as consisting exclusively in the search for truth and virtue and in reasoning rigorously about both. From this perspective philosophy—*philosophia perennis*?—cannot be distinguished from the formal and natural sciences and follows the classical canon of logic, physics and ethics. As with mathematics, it has no need for its own history in order to achieve its aims. Only from Hegel on is there the conviction that philosophy is concomitant with its own history or, at least, one cannot know it without referring to its history. Moreover, these two theses are quite different.

In 1715, Christoph August Heumann (1681–1764) wrote in the philosophical journal he founded and edited that it was his intention to promote knowledge of what is true and what is good, opposing false beliefs through an “eclectic” search for truth.¹ It will be seen more clearly below that “eclectic” means per-

¹ “[...] durch Antreibung eigener (eclectischer) Untersuchung der Wahrheit”: *Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 2 (*Einleitung zur Historia philosophica. Der I. Capitel. Von deren Nutzbarkeit*).

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sonal, free, functional to the truth and emancipated from pre-established authorities, schools, and systems. Heumann's goal was to discuss directly and clearly—not in weighty Latin tomes—the history of philosophy and at the same time of philosophers.²

In his view, the true philosopher is the one who looks for the truth alone and tries to ground it on certainties. The *interpres philosophi* (he mentions Epictetus), the epigone, is a member of a sect that garners the ideas of a philosopher in the past and illustrates them to the young (*Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 194). A philosopher is a man of reason whereas the epigone is someone who obeys the rabbis, fathers of the church, *auctoritates*, and tradition. The epigones of Aristotle are the Scholastic philosophers, those of Plato the Church Fathers. The philosopher considers other philosophers as his equals and to the extent to which he finds their ideas valid and firmly based, he accepts them. If not, he rejects them. An epigone, in contrast, sees the philosopher by whom he is inspired as a despot and does not assume the right to accept or reject his ideas but, rather, merely to succumb to them passively and divulge them tirelessly. The moral comparison between the proud thinker and the paltry repeater mirrors that between a free government backed by independent citizens, *sui juris*, and a despotism imposed on compliant citizens as well as, in the age of nascent public opinion, that between a free debating of different opinions and fanatical propaganda.

One is not born but becomes a philosopher. To do so, you have to apply and develop the love for truth. Epigones, on the other hand, are born as such since they are what they are by being part of a school, for example the Platonic or Cartesian school (*Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 195). The philosopher is someone who uses their independent judgment; the epigone is a “*homo beatae memoriae*” who takes pleasure in reproducing the ideas of others, for the most part from the past. It is said that a philosopher examines ideas. An epigone, instead, prefers to err with his mentor than to be in the right by embracing a different opinion that is more convincing, better grounded and argued. This is why no eclectic sect exists (as Jacob Thomasius would wish), which is a *contradictio in adiecto*—like saying free slavery (*Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 197). Eclecticism is a critical method, not a particular philosophy.

Philosophy is practiced by free men and it develops and is nourished in free ethical-political communities without needing to refer to an authority, the past or tradition. The free citizen of the *pòlis* and the Protestant citizen in modern European states are two models, one ancient and the other modern, for a community where philosophy can thrive best. Exceptions such as Socrates, *exemplum* of knowledge and virtue condemned by his fellow citizens, confirms the rule. This is what the author of the first review of philosophy and history of philosophy thought.

² On Heumann: Freudenberg 2001, Spalten 614–35; Mulsow- Eskildsen-Zedelmaier 2017. Also: Braun 1990, 109–30; Lehmann-Brauns 2004, chap. VIII. The importance of the periodical for the start of the history of philosophy is confirmed by Epple 2023.

2. So it is that the belief seems well founded that a century before Hegel no one thought the history of philosophy was useful for philosophers, a view confirmed by one of the first exponents of the history of philosophy. In addition, in the XVII century before Heumann there were many historians, but no philosopher, who wrote on the history of philosophy (Bordoli 2022, 31–46). Examples are Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638) who studied its chronology and taxonomy (Alstedius 1650, 453–55; 471–85; Alstedius 1612; Alstedius 1620); Thomas Stanley (1625–1678) with his celebrated *Historia philosophica* (Stanleius 1655–1660 3 vols; 1711, 2 vols), Georg Hornius author of *Historia philosophica* (Hornius 1622), Gerard Vossius, author of a critical review of the ancient philosophical schools (Vossius 1658); and Joannes Jonsius (1624–1659), professor of philosophy at Königsberg whose 1659 work on philosophers (Jonsius 1659) was integrated and republished in 1716 (Jonsius 1716) with a preface by Burkhard Gotthelf Struve (1671–1738). There were also some theologians who took an interest in the history of philosophy in relation to questions concerning the “history of truth” and its revelation to mankind, for example, Roman Catholic Pierre-Daniel Huet (Huetius 1694) and Lutheran Jacob Thomasius (Thomasius 1665; Thomasius 1699). Nevertheless, philosophers were apparently not at all interested in the history of philosophy. The expression *historia philosophica* was used to refer to a branch of history, like ecclesiastical, military or universal history, of interest to professional historians or, at most, theologians for rhetorical-literary purposes. Ancient examples such as Aristotle’s first book *Metaphysics* or Diogenes Laertius’ *Philosophers Lives* and more recent works concerned with *philosophia perennis* fall outside this field either because they belong to doxography (so within the first case) or they are manifestly speculative thinking.

Corroboration *e contrario* for this belief could also even be sought in the so-called *critical thinkers*, such as Pierre Bayle, Richard Simon or Jean Le Clerc and many others, who were not systematic philosophers but able to exert a strong and lasting influence on philosophy and the history of ideas. Neither can we overlook Humanism and the European Reformation, sometimes intertwined and at others separately, but with a big influence in providing tools for *critical thinking*. Suffice it to consider Biblical Criticism in the XVII century. In Halle in the XVIII century, two figures such as Johann Jacob Baumgarten and Johann Salomo Semler, promoters of *Nachrichten von einer Hallischen Bibliothek*, show the deep-reaching effects of the interaction between these traditions.

3. The conclusions from these brief considerations may appear to be paradoxical. In 1715 Heumann, who thought that philosophy was the search for what is true and what is good, held that this could be done by studying the history of philosophy within the field of philosophy and not history, without an opposition arising between the use of philosophical thought in its three divisions of logic, physics and ethics and the history of philosophy conceived as a growing and innovative dimension of philosophy itself. He was aware of this new aspect to the extent of founding the first review of philosophy, which was also the first review of the history of philosophy. The language changed too. If the history of

philosophy points to a new philosophical field and no longer solely an area of history, it must not be confused with the expression *historia philosophica* then in use. Aiming to extend philosophical thought and not place philosophy and history in opposition—or worse philosophy and the history of philosophy—this mental shift was marked by the review’s demanding title, *Acta philosophorum, das ist Gründl. Nachrichten aus der Historia philosophica, nebst beygefügeten Urtheilen von deren dahin gehörigen alten und neuen Büchern*.

The history of thought is accomplished through the use of thought; it makes no sense to place them in opposition to one another. The facts and documents of history have to be accompanied by rigorous (logical and historical) judgment on truth and virtue. The first step is for facts and documents to be gathered and examined by the *adminicula* of humanist tradition: criticism (*critica*) and philology. Here we are in the realm of professional historians: if and to the extent necessary these tools are to be used to define the object, *materia subjecta*.

However, concomitant with this phase is another more strictly philosophical one, that of judgment, of discerning what is true and what is false in a reasoning or theory in relation to other reasonings or other past or current theories. This judgment, then, also deals with the ethical and political impact of philosophical ideas and systems.

According to Heumann in 1715, this is where the usefulness of philosophy of history lies, which encompasses the overall benefit of freeing men from ignorance and in particular ignorance as concerns philosophy, still seen as the source of ideas that, if examined with rigor, turn out to be no more than fairy tales (*Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 3 ff.). But philosophy of history also has particular additional benefits, for example that deriving from the eclectic approach.³ As seen above, the eclectic position is not a specific philosophy but, rather, a method for choosing true and effective reasonings and theories. The *philosophus eclecticus* is the one who is able to choose what is best. The same happens in religion. Those who never put foot outside Italy or Spain would continue to view Lutherans as heretics (*Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 21); and the same that holds in spatial terms also applies to time. The history of philosophy teaches us to understand that what appeared or appear to be paradoxes should be taken as such even if they go against the apparent defenses of common sense.⁴ Philosophy as criticism and “correction of appearances” (Hume) is a guideline modern reason and the *Aufklärung* and is associated with biblical criticism. This is how the words of Paul of Tarsus are sometimes interpreted in the modern age: “omnia autem probate, quod bonum est tenete” [prove all things, hold fast that

³ *Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 20: “So finden wir [...] die Philosophia eclectica die beste Art der Philosophie sey”.

⁴ *Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 27. The examples are of several paradoxes: for example the Copernican theory or the thesis of Epicurus according to which *voluptas* coincides with *summum bonum*, a paradox that corresponds with the Ciceronian thesis of the identity between *utile* and *honestum* (contested by Grotius).

which is good].⁵ We learn from the history of philosophy written by philosophers that an apparently new idea is often not such and we are able to because many sources are studied and compared. This underlines how desirable it is that, before historians, it is philosophers themselves who should deal with the history of philosophy (*Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 34). Conversely, up until that time this was done by historians and philologists.

4. As we have seen, in order to grasp the importance of including the historical dimension in philosophy, typical of the modern age, it is necessary according to Heumann to distinguish *historia philosophiae* from *historia philosophica*. The first entails the search for the truth of facts and theories⁶ and therefore requires philosophers to express their judgment, which is something the professional historian could not do. Judging what is true or what is of value is alien to the history of historians. It was an epochal sea change.

This recalls the words of Jean Le Clerc in a review of the work of Edward Hyde (1609–1674), 1st Earl of Clarendon (Hyde 1706–1707). The erudite professor at the *Remonstrants Seminarium* in Amsterdam and son-in-law of Gregorio Letti, commending the way the former Chancellor of the Exchequer writes about history, says:

Ceux qui croient que l'Histoire est une simple relation de ce qui s'est passé, dont l'Historien laisse le jugement au Lecteur, ne goûteront pas la méthode de celle-ci; où l'Auteur fait souvent d'assez longues leçons aux Rois et aux Peuples de la Grande-Bretagne [...] Il me semble que ce là [est] le véritable usage de l'Histoire, et que l'Historien doit aider ses Lecteurs à le faire (Bibliothèque choisi XVIII 1709, 14).

Moreover, the growth from within the *nova philosophia* of historical awareness together with a critical approach was based on the emergence of a free subject in an open society. That is why this process unfolded in the modern age. Two preconditions were necessary: the Greek idea of philosophy and the Protestant Reformation. Heumann made full use of these two antecedents, thereby contributing to provide the rudiments also for a second modern philosophical discipline, namely philosophy of history. While the history of philosophy helps the philosopher to choose what is true and what is good, the philosophy of history legitimizes the modern age as that in which mankind has reached a better and more advanced state because characterized by the development of modern freedom, which is what enables progress in knowing the truth and acting morally for good. These are guaranteed by the universalization of the ancient freedom of the Athenian citizen and the freedom of conscience of the modern Christian.

Morality came into being with Socrates. Scientific knowledge existed in the East, but it was something other than the *studium philosophicum* that is the

⁵ 1Ts 5, 21: Vulgata and King James Bible (1611) text.

⁶ *Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 35: "[...] so wohl die *veritatem factorum* als *dogmatum*".

study of physics. Attributed to the ancient Hebrews and the patriarchs, also *sapientia* [*Weisheit*]⁷ is something other than philosophy. What is called Barbarian philosophy (Heurnius 1600) is in reality not philosophy. It is only with the Greeks that institutional religion—publicly organized and professed—became separated from the search for truth. We see only with the Greeks the true beginning of philosophy, at first *particulariter*, occasionally and individually, and then *systematice* and *universaliter*, in schools and academies, institutions for its promotion and cultivation. The Christians inherited philosophy from the Greeks and found it easy to use since their religion and their revelation are (or should be) pure and rational.⁸

The term *Weltweisheit/Weltweisheit*⁹ is the result of a preconception since it derives from identifying philosophy with human and secular knowledge in opposition to religious and theological knowledge or faith. It cannot be true wisdom but, as said in 1Cor 1, 20,¹⁰ only stupidity and presumption if it expected to go beyond its own boundaries, those of finite knowledge. This idea recurs in some fathers of the church such as Tertullian, who talks of *sapientia saecularis* or Lactantius, who mentions the *terrena philosophia*, or Augustine, so beloved by the papists (but also Luther!), who acknowledges a *hujus mundi philosophia*. Hence it is preferable in German to use the term *Philosophie* as the alternative is too technical and tied to logic. This is also the case in the other modern European languages like Italian and French.¹¹ So it is that for Heumann the Greek origin of philosophy is transposed both—with regard to people in the East—into its definition as abstract reality able to think the universal but also—in respect of Christianity—as rationality that covers the entire field of the concept, not confining itself to empirical experience. Comparing the history of Christian ideas with the history of philosophical ideas shows that reason is applied to ev-

⁷ *Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 249. With Cicerone (*Philippicae orationes* XIII 6), Heumann also distinguishes pure simple knowledge from erudite knowledge.

⁸ “Die Theologi haben angemercket daß das Christenthum am besten geblühet als die Christen von Armuth, Verachtung und Vervolgung gedrucket worden[...].” (*Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 257); in fact, indirectly, this enables the nucleus of reason to be freed from faith. There are numerous references, but here two suffice: Grotius 1709, VI, 1, 278: “Religio autem passim non in mentis puritate, sed [...] in ritibus collocari coepit”. Spanhemius 1688, 38 ff. and *passim*; then in Spanhemius 1689, 188 ff. and *passim*.

⁹ *Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 314 ff. (“Von dem Nahmen der Welt-Weisheit”). The text (note a) includes the reference to *De Officiis* II, 5, which repeats I 153: “[...] sapientia [σοφία] rerum est divinarum et humanarum scientia, in qua continetur deorum et hominum communitas et societas inter ipsos”.

¹⁰ “Ubi sapiens? Ubi scriba? Ubi conquisitor huius saeculi? Nonne stultam fecit Deus sapientiam huius mundi?”.

¹¹ An expectation that was not to be met very soon. *Weltweisheit/Weltweisheit* denoted philosophy also in institutional terminology. Again in 1738 Carl Günther Ludovici, vol. 3, Drittes Register, s.v. *Philosophie*, refers to *Weltweisheit/Weltweisheit*. Heumann was the first to polemically point out the terminological, conceptual and historical difference, as shown by the entry in Walch 1726, Spalten 2888–89 (then: Walch 1775, IV ed., vol. 2, Spalten 1544–545).

ery aspect of natural and human life provided that authority and superstition, violence and ignorance are curtailed and neutralized.

The learned and orthodox work of Jacob Thomasius¹² presents a different, though sophisticated, approach to the new times:

Non placent mihi novationes. Sed nec disciplicuit [sic] unquam Antiquitatis notitia. Quam ita mihi servo, ut ad ingenium seculi me componam interim in iis, quae et ferri possunt absque noxa capitali, et mutari non possunt absque convulsione literarii status. (Thomasius 1699, 21).

The history of philosophy (and of theological-religious ideas) is, however, also reputed to be useful both for accommodating moderate degrees of innovation and for rejecting that which would instead overturn what exists. And this implies that the age is the harbinger of big changes but also that history of philosophy is acknowledged as a new dimension of philosophical thought.

Lastly, Heumann remarks that history of philosophy has to be seen as the history of all the philosophical disciplines in their entirety and not merely as the sum of the history of logic, the history of metaphysics etc. Also, it has to be viewed from both a chronological and geographical perspective (*Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 462 ff.). This method is universal and enables understanding that it is a philosophical and not a historical discipline. In this regard, an explicit analogy with ecclesiastical history is made,¹³ to which we will come back below.

Heumann stops at this point, not going so far as to see history of philosophy and philosophy as identical and deny that logic, physics and ethics are fundamental parts of philosophy.¹⁴ Truth and what is ethical-politically good are two objects that philosophy seeks and in which it consists. History of philosophy and philosophy of history are two new and intertwined realms in this search—along with many other realms.

5. From the long methodological *Einleitung*, subdivided into ten *Capitel* distributed in the first four *Stücken* of *Acta philosophorum*¹⁵ emerges a notion not only of history of philosophy but also of *nova philosophia*, the new culture. This claim is directly substantiated by three examples, which would find full expression in Hegel's history of philosophy, interwoven with the development of the modern world and the philosophy of history. They are ethical-political freedom, whose ideal model are the Greeks; the anthropological importance of the Lutheran Reformation for the interiorization of conscience; and modern thought and its immanentistic and systematic nature.

¹² On Thomasius: Lehmann-Brauns 2004, chap. II.

¹³ *Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 463: "Es verhält sich dieses eben also wie mit der Kirchen-Historie".

¹⁴ *Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 98–9: Heumann divides philosophy into six fields: logic, ethics, law, politics, anthropology and medicine (part of physics), theology.

¹⁵ See index below.

Heumann provides the example of a division of the history of philosophy into Greek philosophy and modern philosophy, which is not easy to find in the XVIII century except for first Buddeus and only later Hegel (Bordoli 2022, 80). This is connected with the emphasis placed by Heumann and shared by Hegel on the relation between the exercise of ethical-political freedom and the development of philosophy. Furthermore, Heumann points to the profundity of the relation between freedom and philosophy by, like Hegel, conferring due importance to the interiority of conscience and consequent divesting of the divine character of external nature and of the State. Liberty, secularization and immanence recur in numerous articles, above all in those dedicated to Bruno, Galilei and Spinoza and those to Luther and Melanchthon.

In one of the latter there is a reference to Johannes Grunius (1587, 64), in which Heumann underlines a particularly important assertion in the light of other less acceptable views on the history of philosophy: “Et quia lux Verbi divini sine philosophia excitari non potest” (Grunius 1587, 64); Luther did well to enlist Melanchthon’s support. Within the same perspective lies the reappraisal of Paul of Tarsus, who in the *Aufklärung* would become leader of a tendency in Christianity marked by practical faith and the depth of conscience, freed from manifest observance of ceremonies and superstition.

The seven *Capitel* on Bruno (totaling around 160 pages) look at a difficult writer acknowledged to be a model of atheism and include him fully in modern philosophy.¹⁶ Three contributions are on the accusation of atheism made against Bruno da Veyssièrre de La Croze.¹⁷ At the philosophical level, Heumann focuses on the thesis of the infinity of worlds and of the universe, which he considers to be shared also by Descartes, adding that it is not a question of a demonstrated truth but of a probable hypothesis based on the infinity of God.

Also of interest is the mention of the Spinozist Hendrik Wyermars (1684–1757)—and other Spinozists like Willem Deurhoff, about whom Heumann shows he is well informed—¹⁸as it links up with the relation between religion, theology and philosophy, referring to the writings of Gottfried Arnold. The latter had opened up a new path in ecclesiastical historiography interpreted as history of religious and philosophical ideas,¹⁹ and this is the model that Heu-

¹⁶ *Acta philosophorum*, on philosophy: I Buch 1715, 501–20; I Buch 1716, 868–908; II Buch 1718, 436–41; III Buch 1724, 424–33; on atheism: II Buch 1718, 380–406 and 406–36; II Buch 1720, 792–809 and 810–23.

¹⁷ *Dissertation sur l’Atheisme et sur les Athées modernes*, in Mathurin Veyssièrre de La Croze 1711, 250–86. Also the next written piece is on the theme: *Lettre de Gaspar Scioppius sur la mort de Jordan Brunus*, in Mathurin Veyssièrre de La Croze 1711, 287–337. The dispute between Heumann and Veyssièrre La Croze had a certain resonance, as Jordan (1741, 162–66). On the Benedictine who later converted to Protestantism and took part in the intellectual life in Berlin: see Ricci 1986; Mulsow 2001.

¹⁸ On the spread of Dutch Spinozism see also *Acta philosophorum* I 1716, 650–52.

¹⁹ *Acta philosophorum* II Buch 1716, 115–44. Gottfried Arnold 1699–1700, 2 vols. On the theme: Lehmann-Brauns 2004, chaps. IV–VI.

mann employs to formulate the basic principles of history of philosophy. Just as religious ideas have followed the most varied paths in becoming established (not only those of the orthodoxies), so philosophical ideas follow erratic routes before being acknowledged as true. Thus, like heresies that are fully part of ecclesiastical history and should not be treated differently from orthodox ideas, atheism is also a fully-fledged component of the history of philosophy and assists in better judging *ideae* and *opinionones receptae*.

So it is that Heumann reads Wyermars not out of curiosity or scholarship, a desire to shock, or even to share in Spinozism, but because it lies within the innovative intention to put together a history of philosophy that narrates the growth of and interweaving between conflicting ideas in human history. It is interesting that in 1750 also Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten's *Nachrichten von einer Hallischen Bibliothek*²⁰ talks at length of Spinoza and the Spinozists; the aim changes, but works of this kind continue to be read and studied with increasing meticulousness. Wyermars 1710²¹ argues for the eternity of the world and refutes the *creatio ex nihilo* of *Genesis*. He was locked up in an Amsterdam prison for fifteen years. In 2015 a modern annotated edition of the work came out but has not yet been translated (Wyermars 2015). Heumann was the first to write on the work.

The definition of a new philosophical discipline, on the one hand, and modern subjectivity able to make a better use of thought on the other set the preconditions for a further and innovative contribution from Heumann in the review: the history of philosophy written by women.²² The fifty pages contain a short introduction (first seven paragraphs) followed by a review of thirty or so female philosophers, considered as such and not as in the past simply learned or intellectual thinkers. Referring to Jonsius (1659, I, chap. 3, 22), Heumann goes as far as to maintain that the first trace of a philosophy of history was female and down to Theano from Crotone, wife, daughter or mother of Pythagoras (*Acta philosophorum* I 1715, 178). The criteria for excluding or including names are not

²⁰ Taking only Wyermars: *Nachrichten von einer Hallischen Bibliothek* 5, 1750, 388–93. See Schröder 1996. The *Nachrichten* already has in the first number (1748) a review of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* and of a version in French (chaps. IX–X, 58–74).

²¹ “Den ingebeelde Chaos, en gewaande werels-wording der Oude, en hedendaagze Wysgeeren, veridelt en weerlegt, Byzonder de gevoelens hier omtrent, van T. Lucretius Carus en Dirk Santvoort. Betoonende datze de beginzelen des Werelt, dat is, wording van Zon, Maan, Aardkloot, enz. volgens hun eygen gronden, niet wel afgeleyd en betoogt hebben. Met een verstandige verklaring wegens Gods Inblyvende, en Overgaande werking [...]”, namely: “Refutation of the imaginary chaos and presumed origin of the world according to ancient and modern philosophers, especially with regard to the views of Lucretius and Santvoort. Here it is shown that the latter have not well illustrated the first principles of the world, that is the origin of the sun, the moon, the earth etc. in line with their real causes. With a clear explanation as to the immanent or transitive actions of God [...]”. Heumann (*Acta philosophorum* II 1716, 121, note f) shows he knows also of Dirk Santvoort (1653–c1715), the Amsterdam philosopher who authored *Dissertatio philosophica de causa motus et principiis solidorum corporum*, published in 1704.

²² *Acta philosophorum* II 1721, 825–75: *Acta Philosopharum, das ist Nachricht von der Philosophie des Frauenzimmers*. Now see Heumann 2023.

very clear (Graneß and Herzl in Heumann 2023, 28 and *passim*). Nonetheless, it has to be noted that the start of history of philosophy includes specific attention to women philosophers on the basis of the principle that philosophy can be practiced by anyone, a principle that could not be taken for granted in that age.

6. *Acta philosophorum* is an important publication also in terms of quantity.²³ The observations made so far are based for the most part on the *Einleitung zur Historia philosophica*, which takes up the first three *Capitel* (pp. 1–103) in the *I Buch* (Book); the first four *Capitel* (pp. 179–314) in the *II Buch*; *Capitel* I (pp. 381–462) and *Capitel* II in the *III Buch* (pp. 462–72)²⁴; and last, *Capitel* I in the *IV Buch* (pp. 567–670). Altogether numbering around 432 pages, it is an ample essay that welcomes the emergence of the new philosophical discipline in the first philosophical review.

The work is made up of three books (*Bücher*) containing 18 pieces (*Stücken*):

I, 1–6, 1715–1716.

II, 7–12, 1716–1721.

III, 13–18, 1723–1726.

All the *Bücher* were published in Halle by Renger in 1716, 1721, 1726. Each *Stück* is of about 180 pages for a total of over 3000, at an average of 1000 per *Buch*. All three Books have an analytical index of authors.

In the *Einleitung* the main issues are addressed that were to be debated throughout the entire XVIII century in the process that would lead to the definition of history of philosophy as an independent field of study, and which would be given a systematic exposition in Hegel's manuscripts of the *Einleitungen* to his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (above all in those of 1820 and 1825–1826).²⁵ The themes expounded on in the ten chapters of the *Einleitung zur Historia philosophica* are:

I, I, I – Utility of history of philosophy.

I, I, II – *Sophus, philosophus, sophista*.

I, I, III – Essence and concept of philosophy.

I, II, I – Characteristics of false philosophy.

I, II, II – *Kabbalah* (follows on from preceding).

I, II, III – Origin and development of philosophy.

I, II, IV – *Weltweisheit* (follows on from I, I, II).

I, III, I – *De fide historica*, or credibility of history of philosophy.

I, III, II – Dividing up history of philosophy.²⁶

I, IV, I – *Ingenium philosophicum*.

²³ See below Appendix 1 and 2.

²⁴ Heumann does not include this chapter in the *Einleitung*.

²⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in Hegel 1994, 13–81; 205–76 (Hegel 2025, 557–605; 3–58).

²⁶ See previous note.

Acta philosophorum contains 144 contributions of short and long *Capitel* at an overall average of about 21 pages in-8 per *Capitel*. The distribution among the three Books is fairly balanced with the number increasing from one Book to the next. There are themes dealt with in several articles. Each Book has short *Capitel* (up to 8–10 pages), often dedicated to historiographical and bibliographical overviews. Monographic *Capitel* are normally found at the beginning. Excluded are reviews in the evaluative sense, which were a literary genre and characterized instead periodicals like *Acta eruditorum* or *Nachrichten von einer Hallischen Bibliothek*. This confirms the innovative nature of Heumann's work. The necessarily experimental character of his initiative accounts for the variety of themes and styles in the different *Capitel*.

The 144 articles (*Capitel*) range from antiquity to the modern age, including the Orient (Near and Far East), as was then common: a term that also included the Holy Scriptures (Jewish and Christian) and Patristic and Kabbalistic traditions. Nonetheless, Greek and modern philosophy prevail; eastern and medieval philosophy appear to a very modest degree. Among the ancients Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Stoics and Stoicism are recurrent and among the moderns Pomponazzi, Bruno, Descartes, Spinoza, Burnet, but also Luther and Melancthon (two *Capitel* on the religion/philosophy theme in the Grunius volume). Particular attention is reserved for the new science with Galilei (in as many as five *Capitel*), Huygens, and Harvey. Heumann deals especially with philosophical historiography or what could be considered such, as in the works of Jonsius. Rare or little known works are often mentioned. Sometimes a *Capitel* has an anecdotic nature, for example on the physical appearance of Socrates and on Xanthippe.

7. In Heumann history of philosophy does not correspond with philosophy but the first takes from the second an interest in the search for what is true and what is good. This is a criterion that is shared throughout the XVII century, in which history of philosophy developed as a philosophical discipline, at times contiguous with philosophy of history. A decisive contribution was made by reviews, which stimulated in readers new interests and curiosity and interpreted intellectual changes with greater flexibility and courage than other media and institutions.

Even the first Kantian historians of philosophy showed that including history of philosophy within philosophy as its modern side does not mean to make philosophy and history of philosophy identical (whatever that may mean) despite that giving rise to many problems. A follower of Kant like Johann Christian August Grohmann (1769–1847) holds that history of philosophy was a new field of study, complementary to the philosophy of history, that modern man has to engage with and which expresses a kind of autobiography of modern times at the level of ideas. The origin of history of philosophy is the concept, not experience.²⁷ Science is a system of necessity according to the concept and

²⁷ Grohmann 1798. On this theme see: Bordoli 2022, chap. 3.4.2, 164–70.

so is history, including history of philosophy. The history of philosophy does not take its method from pragmatic history concerned solely with external circumstances. The development, progress, that Grohmann detects and praises is conceptual in nature. The variations that history of philosophy deals with are the various philosophical systems. It examines how the thought of mankind passed from the dogmatic approach at its origins to idealism and from idealism to criticism, culminating in *Wissenschaftslehre* (the echo of Fichte is no coincidence) with which philosophy reaches its greatest degree of speculation (Grohmann 1798, 42).

Carried away by his logic into a paradox, Grohmann starts from philosophy of history and precisely from the infancy of mankind as outlined by Kant in *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* [1784].²⁸ Can one conceive an a priori history of philosophy, just as it is possible to formulate an a priori universal history? Like Kant reflecting on the conditions that make a philosophy of history possible for mankind, an examination is made of what conditions make a history of philosophy possible, putting in parentheses the mass of opinions and ideas that make up the pragmatic side. It is evident that this leads the author to place in the foreground the question of method: that of philosophy and that of history of philosophy (Grohmann 1798, 8). The ethical and logical comparison between philosophy of history and history of philosophy also opens a work on the same theme that Grohmann had published the year before (Grohmann 1797, 2–3).

Only method and not system can lay down the path that leads empirical content to unity of form or idea or concept (Grohmann 1797, 6–25). There is no system for that which implies references to content deriving from experience. But there is method. This goes for natural history as for universal or pragmatic history where single events (facts), besides being considered as such, are traced to something universal and thus treated with method.

Grohmann ponders whether that is also the case with history of philosophy. It presents an empirical side (history) and a conceptual side (philosophy) (Grohmann 1797, 25–6). Contrary to those who start from the first, he begins from the second in order to find an a priori that enables time and space to be accounted for (Grohmann 1797, 30). This implies that history of philosophy does not consist in a sequence of facts (opinions) in time, but rather in various systems, that is various (universal and necessary) conceptual orders connected logically to one another (Grohmann 1797, 32). These systems are grounded in a necessary and unitary mode on the diverse faculties of the human spirit, which represents the a priori, that is the condition of being possible (Grohmann 1797, 34).

²⁸ Grohmann 1798, 1 ff. Confirming that it this is not a chance/random way of reasoning, interpreting Kantian apriorism in an anthropological and psychological key, a few years later Grohmann would publish among others: *Psychologie des kindlichen Altens* (Grohmann 1812) and *Ideen zu einer Geschichte der Entwicklung des kindlichen Alters. Psychologische Untersuchungen* (Grohmann 1817).

The system (the necessary connection of the concepts) is, of course, in a close (causal, logical) relation with its sources—the different conceptual references set in time and space, the organization of which gives rise to the system (Grohmann 1797, 38 ff.). Consequently, an a priori history of philosophy appears as the representation of possible systems.²⁹ For an opposite conception, Grohmann cites an article in a periodical edited by Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, professor at Jena (shortly to be joined by Fichte), in which a pragmatic and thus empiricist interpretation of the notion of history of philosophy is given (Niethammer 1795).

The objects of universal history are empirical and cannot be traced back to general laws, whereas the objects of history of philosophy are indeed bound to time and space (and to this extent individual) but traceable back to general laws of thought and therefore given universality.³⁰ History of philosophy employs the scientific method but is not a science in the true sense; its object is treated according to the scientific method but in itself is not an absolute formal unity in that it maintains a connection with experience (Grohmann 1798, 45–6).

By way of example, for Spinoza God and the world are identical while others make a clear-cut distinction (Grohmann 1798, 48–9). The two systems are incompatible. Yet their origin is the same and is not in time but instead in the human mind's way of thinking (the a priori of philosophical thought), which makes possible history of philosophy.³¹ Gurlitt gives an incomplete and inaccurate definition of philosophy³² since he takes its changeable external aspects (authors, contexts, works) to be the immutable ground of thinking on which philosophy is based. Evidence of this confusion is the use of the two adjectives "chronological and systematic" applied to history of philosophy when the one excludes the other (Grohmann 1797, 69). What is subject to change in universal history are events, facts, while in history of philosophy it is the (philosophical) systems. Nevertheless, whereas in the first facts derive from experience, in the second the systems are bound to the laws of thought, to how the mind works. The result is that regarding history of philosophy, philosophical systems as the internal product of thought need to be distinguished from the external

²⁹ Grohmann 1797, 39: "[...] eine Darstellung von möglichen Systemen [...]"

³⁰ Grohmann 1797, 44–5. For the difference between the empiricist foundation of universal history and the a priori foundation of the history of philosophy: Grohmann 1797, 54–8.

³¹ Grohmann maintains that the changes in philosophy throughout history have an in itself "legitimate" origin [*ewigen Geburtsbrief*], that is one and the same with the foundation that produces them: the human spirit as such [*das menschliche Gemüth überhaupt*] (see Grohmann 1797, 49) on which the laws of thought depend a priori and on which the relations between the human faculties depend a priori.

³² Grohmann 1797, 67–8, and Gurlitt 1786, 1. Grohmann's own summary: "Geschichte der Philosophie ist die systematische Darstellung der nothwendigen vorhandenen Systeme der Philosophie, als der Wissenschaft der a priori im Vorstellungsvermögen bestimmten Erkenntniss nach Begriffen, in wie fern die Systeme auf ihre ersten im Vorstellungsvermögen bestimmten Gründe zurückgeführt werden können und nach ihnen möglich sind" (Grohmann 1797, 64–5).

changing of the philosophical spirit, namely the appearance in time and space of opinions, authors and works (Grohmann 1797, 73–4). Otherwise philosophy is the same as mathematics: purely formal, analytic knowledge (Grohmann 1797, 76). Neither does Gurlitt differentiate philosophy from history of philosophy. The latter has to be confined to the laws of thought and the philosophical systems; the former on the other hand establishes the scientific and immutable nature of philosophical ideas, grounding the history of philosophy a priori (Grohmann 1797, 79–80). It is not the task of history of philosophy to define philosophy. The fact is that between what changes (systems) and what does not change (philosophy) there is a qualitative jump and not a transition or progress. The single systems are based on the laws of thought—remaining isolated and self-contained one in respect of the other—but philosophy as science embraces them all and, above all, embraces thought and its laws wholly and rigorously (Grohmann 1797, 81).

A further example (Grohmann 1797, 93–4) shows that Spinoza's system is derived from the one of Descartes, which has to do with pragmatic history (of historians) and not history of philosophy in a scientific sense. According to history of philosophy, the question to be put is, rather, what the internal (logical) connection is between Spinoza and Descartes. However, the point is not the division of tasks between philosophy and history of philosophy but, instead, the last word that is pronounced by philosophy, making the history of philosophy truly possible but also putting an end to any further version. The reason is that true philosophy (critical philosophy) reveals the genuine and ultimate connections between the laws of thought and therefore between the systems that have appeared in history, thereby enabling the first and last history of philosophy in conformity with the scientific method to be written, just as at the same time it endorses the end of philosophy itself.³³

In Grohmann's view, therefore, Kant (and, it needs to be recalled, not Hegel) is the last philosopher in as far as the discoverer of true philosophy, which puts an end to philosophy and history of philosophy but the latter, for the very same reason, has in the meantime come into being. It is precisely this paradox that the reviewer of Grohmann's text seems to have sensed when he remarks that it is natural for every philosophical system to imply different notions of philosophy and, in turn, this changes the idea of history of philosophy.³⁴

8. Between 1715 and 1725, Heumann's *Acta philosophorum* opened up the way to the birth of the philosophical history of philosophy: history of philosophy as a new philosophical discipline. A periodical publication was much better suited

³³ Grohmann 1797, 101: "Die Geschichte der Philosophie ist das Ende alles Philosophirens, und sie kann nur erst zu Stande gebracht werden, wenn eine wahre Philosophie zu Stande gebracht worden".

³⁴ *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* Band 2 (13 April 1798), 118: 105–8. According to the reviewer, out of a desire to avoid the risk of bringing history into the idea of philosophy, Grohmann was forced to annihilate (*zernichten*) history.

than an essay to attempting to define a field of epistemology. Neither was philosophy of history, whose origin dates from around the middle of the XVIII century, born like Athena from the head of Zeus but after a long gestation involving different authors, divergent perspectives and intentions not always clear in themselves. Additionally, a review allowed for close and complex relations with more or less competent interlocutors, as well as with a broad and curious readership, demonstrated by continual references to *Acta eruditorum*.

Heumann's aim was not simply scholarly or informative. On the basis of the *nova philosophia*, he reconsiders ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, and medieval and eastern philosophy including Biblical philosophy (but excluding the latter from true proper philosophy). He attributes an important function to philosophy in society and modern culture, inspired to know what is true in the natural and human world and pursue ethical-political freedom and happiness. The history of philosophical ideas, which had to be obtained through the criticism (*critica*) formulated by Humanism and felt the effects of the moral renewal introduced by the Reformation, serves to pave the way for the improvement of human societies that aspire to increasing mental and practical freedom. The influence of Heumann during the XVIII century was very widespread and deep-reaching and took effect both in (philosophical and other) reviews and on authors who wrote expressly on the history of philosophy. From Buddeus to Gurlitt, the definition of history of philosophy from the Greeks to the moderns, when the *Geist des Zeitalters* inspired throughout Europe the fostering of freedom of speech and thought and of ethical and political freedom,³⁵ owed to Heumann and *Acta philosophorum* a first explicit step in that direction, which did not fail to include female philosophers.

Although the vitality of the entire German-speaking area can be pointed to with regard to the emergence of history of philosophy as part of the *nova philosophia*, it is impossible to overlook the importance of the University of Halle/Saale and of Prussian and Saxon milieus from the end of the XVII century. Here is not the place to dwell on this aspect. However, the central role of the University of Halle (founded in 1694) in these developments should be noted. It established itself as a complex breeding ground for the new culture characterized by the growing diffusion and improvement of knowledge. In this, the reviews made a decisive contribution (Löffler 2020) starting from *Acta philosophorum* and *Nachrichten von einer Hallischen Bibliothek* (1748–1751) without forgetting the tradition initiated in 1682 by *Acta eruditorum* (published in nearby Leipzig).

In conclusion, *Acta philosophorum* is not only the first philosophical review but, at the same time, the first review of philosophy that includes history of philosophy as a philosophical discipline. It was, furthermore, not by chance that this new idea of philosophy made its appearance in the Age of Enlightenment.

³⁵ It is sufficient to mention Buddeus 1731 and Gurlitt 1786. On this theme: Bordoli 2022 (particularly: chap. 2.5.1, 79–84; chap. 3.1, 116–22).

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Appendix 1

Table 1 – *Capitel* average length.

	Stück	Capitel einleitung	Capitel	Short capitel ≤ 8–10 Pp.	Tot
I BUCH	I–VI	10	23	7	40
II BUCH	VII–XII	0	32	18	50
III BUCH	XIII–XVIII	0	43	11	54
tot	XVIII	10	98	36	144

Capitel average length: 21 pp.

Capitel average length, except short *Capitel*: 26 pp.

Appendix 2

Table 2 – *Acta philosophorum* Index.³⁶

I Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
I STÜCK	I	Einleitung zur <i>Historia Philosophica</i> [I]. Von deren Nutzbarkeit	1–63
	II	Einleitung zur <i>Historia Philosophica</i> [II]. Von denen vielerley Bedeutungen der Wörter σοφία und Philosophia	63–92
	III	Einleitung zur <i>Historia Philosophica</i> [III]. Von dem Wesen und Begriff der Philosophie	93–103
	IV	Eherenrettung der Xanthippe	103–25
	V	Von des Socratis Leibesgestalt	126–38
	VI	Das Leben Plotini vom Porphyrio beschrieben	138–59
	VII	Joannes Jonsius de Scriptoribus Historiae Philosophicae	159–79

³⁶ In case of slight differences between the volume's index and *ad locum* title, here you find the latter (frequently in latin). In the text there are many internal references. Here you find the most important ones.

I Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
II STÜCK	I	Einleitung zur <i>Historia Philosophica</i> [IV]. Von denen Kennzeichen der falschen und unächtigen Philosophie	179–236
	II	Von denen vier <i>Cabbalistischen</i> Welten wie auch von denen zehnen <i>Sephiroth</i> [IV bis]	236–46 Supplement zu dem vorgehenden Cap., par. XXXI folg.
	III	Einleitung zur <i>Historia Philosophica</i> [V]. Von dem Ursprung und Wachstum der Philosophie	246–314
	IV	Von dem Nahmen der Weltweisheit [II bis]	314–21 Anhang zum andern Capitel des I Stück [<i>supra</i> I, I, II]
	V	Diogenes Laertius <i>de Vitis Philosophorum</i>	321–67
	VI	<i>Scriptores Historiae Pythagoricae</i>	367–81 <i>Infra</i> I, IV, VIII; e II, IX, VIII.
III STÜCK	I	Einleitung zur <i>Historia Philosophica</i> [VII]. De Fide Historica oder Von der Glaubwürdigkeit in dieser Historie	381–462
	II	Eintheilung der <i>Historiae Philosophicae</i> [VIII]	462–72
	III	Von des <i>Oraculi</i> Urtheil über den <i>Socratem</i>	472–500
	IV	<i>Jordani bruni Nolani de Monade, numero et figura liber, consequens quinque de minimo, magno et mensura, item de innumerabilibus, immenso et infigurabili, seu de Universo et Mundis libri octo [...]</i> , Francofurti, 1591	501–20 <i>Infra</i> II, IX, IV.
	V	Nachricht von einer dem <i>Thaleti</i> zu Ehren geschlagenen Mütze	520–23
	VI	<i>Thomae Stanleii Historia Philosophiae</i>	523–45
	VII	<i>Thomae Campanellae de libris propriis et recta ratione studentium Syntagma</i>	545–66
IV STÜCK	I	Einleitung zur <i>Historia Philosophica</i> . Von dem <i>Ingenio Philosophico</i> [VI]	567–670

I Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	II	<i>Fabula de Hippocrate, Democriti insaniae medicinarum adhibero jusso, ex historia veterum Philosophorum eliminata</i>	670–81 First published by C.A.H[eumann], <i>Acta eruditorum</i> XXXII, 1713, pp. 458–63. Here in latin as a language well known to readers (p. 670, note a).
	III	Von dem der <i>Thaleti</i> , wie auch von einer andern dem <i>Pomponatio</i> zu Ehren verfertigten Mütze	681–90
	IV	<i>De varia Aristotelis fortuna in Academia Parisiensi liber</i> [1656]. <i>Auctore Joanne De Launoy</i> [Jean de Launoy]	690–720
	V	<i>Jo. Jacobi Frisii Bibliotheca philosophorum classicorum authorum chronologica</i> , 1592	720–25
	VI	<i>Dissertatio de Paedantismo didactico Pythagorae ratione silentii, Praeside Jo. Dav. Koelero</i> [...] <i>Respondente Georg. Frid. Deinlino</i> , 1714	725–30
	VII	<i>Catalogus Scriptorum de Philosophia Stoica</i>	730–51 <i>Infra</i> II IX, VII.
	VIII	Zusatz zu dem <i>Catalogo Scriptorum de Philosophia Pythagorica</i>	751–54 <i>Supra</i> I, II, VI; <i>infra</i> II, IX, VIII.
V STÜCK	I	Von der Philosophie der Patriarchen [I]	755–809
	II	Von der Platonischer Weibergemeinschaft	809–48 <i>Infra</i> II, XII, I.
	III	Von des <i>Potamonis</i> Lebenszeit	848–68 Contrary to the index: 886.
	IV	<i>Jordani Bruni Nolani de innumerabilibus, immenso et infigurabili, seu de Universo et Mundis, libri octo</i>	868–908 <i>Supra</i> I, III, IV.
	V	<i>Christiani Hugenii</i> [Huygens] <i>ΚΟΣΜΟΘΕΩΡΟΣ, sive de terris coelestibus earumque ornatu conjecturae</i> , 1698	908–25
V I STÜCK	I	Von der Philosophie der Patriarchen [II]	925–43

I Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	II	Von dem Aesopo und dessen Fabeln	944–72
	III	Lebensbeschreibung Ioannis Lockii	972–1031
	IV	<i>Nic[olai] Hier[onymus] Gundlingii Historia philosophiae moralis. Pars prima</i> , 1706	1032–39
	V	<i>Georgii Hornii Historiae philosophicae libri septem [...]</i> , 1655	1039–61
	VI	<i>Petrus Silvanum Regium</i> [Pierre-Sylvain Régis], <i>Discursus philosophicus, in quo Historia philosophiae antiquae et recentioris recensetur</i> , 1705	1061–70
	VII	Jo[annes] Michaëlis Schwimmer, <i>Academia prisca Graeciae</i> , 1674	1070–73
	INDEX AUCTORUM		=
	Register über die in denen ersten sechs Stücken enthaltenen Sachen		= From <i>Cometen</i> to <i>Praejudicium</i> pages are twice repeated.
II Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
VII STÜCK	I	Von der Philosophie der Patriarchen oder der alten Hebräer [III]	1–58 About ancient Hebrew philosophy. Erroneously denoted as second part. Continuing I, VI, I, par. X (second part of I, V, I).
	II	Von dem Fasse des <i>Diogenis Cynici</i>	58–69
	III	Nachricht von dem <i>Petro de Apono</i>	69–115 [Pietro d'Abano]; <i>infra</i> III, XV, II.
	IV	Nachricht von einem neuen Spinozisten <i>Henrico Wirmarsio</i>	115–44 [Hendrik Wyermars]
	V	Gottlieb Stollens Historie der Heydnischen <i>Morale</i> , Jena 1714	144–60 [Gottlieb Stolle (1673–1744)].

II Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	VI*	Johannes Grunius, <i>Philosophiae origo, progressus, definitio, divisio, dignitas, utilitates, quas vitae humanae et ecclesiae confert [...]</i> , 1587	160–61 *In VII STÜCK Index (p. 172), Capitel VI and Capitel VII inverted.
	VII	Dessen Zusatz zu dem Catalogo Scriptorum de Philosophia Stoica	161–64 <i>Supra</i> I, IV, VII
	VIII	<i>Everardi Ottonis Jcti Oratio de Stoica veterum Jurisconsultorum philosophia Oratio</i> 1715	164–71 [Everardus Otto]
VIII STÜCK	I	<i>Catalogus scriptorum de philosophia veterum in Oriente barbarorum</i>	173–204 <i>Infra</i> III, XV, IX.
	II	Von der Barbarey	204–53
	III	Aesopi Lebensbeschreibung	253–75 [Claude Gaspard Bachet de Méziriac: <<Meziriacs Lebensbeschreibung des Aesopi>>]. <i>Supra</i> I, VI, II.
	IV	Daß Aesopus und Lockman eine Person sey	275–80 A reference to Thomas Erpenius. About Aesop see previous Capitel.
	V	Von der Catholischen Philosophie	281–301 <i>Infra</i> III, XIII, III
	VI	<i>Mich. Gottlieb Hanschius, Diatriba de Enthusiasmo Platónico</i> , 1716	301–10 [Michael Gottlieb Hansch].
	VII	Ioannes Ionsius, <i>De Scriptoribus Historiae Philosophicae libri IV [...]</i> Cura Io. Christophori Dornii. Cum praefatione B.G. Struvii	310–19 [Johannes Christophorus Dorn; Burckhard Gotthelf Struve (1671–1738)]. <i>Supra</i> I, I, VII.
	VIII	Leonardus Cozzandus, <i>De magisterio antiquorum Philosophorum libri VI</i> , 1684	319–26
IX STÜCK	I	Von der Atheistischen Philosophie des Petri Pomponatii	327–80
	II	<i>Jordani Bruni</i> Unschuld <i>in puncto</i> der Atheisterey	380–406 Vs accusation of atheism to Bruno by Veysseyre La Croze in 1711. <i>Infra</i> II, XI, VI–VII.

II Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	III	<i>Jordani Bruni</i> Abschiedsrede	406–36 Bruno in Wittenberg in 1588 (following the previous)
	IV	<i>Jordani Bruni Nolani De triplici Minimo et Mensura [...] libri V</i> , 1591	436–41 <i>Supra</i> I, III, IV.
	V	Von des <i>Ciceronis</i> Philosophie	441–66
	VI	Sonderbare <i>Epigrammata</i> auf etliche <i>Philosophos</i>	466–78
	VII	Anderer Zusatz zu dem <i>Catalogo de Philosophia Stoica</i>	478–87 <i>Supra</i> I, IV, VII.
	VIII	Anderer Zusatz zu dem <i>de Philosophia Pythagorica</i>	487–91 <i>Supra</i> I, II, VI; e I, IV, VIII.
X STÜCK	I	Von denen sieben Weisen in Griechenland	493–537 <i>Infra</i> II, XII, VIII; e III, XI–II, V.
	II	Nachricht von dem Streite der Philosophorum des funfzehenden Saeculi über den Platonem und Aristotelem in XV Saec.	537–71–79 From p. 537 to p. 571 will find German translation of Jean Boivin, <i>Querelle de philosophes de Quinzième Siècle. Dissertation historique</i> , in <i>Histoire de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres</i> , Paris, 1717, vol. 2, pp. 775–91. From p. 571 to p. 579 will find a commentary to the text: Urtheil von dem bißher erzehlten Streite der <i>Platoniorum</i> und <i>Aristoteliorum</i> .
	III	<i>Lutheri</i> Urtheil von der Philosophie	579–93
	IV	Von der Philosophie des <i>Melanchthonis</i>	594–603
	V	<i>Ad Virum Clarissimum, Christoph. Augustum Heumannum Epistola Ioannis Christoph. Coleri Epistola, qua memoria saecularis adventus Philippi Melanchthonis [...] celebratur</i>	603–15
	VI	Von des <i>Harvei</i> Widersachern und Patronen	616–31 [William Harvey, <i>De motu cordis</i> , 1628].

II Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	VII	<i>G. C. Gebhardi Disp. de harmonia coelorum Pythagorica, 1692</i>	632–34 “Pythagorica” appears only in the index (after p. 657) and not in the work’s title.
	VIII	<i>De priscorum sapientum placitis [...] ad Aloysio Pisaurio, 1567</i>	635–37 [Luigi Pesaro, Aloysius Pisaurius (1541–1586)].
	IX	<i>Catalogus Scriptorum de philosophia epicurea</i>	637–50
	X	Epigrammata auf etliche Philosophos	650–57
XI STÜCK	I	Von der Philosophie der alten Egyptier	659–97
	II	Philosophisches Rätsel, nebst dessen dreifacher Auflösung	697–710 Philosophical riddle (in italian in the text), whose solution is atomistic <i>vacuum</i> . Heumann’s divertissement ends with Horace, <i>Ars poetica</i> , 5: “auditum [in orig.: spectatum] admissi, risum teneatis, amici?”.
	III	Lobsprüche vom <i>Aristotele</i>	711–17
	IV	Eusebii Renaudoti Nachricht und Urtheil von der Philosophie der Sineser	717–86 [Eusèbe Renaudot (1646–1720)].
	V	Dialogus de transmigracione animarum Pythagorica [...] autore Ambrosio Rhodio, 1638	787–92
	VI	<i>La Croze vom Atheismo Jordani Bruni</i>	792–809 <i>Supra</i> II, IX, II–III.
	VII	Schutzschrift <i>Jordani Bruni</i>	810–23 Following the previous.
XII STÜCK	I	<i>Acta Philosopharum</i> , das ist, Nachricht von der Philosophie des Frauenzimmers	825–75 <i>Supra</i> I, V, II.
	II	Von dem Nahmen der <i>Peripateticorum</i>	876–99
	III	<i>Catalogus Scriptorum de philosophia Cynica</i>	899–911
	IV	Gründliche Nachricht von zehen fälschlich also genannten <i>Cynicis</i>	912–21

II Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	V	<i>De Platone caute legendo Io. Baptistae Crispi Disputatum libri XXIII</i> , 1594	921–50 [Giovanni Battista Crispo, <i>De ethnicis philosophis caute legendis [...]</i> , Romae, 1594].
	VI	<i>Ephraimi Gerhardi Introductio praeliminaris in Historiam philosophicam</i> , 1711	950–55 Originally <i>Dissertatio academica</i> (Gerhard <i>praeses</i> , Samuel Laurentius Puschmann <i>respondens</i>) held in Jena in 1705; then published in 1711 in a slightly different title.
	VII	Gombervillaeus, La Doctrine des Moeurs, tirée de la Philosophie des Stoiques, représentée en cent tableaux et expliquée en cent Discourses	956–57 Marin Le Roy de Gomberville's (1600–1674) work title, published in 1646, as seen in the II Buch index, is inappropriate: <i>Doctrina moralis Stoicorum</i> . The work is conceived for young students and does not mention Stoicism. <i>Supra</i> II, VII, VII.
	VIII	Geßners Zusatz zu der Dissertation von denen sieben Weisen	958–60 <i>Supra</i> II, X, I; <i>infra</i> III, XIII, V.
	IX	<i>Epitaphia Berühmter Philosophorum</i>	960–72 It includes ancient, medieval and modern philosophers like Francis Bacon e Descartes.
	INDEX AUCTORUM		=
	Register über die in diesem andern <i>Tomo</i> enthaltenen Sachen		=
III Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
XIII STÜCK	I	Gerichtlicher Proceß der <i>Aristotelico-Scholasticorum</i>	3–23
	II	Von des <i>Gassendi Exercitationibus paradoxicis</i>	23–48
	III	Fortsetzung von der Scholastischen Philosophie	49–70 <i>Supra</i> II, VIII, V.

III Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	IV	Von einer dem Aristoteli zu Ehren geschlagenen Münze	70–7
	V	<i>Iraenei Bibliophili</i> Zusatz zu der Nachricht in <i>Actis Philos. T. II, p. 501 et 958</i> , von dem Buche, die sieben Weise genannt	77–85 <i>Supra</i> II, X, I; e II, XII, VIII.
	VI	Von einem erdichteten Indischen <i>Philosopho</i> , Namens Lyndorach	85–8 Luigi Groto totally invented an indian philosopher called Lyndorach, strongly opposed to marriage (see Barbara Spaggiari, “«Sorgi Homer, vien Petrarca, esci Marone». I corrispondenti in versi di Luigi Groto.” <i>Italique. Poésie italienne de la Renaissance</i> 19 (2016): 247–62, p. 256 and note 42).
	VII	Entwurf eines <i>Martyrologii Philosophici</i>	88–109
	VIII	Anmerkungen zu Herrn <i>Io. Alb. Fabricii Catalogo Stoicorum</i>	109–24
	IX	<i>De Philosophia Pauli Apostoli</i>	124–49 <i>Supra</i> II, VII, VI.
	X	Ioannis Launoii liber de varia Aristotelis in Academia Parisiensi fortuna [...], 1720	149–58 About Jean de Launoy and others on Aristotle's reception.
XIV STÜCK	I	Von der Ionischen Philosophie	159–210
	II	<i>Moralis philosophiae Platonicae Dispositio per Chrysostomum Iauellum</i> , 1536 Beschreibung der Platonischen Philosophie	210–41 Index title (p. 344): <i>Beschreibung der Platonischen Philosophie</i> .
	III	<i>Nicolai Secuti</i> , Gedanken von des <i>Platonis</i> Seligkeit	241–49 Especially about: Niccolò Securo, <i>Plato beatus</i> , 1666.
	IV	Von dem <i>Lapide Philosophorum</i>	249–61
	V	Lebensbeschreibung Galilaei Galilaei	261–82 <i>Infra</i> III, XV, III; III, XV, VI-II; III, XVII, XII; III, XVI-II, VII.

III Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	VI	Nachricht von <i>Gualteri Burlei Historia Philosophica</i>	282–98 A more specific title is to be found in the index (p. 344): <i>Vitae Philosophorum</i> . Il <i>Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum</i> , anonymous, was attributed to Walter Burley (XIV sec.).
	VII	<i>Thomae Burnetii Archaeologiae Philosophicae</i> [1692]	298–341
XV STÜCK	I	<i>Poëma vetus de vita et morte Aristotelis</i>	345–74
	II	<i>Petri de Abano Conciliator differentiarum Philosophorum et praecipue Medicorum</i> , 1483	374–400 <i>Supra</i> II, VII, III.
	III	Fortsetzung der Lebensbeschreibung des <i>Galilaei</i>	400–23 <i>Supra</i> III, XIV, V. <i>Infra</i> III, XV, VIII; III, XVII, XII; III, XVIII, VII.
	IV	<i>Iordani Bruni Metaphysica</i>	424–33 About Bruno's philosophy: I, III, IV; I, V, IV; II, IX, IV; III, XV, IV. About Bruno's atheism: II, IX, II–III; II, XI, VI–VII.
	V	<i>Thomae Burnetii Lebenslauf</i>	434–39
	VI	<i>Guil. Morellii Tabula compendiosa de origine, successione, aetate et doctrina veterum philosophorum</i>	439–49 [Guillaume Morel (1505–1564)]. The work is a schoolbook published in 1580.
	VII	Bibliothèque des philosophes par H. Gautier, 1723	450–67 [Henri Gautier (1660–1737), Bibliothèque des philosophes, 1723 (voll. 1 e 2)–1724 (vol. 3)].
	VIII	Fernere Fortsetzung der Lebensbeschreibung des <i>Galilaei</i>	467–84 <i>Supra</i> III, XV, III.
	IX	Zusatz zu dem <i>Catalogo scriptorum de philosophia veterum in Oriente barbarorum</i>	485–94 <i>Supra</i> II, VIII, I.
XVI STÜCK	I	Von den <i>Therapeutis</i> , Jüdischen <i>philosophis</i> in Egypten	503–29
	II	Lebensbeschreibung <i>Petri Abaelardi</i>	529–86

III Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	III	Nachricht von der ersten Teutschen <i>Logic</i>	586–92 <i>Infra</i> III, XVII, V.
	IV	Von dem Titel <i>Magister Philosophiae</i>	592–630
	V	Histoire de la philosophie payenne, 1724	630–31 [Jean Levesque de Bourigny (1692–1785)]. The content is more theological-metaphysical and ethnographic than historical.
	VI	<i>De philosophiae apud Romanos initio et progressu Paganini Gaudentii Volumen</i> , 1643	631–41 Paganino Gaudenzi (1595–1649) Swiss Calvinist converted to Roman Catholicism, yet a defender of modern philosophy and Galileo Galilei. The work was published in Pisa (where he taught) and celebrates Lucretius' atomism.
	VII	<i>Fragmenta MSS</i> ta aus der Historie <i>Samuelis Pufendorffii</i>	641–59 <i>Infra</i> III, XVII, VII.
XVII STÜCK	I	Lebensbeschreibung des <i>Theophrasti</i>	661–81
	II	Von des <i>Theophrasti Characteribus ethicis</i>	681–94
	III	Von des <i>Ciceronis Paradoxis Stoicis</i>	694–711
	IV	<i>Dissertatio de aetate Potaemonis Alexandrini eclecticorum philosophorum principis</i>	711–45 A letter by Jacob Hase (1691–1723) to Heumann.
	V	Nachricht von Ortholph Fuchspergers schon A. 1533 gefertigten Teutschen <i>Logic</i>	745–55 [Ortolf Fuchsberger (1490–1541), <i>Dialectica</i> , 1533]. About logic, <i>supra</i> III, XVI, III.
	VI	<i>Epitaphia</i> berühmter <i>Philosophorum</i>	755–69
	VII	<i>Fragmenta MSS</i> ta aus der Historie <i>Sam. Pufendorffii</i>	770–89 <i>Supra</i> III, XVI, VII.
	VIII	<i>Dan. Heinsii Peplus Graecorum epigrammatum, in quo omnes celebriores Graeciae Philosophi, encomia eorum, vita et opiniones, recensentur aut exponuntur</i>	789–91

III Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	IX	Bartholdi Feindes Schaubühne der führnehmsten Weltweisen und deren Gesellschaften von Anfange der Welt biß auf gegenwärtige Zeiten [1702]	791–92 [Barthold Feind (1678–1721)].
	X	<i>Henningi Wittenii Compendium Historiae Philosophicae</i>	792–93 [Henning Witte (1634–1696)]. Preface to <i>Memoriae philosophorum, Oratorum, Poetarum, Historicorum, et Philologorum [...]</i> , Francofurti, 1677, consisting in a brief history of philosophy (40 pp.).
	XI	<i>Theophili Galei Historia Philosophica</i>	793–802 [Theophilus Gale, <i>Philosophia generalis</i> , Londini, 1676].
	XII	Anmerkungen zu des Galilaei Lebensbeschreibung	803–14 <i>Supra</i> III, XIV, V; III, XV, III; III, XV, VIII. <i>Infra</i> III, XVIII, VII.
XVIII STÜCK	I	Nachlese von dem <i>Ingenio Philosophico</i>	817–57 The Capitel is a continuation of Einleitung, I, IV, I.
	II	Von des Ioannis Scoti Erigenae in fünf Bücher verfasseten <i>Physiologia</i>	858–900
	III	Zusatz zu des Herrn Fabricii <i>Catalogo Platonicorum</i>	900–11
	IV	Von der Secte der <i>Elpisticorum</i>	911–20 About Elpistic sect wrote Jakob Brucker, and Iohannes Christianus Leuschaerus [Leuschner]: <i>De secta Elpisticorum variorum opuscula [...]</i> , Lipsiae, 1755 (that includes the Heumann's <i>Disquisitio</i>).
	V	Tituli honorarii Scholasticorum et alia Scriptorum cognomina in Catalogum ordine Alphabetico relata a Iac. Thomasio	921–29
	VI	Vorschlag zu einem Wercke unter dem Titel: <i>Fragmenta Historiae Philosophicae</i>	930–37

III Buch/Tomus	Capitel	Inhalt	Seiten/Anmerkungen
	VII	Anmerkung von dem Galileo	938 <i>Supra</i> III, XIV, V; III, XV, III; III, XV, VIII.
	VIII	<i>Philosophiae naturalis adversus Aristotelem libri XII [...] a Sebastiano Bassone</i>	939–48 Sébastien Basson vs Aristotle for the atomistic theory.
	IX	Nachricht von <i>Samuele Pufendorfio</i>	949–57
	INDEX AUTURUM		=
	Register über die in diesem dritten <i>Tomo</i> enthaltenen Sachen		=

Summaries of the Reviews of the Editions and Translations of Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime* Published in the *Gelehrte Journale* Between 1710 and 1783

Lorenzo Leonardo Pizzichemi

Abstract: This essay aims to offer new and systematic information for those—particularly historians of knowledge and classicists—who are interested in 18th century German reception of Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime* (Περὶ ὑψους), “the golden book” of the German *Aufklärung*. By systematically reporting, for the first time, the content of 30 German book reviews of overall 11 editions and translations of *On the Sublime* that appeared in 14 *Gelehrte Journale* between 1710 and 1783, this essay seeks to address still neglected sources that are crucial to understanding the concrete reception of the treatise in 18th century German-speaking territories.

Keywords: Pseudo-Longinus, *On the Sublime*, Translation Reviews, *Gelehrte Journale*, German Enlightenment Journal Reviews, *Aufklärung*, History of Knowledge.

...wer die art der gelehrten kennet/
welche viele bu^cher haben/
und zugleich in allerhand disziplinen ge^ebet sind.
Sie fallē wie die Bienen/
von einer Blume auff die andere;
von einem buch auff das andere:
und nehmen sich also keine zeit
eine grosse und weitla^auftige Schriff
zu verfertigen.
(Anonymous reviewer 1711).¹

1. Introduction

Several reasons—regardless of the research results already achieved by scholars—lead us to argue that the book reviews [*Rezensionen*] published in the

¹ “...whoever knows the nature of those scholars who own many books and are at the same time practiced in all sorts of disciplines knows that they flit like bees from one flower to the next, from one book to another, and thus they do not take the time to compose a great and

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German Enlightenment journals [*Gelehrte Journale*] can be considered relevant sources for uncovering new and innovative research perspectives on the German Enlightenment and 18th century German thought. Two reasons, in particular, seem to me decisive in this regard: (a) the relevance of the press in the 18th century and (b) the fundamentally commercial nature of book reviews.

(a) Whereas today the press is a relic, relegated to the margins of the social production of truth, starting from the 18th century the journals held a *monopoly over truth*—a monopoly that would persist in Western societies well into the 20th century. From the 18th century onward, truth, systems of certainty, and the construction of values began to transcend the ‘inner forum’ of individual conscience and materialise in the printing press: the ‘inner voice’—along with the “clear and distinct ideas”—gave way to ‘public opinion.’ The epochal significance of this transition remains largely understudied—especially in German-speaking regions, whose intellectual legacy would profoundly influence the course of global thought over the ensuing centuries. It is a matter of fact that the authors who gave modern philosophy its vocabulary (e.g., Kant) feared book reviews. In a way that might seem odd to us today, defences against reviewers’ attacks appear in the most sensitive passages of their works. A single review could destroy an entire career—and, most importantly, determine for readers what was worth buying and what could be discarded.

(b) The book reviews published in the *Gelehrte Journale*, or at least the majority of them, were written with commercial intentions.² The purpose of a review was, quite clearly, to answer the question: “Should this book be purchased?” At a time when the bourgeoisie was shedding the workshop’s apron and discovering leisure, reviews played a strategic role: they pointed to what ought to be possessed. Even in their leisure time, which they devoted to “shaping themselves as they are,”³ the bourgeois remained “busy” and “at work.” Therefore, reviews—by offering a brief synopsis of the book’s content—*took the place of the book itself*.

With the significant rise in book publication during the 18th century, came an exponential increase in journals and reviews. In this context, reviews of philosophical texts are paradigmatic. In fact, the number of theoretically significant or ‘original’ reviews of philosophy books represents a negligible fraction of the corpus of published reviews of philosophical works. Even if there are notable differences among journals and between disciplines—e.g., reviewing a text written in an ancient language generally required a higher level of expertise —, the aver-

extensive treatise”. For the source of this quotation, see *infra* par. 2.1.2. I would like to thank the Biblioteca of the Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici (Rome), and in particular Dr. Lisa Antonello, as well as the Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig for their essential support in locating and digitizing the sources. I also wish to thank Prof. Laura Anna Macor for her guidance during my research.

² In his *Parerga und Paralipomena* (Schopenhauer 1851/1988, par. 281, vol. II, pp. 451–54), Arthur Schopenhauer vehemently deprecated the commercial aims of review journals, their shady connections with publishing houses, and the widespread practice of anonymity in writing book reviews.

³ This is a quotation from Johann Wolfgang v. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister*, Book V, Chapter III.

age quality of reviewers was not outstanding. The systematic use of plagiarism is clear evidence of this. Precisely because of its commercial—and at times even self-promotional—nature, and its lack of theoretical rigor—when there is little to say, pages are filled with clichés designed to win the reader's assent—plagiarism tends to select and amplify certain clichés over others, thereby shaping a commonly shared body of knowledge.

As such, reviews become a key source for historians of knowledge. In the reviews published in the *Gelehrte Journale*, the body of knowledge of the German *Aufklärung* takes form, and the concrete mode of social production of truth becomes visible through the analysis of the structure, articulation, development, and dissemination of specific categories or 'ideas' via journals. For instance, a particular German translation that was praised as excellent in one decade may be dismissed as poor in the next. What changed? The collective mentality, the reader expectations, the "Mode".⁴

In this essay, I am going to systematically report and analyse, for the first time, the content of 30 German book reviews of a total of 11 editions and translations of Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime* that appeared in 14 *Gelehrte Journale*⁵ between 1710 and 1783. I am convinced that reviews can yield new insights for scholars only when examined systematically. From the perspective of the history of knowledge, quantity is a kind of quality. In addition to the intrinsic beauty and astonishing modernity of the work—which cannot fail to captivate any scholar, then as now—my decision to focus on the reception of *On the Sublime* in German Enlightenment journal reviews is also motivated by the fact that, starting from the 17th century, this treatise enjoyed an enormous success in the European culture,⁶ especially in German-speaking territories. In fact, the success of this treatise is exclusively a modern phenomenon, and this represents a fascinating aspect to explore from the standpoint of the history of knowledge. Ignored—as far as we know—in antiquity, this treatise enjoyed undeniable popularity in German-speaking territories during the 18th century, partially shaping its philosophical destiny. Authors such as Winckelmann, Mendelssohn, and Lessing—to name just a few—cited and philosophically engaged with the treatise. To borrow an expression from 18th century journal reviews of the treatise, *On the Sublime* was certainly the "golden book" of the German *Aufklärung*.

⁴ I employ here the German term "Mode," leaving it untranslated, in the weighty—and meaningful for historians of knowledge—sense suggested by Gadamer (1960/2010, 42–3): as the concrete, collective and historically laden realization of taste. "Mode" also pertains the field of knowledge (Gadamer 1986/1993, 51).

⁵ I.e., *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* [+ Anhang], *Ausführlicher Bericht von allerhand neuen Büchern u. andern Dingen*, *Neue Bibliothek oder Nachricht* etc., *Neue(r) Zeitungen v. gelehrten Sachen* [+ Beytrag], *Niedersächsische Neue Zeitungen v. gelehrten Sachen*, *Niedersächsische Nachrichten v. gelehrten neuen Sachen*, *Hallische Gelehrte Zeitungen*, *Philologische Bibliothek*, *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von gelehrten Sachen*, *Göttingische Zeitungen v. gelehrten Sachen*, *Göttingische Anzeige von gelehrten Sachen*, *Gothaische gelehrte Zeitungen*, *Deutsche Acta Eruditorum*.

⁶ On the translations of the treatise up to 1600, see Weinberg 1950.

Although there are still several studies on the reception of *On the Sublime* in 18th century European and German culture (e.g., see Fritz 2011), in this essay I will attempt to trace its German reception through sources that have so far been overlooked, yet essential for understanding its concrete dissemination: i.e., the reviews of its editions and translations published in the *Gelehrte Journale*.

2. Summaries of the Reviews of the Editions and Translations of Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime*

In order to present these so far overlooked research materials to scholars in a way that allows for uses different from the one pursued here—and thereby enable these sources to be examined in light of other research questions—I have adopted in this essay the scholastic method of “summaries” (Lat. *summaria*, Germ. *Summarien*), which enjoyed great success in early modern Germany (e.g., Luther 1533). The “summary” is a method of exposition aimed at identifying the “purpose” [*scopus*], content [*argumentum*], and “usage” [*usus*] of a text. This mode of presenting the sources will also allow me to draw conclusions that can be verified by scholars who prefer different methodological approaches. I have organized the reviews by dividing them into several classes according to a twofold criterion: (a) I have grouped into the same class all reviews referring to the same edition or translation of *On the Sublime*, even if they appeared in different journals, and (b) I have arranged them in chronological order. Consequently, reviews that appeared in the same journal but concern different editions or translations have been placed in separate sections. Each section, centred on a specific edition or translation of *On the Sublime*, opens with a very short introductory paragraph about the edition, followed by the corresponding summaries of the reviews. To each edition/translation and each review I have assigned a label, placed in square brackets and indicated respectively with the letters “T” (for Text) and “R” (for Review), followed by a number. This system should make it easier to reference and discuss the results of my research in the last section of this essay and in further works. Several reviews address issues of translation theory, specifically discussing translation choices. Although these are quite interesting, space limitations have made it impossible to reproduce these discussions in full. Nevertheless, in the summaries I have indicated which reviews contain such translation-related remarks. Conversely, in the hope of assisting scholars working on the modern textual tradition of *On the Sublime*, I have systematically highlighted cases in which reviewers criticize or discuss the readings chosen by the editor, occasionally offering their own commentary or alternative reading. To avoid burdening the reading experience for those uninterested in such issues, however, I have placed a list of these cases in the following table (see Table 1).⁷

⁷ In quoting passages from *On the Sublime* in the following pages—whether from reviews or editions—I have added the corresponding paragraph and page numbers from Halliwell’s edition in square brackets for the reader’s convenience, even when the wording may differ.

Table 1 – Cases in which Reviewers criticize and discuss editors' readings or translations.

Edition/ Translation	Review	Text Passage in the Edition/ Translation	Emendation/ Criticism of the Reviewer	Motivation/ Reviewer's Comment	Remarks
T1	R2	περι ὑψους [Title] (Lat. <i>De sublimitate</i>)	περι ὑψους λόγον (Lat. <i>De sublimi sermone</i>)	The use of ὑψος "absolute" is unlikely	Reporting of a Schurtzfleisch's consideration
T1	R2	Καικήλιος [passim]	Καικελιος	More common writing style	Reporting of a Schurtzfleisch's consideration (also according to both the MS in the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana and Manuzio's edition) ⁸
T1	R2	Ποστούμει Τερεντιανὲ φίλτατε [par. 1.1, Halliwell 2022, 2].	Ποστοῦμε Φλ. Τερεντιανὲ	"Postumus" as a proper name instead of "Postumius" (a <i>gens</i> name) likely allows for the identification of the addressee of the treatise as "Terentianus Posthumus Flavius"	Reporting of a Schurtzfleisch's consideration. This passage is still controversial ⁹
T1	R2	ἐπι πάσης τεχνολογίας [par. 1.1, Halliwell 2022, 2]	"Pro quacunque artis liberalis tractatione" (Schurtzfleisch) / "In omni artis alicujus tractatione" (Hudson)	Hudson and Schurtzfleisch both agree on the interpretation of the passage	—
T1	R2	δυνάμει δὲ κυριωτέρου [par. 1.1, Halliwell 2022, 2]	"at natura certe prius" (Hudson)	"at valore certe prius" (Schurtzfleisch) / "potentia prius esse, natura posterius" (Reviewer)	—

⁸ The MS Parisinus gr. 2036 reads Καικίλιος; Russell and Halliwell read Καικίλιος.

⁹ The MS Parisinus gr. 2036 reads Ποστούμει Φλωρεντιανὲ Τερεντιανὲ φίλτατε; Russell reads Ποστούμει Τερεντιανὲ φίλτατε; Halliwell reads Ποστούμει Φλώρε Τερεντιανὲ φίλτατε.

Edition/ Translation	Review	Text Passage in the Edition/ Translation	Emendation/ Criticism of the Reviewer	Motivation/ Reviewer's Comment	Remarks
T1	R2	ἀνδράσι πολιτικοῖς [par. 1.2, Halliwell 2022, 2]	“viris civilibus & in foro judici- isque versanti- bus” (Hudson)	Hudson and Schurtzfleisch both agree on the interpre- tation of the passage	—
T1	R2	διὰ τὸ μετὰ βίας ἕκαστα [...] οἶον καίων τε [...] καὶ διαρπάζων [par. 12.4, Halliwell 2022, 24]	καίων and διαρπάζων are here wrong forms. The correct forms are: καίειν and διαρπάζειν	Hudson, fol- lowing Tollius, makes a gram- matical mistake by using a parti- ciple instead of an infinitive ¹⁰	—
T9	R21	εἰς ῥοπικόν [par. 3.4, Halliwell 2022, 6]	[εἰς ῥωπικόν]	The MSS read- ing ῥοπικόν is clearly incorrect	The reading ῥωπικόν is only indirectly sug- gested by the reviewer
T9	R21	ἀνάθημα [par. 7.2, Halliwell 2022, 10].	ἀνάστημα	—	—
T9	R21	Morus' edi- tion reads: ἀναπτυττόμενα δὲ ἄλλως εὐρίσκοιτο χαῦνα [par. 7.1, Halliwell 2022, 10]. In his glosses, how- ever, Morus conjectures the reading μάλλον instead of ἄλλως	ἀναπτυττόμενα δὲ ἄλλως εὐρίσκοιτο χαῦνα	The read- ing ἄλλως is preferable, the suggested con- jecture in the glosses is wrong	—
T9	R21	Morus' edition reads: λόγων [par. 7.4, Hal- liwell 2022, 10]. In his glosses, however, Morus shows to prefer τρόπων	λόγων	The reading λόγων makes no problem	—

¹⁰ Russell and Halliwell read διὰ τὸ μετὰ βίας ἕκαστα, ἔτι δὲ τάχους, ῥώμης, δεινότητος, οἶον καίειν τε ἅμα καὶ διαρπάζειν.

Edition/ Translation	Review	Text Passage in the Edition/ Translation	Emendation/ Criticism of the Reviewer	Motivation/ Reviewer's Comment	Remarks
T9	R22, R23	ἡγεμόνας καὶ τοὺς ἐν ὑπεροχαῖς [par. 17.1, Halliwell 2022, 34]	ἡγεμόνας ἐν ὑπεροχαῖς	καὶ τοὺς is unnecessary	—
T9	R22, R23	σκηπτῶ τινι παρεῖς πάζοιτ' ἄν ἢ κεραυνῶ [par. 12.4, Hal- liwell 2022, 24] – instead of κεραυνῶ Morus postulates in his glosses ἢ καὶ ῥοδίῳ	κεραυνῶ can remain	κεραυνῶ is the explication of σκηπτός	—

2.1 Reviews to: [T1 =] ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΥ ΛΟΓΓΙΝΟΥ ΠΕΡΙ ΥΨΟΥΣ ΒΙΒΛΙΟΝ/*De sublimitate libellus*, ed. and trans. by John Hudson, Oxford: Sheldon 1710, London 1730³. Languages: Ancient Greek, Latin

Bilingual edition edited by the English Hellenist John Hudson (1662–1719). The first edition appeared in 1710. Following a Latin-language preface, the volume includes ancient testimonies [*judicia et testimonia*] on Longinus. The Latin translation is printed under the Greek text. A critical apparatus is provided at the bottom of the page. Reviewers showed appreciation for this edition. A reviewer's suggestion—the desire to read Shurtzfleisch's considerations incorporated into Hudson's glosses [*Anmerkungen*]¹¹—appears to have been realized in the third edition (1730).

2.1.1 [R1 =] In: *Ausführlicher Bericht von allerhand neuen Büchern und andern Dingen so zur heutigen Historie der Gelehrsamkeit gehörig*, vol. I, Issue 12, pp. 1105–6. Year: 1710. Reviewer: anonymous¹¹

The reviewer could only have become aware of the identity of the editor and translator after composing this review, as the editor is referred to as “anonymous” [*der ungenannte Verfertiger*] in the very first line. Footnote “(a),” however, specifies that the editor was John Hudson. This review provides some information about Longinus' life and work, drawn from the editor's preface. In doing so, the

¹¹ In the citations of the reviews, the term *Band* is rendered as “Volume,” *Theil* as “Part,” *Anhang* as “Appendix” and *Lieferung* as “Issue.”

reviewer effectively translates into German and disseminates information that was originally written in Latin by the editor. It is emphasized that the editor lists all existing editions of the treatise but has produced his edition solely to summarize Tollius' extensive work in a concise form, making it easier for young readers to purchase and read more quickly. Since the "glosses" [*Anmerkungen*] essentially derive from Tollius and others, the reviewer chooses not to comment on them. This review does not evaluate the quality of the Latin translation or the readings in the Greek text. The last lines of the review appear typographically in the form of a colophon.

2.1.2 [R2 =] In: *Neue Bibliothek Oder Nachricht und Urtheile von neuen Büchern und allerhand zur Gelehrsamkeit dienenden Sachen*, [no vol. indication in the frontispiece], Issue 14, pp. 349–65. Year: 1711. Reviewer: anonymous

The review opens in a rhetorical manner. Thinking is an art, just as speaking is. While many people can think well on their own, they speak poorly, as they fail to express clearly to others what they have in mind. Melancholic peoples [*Völker*], precisely because they do not have a tendency to use many words, have never developed the art of eloquence. As scholars argued, the principles of eloquence were transmitted to us directly from the Greeks through the mediation of the Romans. Therefore, these principles are to be sought not so much among the Romans as among the Greeks. Many renowned Greek rhetoricians exist, such as Aristotle, Demetrius of Phalerum, and others. Nevertheless, Longinus' text contains the very essence of eloquence—one might even say that the "quintessence" of eloquence is entirely concealed within his brief treatise. Indeed, authors like Aristotle and Hermogenes of Tarsus also made subtle observations in their works on rhetoric, but their style is so dry and arid that one would never guess they were rhetoricians. By contrast, Longinus intertwines his doctrine with eloquence itself, often explaining a rhetorical figure by employing the very figure he is describing. It is therefore unsurprising that Isaac Casaubon referred to Longinus' little treatise as a "golden" book. Even though it is a short and incomplete work, "it carries the weight of a great folio volume." The reviewer notes Hudson's intention to produce an edition well suited for young students. He devotes considerable attention to Longinus' life and identity (pp. 351–54), demonstrating erudition while reporting and commenting on Hudson's views on these topics. Then, the reviewer mentions the first three editions of the treatise (Robortello, Manuzio, Porto), which include only the Greek text without a Latin translation, and provides an overview of all existing translations. He also references several manuscripts that served as the basis for various editions or translations of the treatise, once again displaying scholarly depth. The reviewer reports that Hudson produced his translation with the aid of Boileau's French translation, although Hudson acknowledges that Boileau did not adhere too closely to the wording of the original text. The reviewer considers the "most perfect" edition of the treatise to be that of Tollius (1694), despite two drawbacks: it is too expensive for young students, and, like Boileau, Tollius did not follow the original

text word for word. Hudson's edition seeks to remedy these issues by presenting a Latin translation in which "superfluous words" have been removed. Regarding the textual apparatus (glosses, registers etc.), the reviewer states that he would have liked to see the glosses of the late Conrad Samuel Schurtzfleisch incorporated into Hudson's *Anmerkungen*, as Schurtzfleisch had the opportunity during his travels in Italy to consult a manuscript from the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, which provided information missing from both Tollius' glosses and those of other scholars. At this point, the reviewer compares some of Hudson's readings with those of Schurtzfleisch (pp. 358–64), most of which concern only the first chapter of the treatise. He leans toward Schurtzfleisch's solutions but does not hesitate to propose new insights that differ from both editors.¹² Within this framework, while commenting on a lacuna at the beginning of the third chapter, the reviewer reports the opinion of Richard Simon in his *Lettres choisies*, according to which all the manuscripts of Longinus' treatise depend on a Paris codex or its copies. The reviewer also argues that Tollius probably overlooked the Milanese manuscript because he was aware that the best available manuscript is the Parisian one. Then, the reviewer examines Longinus' famous biblical quotation (Gen. 1, 3–4) and reports various scholarly opinions on the matter. Schurtzfleisch argued that Longinus did not read this passage in either Hebrew or Greek translation but rather quoted it second-hand from Caecilius of Calacte. If Longinus had understood Hebrew—Schurtzfleisch argued—his astonishment would have been even greater. The reviewer, however, notes that Longinus had an almost perfect command of Syriac language. Furthermore, he is persuaded that the key question is not whether these words contain "sublimity," but whether this sublimity should be attributed to Moses' eloquence.¹³ He argues that this "sublimity" is to be sought not so much in Moses' intellect and intention as in the "peculiar nature" [*eigenschafft sic.*] of the Hebrew language itself. While Moses generally employs a very simple style in his historical narrative, the Latin word "fiat" (Gr. γενέσθω [Longinus] or γενηθήτω [Septuaginta]) makes God's eternal and infinite omnipotence comprehensible in His actions, which would otherwise be understandable for Hebrew speakers. Before concluding, the reviewer makes a curious statement: if Schurtzfleisch had wished, he could have explained and improved many Greek and Latin writers in the most learned manner. The nature of scholars well versed in every discipline, however, is akin to that of bees, as they move from book to book just as bees move from flower to flower, without having the time to complete a great and extensive work. Finally, the reviewer states that he knows of no other ancient author who has received such unanimous praise as Longinus. From a linguistic perspective, this review is particularly interesting, as the reviewer frequently employs Latinisms and expressions borrowed from French or Latin (e.g., "etliche alte *Scribenten*," "auf ein

¹² A list of discussions concerning textual passages is presented in Table 1.

¹³ Moses was traditionally considered the author of the Pentateuch.

atqui und ergo,” “Franztösichen *traduction*” etc.). Additionally, the text contains several linguistic inconsistencies characteristic of early 18th century German.

2.1.3 [R3 =] In: *Niedersächsische neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, [no vol. indication], pp. 581–82. Year: 1730. Reviewer: anonymous

This review is a brief report on Hudson’s third edition. It informs that the first and second editions of Hudson’s Longinus were published, respectively, in 1710 and 1718. In all editions, the name of the editor does not appear. This edition is expanded, as it also includes a Latin translation of Longinus’ fragment *De metris* and incorporates the comments of the late Conrad Samuel Schurtzfleisch into its “glosses.” This edition has already been praised as the most convenient and useful of all. While Tollius’ edition is also useful, it is too expensive for young readers, and the glosses are too extensive. Finally, the reviewer notes that Hudson produced his edition by summarizing the comments from previous existent editions and commentaries, some of which were very costly to purchase, and cutting away the superfluous, thus making Longinus’ treatise easier to acquire and read more quickly.

2.2 Reviews to: [T2 =] *Verhandeling over de verheventheit en deftigheit des Styls, zoo omtrent vaerzen als maetelooze Reden*, trans. by Pieter Le Clercq, Amsterdam: Compagny 1719. Languages: Dutch

This book is a Dutch translation of the treatise *On the Sublime*. Neither the Greek nor the Latin text is included. The Dutch translation was made by Pieter Le Clercq (1692–1759). Le Clercq’s knowledge of Greek, as he himself admitted, was limited. Therefore, he most likely translated the treatise from Boileau’s French version, with the help of some Latin translations. Nevertheless, he believed it was essential to provide the Dutch public with a version of Longinus. The first Dutch translation of the treatise made directly from the Greek appeared a century later, in 1811, with Matthijs Siegenbeek. Interestingly, Le Clercq had a specific modern conception of translation. On these topics, see Schoneveld (1992).

2.2.1 [R4 =] In: *Neue Bibliothek Oder Nachricht und Urtheile von neuen Büchern und allerhand zur Gelehrsamkeit dienenden Sachen*, [no vol. indication in the frontispiece], Issue 86, pp. 515–16. Year: 1719. Reviewer: anonymous.

This is a very short report [*Nachricht*] in a *Sammelresenzion*, i.e. a review that includes reviews of multiple books published in the same place, of a Dutch translation of Longinus’ treatise. The reviewer begins by stating that Longinus’ treatise has been appreciated by scholars of every era. The bitterness that affected Homer, Virgil, Horace, and others has not touched Longinus. As Casaubon said, it is a “golden book.” Since Dutch poets may find this treatise useful, they now have access to a Dutch translation. This translation is recommended to all lovers of an excellent and graceful way of writing.

2.3 Reviews to: [T3_a =] ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΥ ΛΟΓΓΙΝΟΥ ΠΕΡΙ ΥΨΟΥΣ ΒΙΒΛΙΟΝ/*De sublimi dicendi genere*, ed. and trans. by Hudson/Gori/Boileau, Verona: Tumerman 1733; [T3_b =] ΠΕΡΙ ΥΨΟΥΣ ΒΙΒΛΙΟΝ/ *De sublimi libellus graece conscriptus, Latino, Italico & Gallico sermone redditus, cum annotationibus*, trans. by Tollius/Gori/Boileau, Verona: Tumerman 1740². Languages: Ancient Greek, Latin, Italian, French

Two editions of the same book—a multilingual edition of *On the Sublime* published by Tumerman in Verona. Alongside the Greek text, there are translations in Latin, Italian, and French, arranged on facing pages. In the first edition, published in 1733, the Greek and Latin texts follow John Hudson's edition; the French translation is the renowned version by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711), and the Italian translation is by Anton Francesco Gori (1691–1757). According to [R7], in the 1740 edition the Latin version is that of Jacob Tollius (1633–1696). The Italian translation by Gori is printed—prepared under the supervision of Anton Maria Salvini—in order to replace the lost version by Giovanni da Falgano, which the publisher had committed to publish. [R5] appears to contain some errors, reporting that Giovanni da Falgano's translation was “attached,” and confusing Niccolò Pinelli with Gori. These errors are likely due to the fact that the Introduction, which contains this information, is written in Italian.

2.3.1 [R5 =] In: *Niedersächsische neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, [no vol. indication], pp. 527–28. Year: 1733. Reviewer: anonymous

This is a very short report. The reviewer provides information about the text and the quality of the book. The Greek text, along with the Latin, French, and Italian translations, is printed on facing pages in four columns. The Greek edition of the treatise and its Latin translation are those of Hudson. Therefore, the reviewer refers to the review of Hudson's first edition, which appeared in this journal (See [R2]). For the Italian [*Toscanische*] translation, Pinelli's version was used.¹⁴ The reviewer states that this learned Florentine became widely renowned through various historical contributions, and his translation has been recognized by all scholars as an excellent rendering of the Greek text. Additionally, an unpublished Italian translation by Giovanni da Falgano [John. Falgani], which was famous around 1570, has been included [*beygefügt*], and Antonio Magliabechi counted him among the best translators. The French translation is that of Boileau, published in 1729 in The Hague. The print and the quality of the paper are spotless.

2.3.2 [R6 =] In: *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen auf das Jahr 1734*, vol. XX, Issue 35, pp. 308–9. Year: 1734. Reviewer: anonymous

This is a short report in a *Sammelrezension*. The Latin translation is that of the Oxford edition of 1710, here corrected and improved on the basis of the Greek

¹⁴ If I have understood correctly, “Pinelli” is probably a mistake by the reviewer for “Gori”. In fact, Niccolò Pinelli produced an Italian translation of the treatise, published in Padua in 1630, and in 1723, Gori consulted it—though only for a few days. Cf. also [R11].

text. The Italian translation is by Gori, who had already completed it in 1720 under the supervision of Abbot Salvini. The French translation is that of Boileau. The four texts are presented side by side. The notes are those of Boileau, Boivin, Dacier, Tollius, and other authors. This edition includes all the variant readings [*variantes lectiones*] compared with other printed editions published so far, as well as with a specific manuscript “aus der Bibliothek des Bischoffs Joh. Mori” (p. 308). These variant readings were added in an appendix because they did not arrive in time during the printing process. An indexed description of the book’s parts (dedications, registers etc.) follows.

2.3.3 [R7 =] In: *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von gelehrten Sachen auf das Jahr 1740*, vol. I, Issue 1, p. 192. Year: 1740. Reviewer: anonymous

This is a brief report. The public is now offered a quadrilingual edition in a single volume. It is described as a “complete masterpiece.” The Greek text comes from the best manuscripts, the Latin version is by Tollius, the French by Boileau, and the Italian by the editor. Information is provided regarding the book’s price. Those interested may contact “Herr Rickershausen,” from whom they can receive, free of charge, two catalogues listing the available books, most of which are in German or French, alongside some in Romance languages or Italian.

2.4 Reviews to: [T4 =] *De sublimitate*, ed. and trans. by Zacharias Pearce, Amsterdam: Wetstein 1733; (with the *Commentari Fr. Porti* as Appendix), London: Tonson & Watts 1744³. Languages: Ancient Greek, Latin

Greek text and Latin translation of the treatise edited by Zacharias Pearce (1690–1744). The three editions were published in London in 1724, 1732, and 1744 respectively. In 1733, a Dutch publishing house issued a reprint of the second edition.

2.4.1 [R8 =] In: *Niedersächsische neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, [no vol. indication], pp. 683–84. Year: 1733. Reviewer: anonymous

This is a short report in a *Sammelrezension*. The reviewer begins with some information about the book. It is an Amsterdam reprint of a book previously published in London. It contains the Greek text, along with Pearce’s Latin translation and glosses. Pearce’s first edition appeared in 1724. The print quality of this edition is no less than that of the original English edition. Moreover, this edition is enhanced, as it is published together with Franciscus Portus’s commentary. The Dutch publishers, given the success of the London edition, had begun the printing process when, during production, Pearce announced a revised second edition. As a result, the publishers had to place the improvements concerning the already printed pages in an appendix. Thus, this Amsterdam edition remains just as good as the London one. Indeed, considering the addition of the glosses by Franciscus Portus—which are edited here for the first time by the Amsterdam gymnasial professor Isaac Verburg (1680–1745) and had remained hidden until then—it is even better. The re-

viewer does not dwell on the quality of Pearce's work regarding Longinus' treatise, as it has already been acknowledged by all the most renowned journals.

2.4.2 [R9 =] In: *Nöthiger Beytrag zu den Neuen Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, Part 3, pp. 472–73. Year: 1738. Reviewer: anonymous

This is a German report on a review originally published in French in the *Bibliothèque raisonnée*. Pearce had published the first edition of his Longinus nine years ago. Since it was too expensive, Dutch publishers decided to reprint it, encouraged in their decision by the discovery of a previously unpublished commentary on the treatise. The author of this commentary, Franciscus Portus, had died about 150 years earlier, and his work was included as an appendix. While the Dutch publishers were nearly finished with the printing process, news reached them that Pearce had, in the meantime, published a revised edition. Therefore, they awaited the English edition and gathered everything the editor had added or improved in it, then they printed these additions separately. Before Pearce, Tollius had devoted significant efforts to Longinus. Pearce, above all, sought more information about the Paris manuscript of the treatise, which had been produced over 600 years earlier. Boivin, through correspondence, provided him with the most precise description, and a Greek scholar residing in Paris compared it [*conferirte es*] with a printed edition. In particular, these efforts revealed that much is missing from Longinus and that one is often mistaken in believing that a gap can be filled with just a few lines. From this, it becomes clear that Tollius' conjectures are entirely erroneous. Pearce describes the manuscript. His glosses fall into two categories: purely critical-textual [*critisch*] or explanatory. The former are placed at the bottom of the book, while the latter appear beneath the text—an arrangement that provides the reader with considerable convenience. From the selection of glosses, one can appreciate Pearce's refined taste. Moreover, they are highly useful, leaving nothing more to be desired. To compile them, he made use of the best tools available to him. Regarding the translation: his Latin is good, yet it does not obscure the clarity and meaning of the original text. The fragments of Longinus were taken from Hudson. Finally, the German reviewer notes that the French reviewer provides some "samples" [*Proben*] of both types of Pearce's notes but does not reproduce them.

2.4.3 [R10 =] In: *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, vol. XXX, Issue 75, pp. 665–66. Year: 1744. Reviewer: anonymous

This is a report in a *Sammelrezension*. From the third edition of this work, it is clear that it has been well received by the educated public. The first edition appeared in 1724, the second in 1732. Now, a third edition has been released, which surpasses both in many aspects. In his Preface, the author reviews previous editions of the treatise—not only his own—and evaluates them. He also explains why he undertook a new edition and details the sources he used. He acknowledges that he retains the text of Manutius' edition but under the con-

dition that he has never disregarded the best readings of Robortello's edition and the manuscripts. He has not included all the notes that have been written on Longinus' text but has made a selection, with most of them being his own. In his glosses, Pearce demonstrates both erudition and refined taste. Pearce found it necessary to prepare a new Latin translation of Longinus. He argues that, although Tollius' version is among the finest, it is not sufficiently faithful, as it does not closely follow the original [*nicht allzu treulich dem Texte folge*]. Pearce uses the Paris manuscript, the best available, with Bovin having sent him its variant readings. Pearce also questions whether the readings noted in the margins of the manuscript used by Tollius, attributed to Voss,¹⁵ are actual textual variants from other manuscripts, as Tollius believed, or merely Voss' conjectures. Pearce has not found these variants in any manuscript. The final index is positively assessed. Finally, the reviewer reports also the death of Alexander Pope.¹⁶

2.5 Reviews to: [T5 =] *Trattato sul sublime*, ed. by Anton Francesco Gori, Firenze: Albizzini 1737. Languages: Italian

This is an Italian translation of *On the Sublime*, published by the Italian publisher Albizzini in Florence. The translation by Gori was prepared under the supervision of Anton Maria Salvini. In the Introduction, on pages XXII–XXIII, there is an ekphrasis of the edition's frontispiece (see Figure 1), which is also referenced in [R 11].

2.5.1 [R11 =] In: *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen auf das Jahr 1738*, vol. XXIV, Issue 14, pp. 115–16. Year: 1738. Reviewer: anonymous

This review occurs in a *Sammelrezension*. Praise for Gori. The reviewer offers interesting evaluations of the translation: "As far as possible, he has translated the thoughts and expressions [of Longinus] not with servile [*knechtischen*] fidelity, but with noble fidelity" (p. 115). "The method of translation that merely aims to capture the author's thought while expanding his expressions with as many words as one finds convenient has never appealed to him" (pp. 115–16). Gori was not the first to

¹⁵ Probably Gerhard Johannes Voss (1577–1649). It is a well-established fact that *On the Sublime* had been read and appreciated, from an early stage, within Dutch learned society.

¹⁶ It is a meaningful coincidence that the reviewer reports on the death of Pope, who was famous, among other things, for a sort of parody of the treatise *On the Sublime*, published in 1727 under the title *Peri Bâthous, or The Art of Sinking in Poetry*. The title *Peri Bâthous* echoes the word βάθος (gen. of βάθος, "depth", "low") that appeared in the treatise *On the Sublime* (par. 2.1, Halliwell 2022, 2), and which, contrary to the manuscript reading, is now preferably rendered as πάθος. From Falgano's translation ("affetto"), however, it is evident that he too had corrected the possibly erroneous manuscripts reading. There is an interesting occurrence of the term "bathos" in Kant's *Prolegomena*, where, in response to a reviewer, he writes (Prol., AA IV, 373): "Hohe Thürme und die ihnen ähnliche metaphysisch große Männer, um welche beide gemeinlich viel Wind ist, sind nicht für mich. Mein Platz ist das fruchtbare *Bathos* der Erfahrung usw" (High towers and similarly lofty metaphysical men, around which there is usually a lot of wind, are not for me. My place is the fertile *bâthos* of experience etc.).

undertake an Italian translation of the treatise. There was a translation by Giovanni da Falgano, once kept in the Magliabecchi Library but now lost. Reporting implicitly a Gori's conjecture, however, the reviewer supposes that the text commonly referred to in these cases is actually none other than the Rhetoric of Demetrius of Phalerum, translated by Falgano and effectively preserved in the Library. As a result, Niccolò Pinelli was the first to produce an Italian translation of the treatise, published in Padua in 1630. This book is extraordinarily rare, and in 1723 Gori was granted permission to consult it, but only for a few days. Gori himself published his Italian version in 1733, but this new edition has been improved in several places, and some errors have been corrected. Finally, the reviewer comments on the frontispiece (see Figure 1), which is taken from an ancient gem of which Gori possesses an imprint. It depicts the following scene: Icarus, with his left wing already attached, impatiently waits as his father Daedalus finishes crafting the right wing. Above, there is Mercury's caduceus, and below, the inscription: $\chi\alpha\lambda\epsilon\pi\acute{\alpha}\ \tau\acute{\alpha}\ \kappa\alpha\lambda\acute{\alpha}$, i.e. "beautiful things are difficult".¹⁷

TRATTATO
DEL SUBLIME
DI
DIONISIO LONGINO
TRADOTTO DAL GRECO IN TOSCANO
DA
ANTON FRANCESCO GORI
LETTOR PUBBLICO DI STORIE
NELLO STUDIO FIORENTINO.



IN FIRENZE . MDCCXXXVII.
NELLA STAMPERIA DI GAETANO ALBIZZINI.
Con licenza de' Superiori.

Figure 1 – The frontispiece of *Trattato del sublime di Dionisio Longino tradotto dal greco in toscano da Anton Francesco Gori*. Firenze: Albizzini 1737.

¹⁷ Quotation from Plato (*Resp.*, 435 c, 497 d; *Crat.* 384 b; *Hipp. ma.* 304 e) attributed from Plutarch to Solon.

2.6 Reviews to: [T6 =] *Von Erhabenen*, ed. and trans. by Karl Heinrich v. Heinecken, Dresden: Hekel 1737, 1742² (with a new Introduction). Languages: Ancient Greek, German

German translation of *On the Sublime* with the Greek text, translator's glosses [*Anmerkungen*], and a concluding essay by Karl Heinrich von Heinecken (1707–1791). The Greek text is based on Pearce's edition. The second edition of the work (1742) was published with a new anonymous Introduction. There is also a 1784 reprint from Basel of Heinecken's translation of the treatise, issued without the Greek text and without any Introduction.

2.6.1 [R12 =] In: *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen auf das Jahr 1737*, vol. XXIII, Issue 41, pp. 359–60. Year: 1737. Reviewer: anonymous

This is a report in a *Sammelrezension*. The translator renders into German one of the most difficult Greek texts to translate. Regarding the source language, he has followed the text word for word. Where euphony had to take precedence, however, he made use of the freedom granted to a translator and, at the same time, demonstrated how skilful our mother tongue is in conveying the emphasis of Greek rhetoric. He has also taken into account all other translations in different languages, meticulously noting and correcting their errors. In the glosses, he has explained what is most important. Everything contributed by other scholars to improve the Greek text has been gathered and carefully examined. The Greek text is that published in Pearce's edition. Nevertheless, Heinecke has spared no effort in refining his text to some degree by comparing all available editions. Heinecke's essay on the life of Longinus surpasses all others in completeness. His glosses sufficiently clarify the obscure passages. The record of previous translations is both comprehensive and appropriate. In examining what Longinus understands by the sublime, Heinecke has repeated all the statements provided by him and illustrated them with German examples, thereby revealing his ability to render judgments on eloquence and poetry in accordance with reason and good taste. The work is dedicated to Count Sulkowski, and the printing is clean.

2.6.2 [R13 =] In: *Deutsche Acta Eruditorum*, [no vol. indication], Issue 218, pp. 139–45. Year: 1737. Reviewer: anonymous

The reviewer begins by stating that Longinus's treatise has always been held in high regard, and that rhetorical principles are not unusual nor exclusive to a single language. Consequently, this translation is also useful to Germans. Until now, we have not had a translation of Longinus into our language. Gratitude is due to Heinecken for making the text accessible even to those among us who do not master the Greek language—and even more gratitude is due because of the translation's quality. It is so well executed that it brings honor both to the translator and to our homeland. The contents of the book are as follows: an introduction including the life of Longinus, the Greek text alongside the German

translation, and a treatise by the editor aimed at understanding what Longinus meant by the word “sublime.” The reviewer intends to report on each section of the book. After recounting Longinus’s life based on Heinecken’s introductory essay, the reviewer focuses on the German translation:

The editor has carefully observed both of the most important duties of a translator, and he has earnestly endeavoured to faithfully express the meaning of his original. Yet, he has made every effort to ensure that there could be no objection to the purity and beauty of the language into which he has translated Longinus (p. 141).

Moreover, the editor has supplemented his translation with numerous scholarly glosses—some clarify the meaning of the text, others justify his translation, still others point out errors in other translations, defend Longinus against unfair criticisms, or bring in various elegant reflections, especially from history and rhetoric. As a sample of the translator’s glosses, the reviewer presents an example taken from the commentary on section IX of the text, which discusses the concept of the sublime and offers a quotation from the first book of Genesis—whose sublimity has been hotly contested. Heinecken cites the opinion of Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721), who claimed that the passage has nothing inherently sublime about it, and that the prophet did not intend to express himself sublimely—thus, in Huet’s view, Longinus’s statement is pointless. The Port-Royal Society, however, in the preface to its translation of the first five books of Genesis, not only cited this very passage from Longinus, but also Boileau’s reflections on it, fully agreeing with Boileau’s judgment. Thus, in a new edition of Longinus, Boileau quoted that preface and expressed astonishment at the opinion of a learned man like Huet. A short history of this controversy follows, and it is noted that M.[agister] Christoph Wolle (1700–1761) held a disputation in Leipzig on this passage, citing the positions of Boileau, Tollius, Huet, Le Clerc, and others. The final section of the book is a treatise on what the sublime was for Longinus. He wrote this part to clarify Longinus’s “sublime”—but above all, for the pleasure of German readers. Heinecken has repeated all of Longinus’s statements on the sublime and illustrated them with German examples. In general, the word “sublime” [*Erhaben*] designates the highest perfection of a thing. The sublime in poetic and rhetorical art, however, is a thought that has been brought to its perfection through what is rich in meaning and spirit [*Geist*], and whose production depends partly on the natural capacity of the intellect, partly on passion, partly on fine representation, partly on word choice, and partly on artful synthesis. Many people have a mistaken idea of the sublime because they fail to note the great difference between sublimity in thought and elevated style. The editor concludes his essay by stating that Longinus, in his treatise, spoke only of sublimity in thought. This must be clearly kept in mind when reading Longinus—for to believe he was offering stylistic advice would be entirely misleading. In general, Heinecken’s conclusive essay is well written and contains many correct and profound insights. Nevertheless, since the editor has made strong use of the “*illustrans ad opposito*” (explaining by the

opposite) strategy, and since most of the quoted passages are taken from still-living authors, the reviewer ironically doubts that these authors will feel particularly grateful to Heinecken.

2.6.3 [R14 =] In: *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von gelehrten Sachen auf das Jahr 1742*, vol. III, Issue 48, p. 290. Year: 1742. Reviewer: anonymous

This is a brief report on the second edition of the work (1742), published with a new anonymous introduction. This report was received by the journal without any information regarding the author or place. The journal opts to publish the following report. Nonetheless, a response to it will probably follow. This work is not new, as this translation had already been published several years ago. Nevertheless, it was not particularly well known. The translator was Heinecken. This work had bad luck, the reviewer does not know whether the fault lies with Longinus or with Heinecken himself. There have been several attempts to reprint it, but without success. This is in fact the fourth edition, and it stands out because of an anonymous Introduction. The fact that it is anonymous aligns with its intent, as it is verbose and contains “slander” [*Lästerungen*] against Prof. Gottsched and the poets of Leipzig, as well as being very long-winded. Prof. Gottsched is not attacked on the merits, but with malice. Also the editors of this journal were insulted. One cannot write an objection to this introduction, because the purpose of an objection is to point out an opponent’s error. In this case, however, it is unnecessary, because we place our trust in the impartial and reasonable reader. A brief discussion follows about who the author of the anonymous introduction might be—whether it is Heinecken himself or someone else. Since the work is now on the market, the translator is wished well. Certainly, it would have been better if the translator had stuck to his task without venturing into the fine arts.

2.6.4 [R15 =] In: *Göttingische Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, [no vol. indication], pp. 807–8. Year: 1742. Reviewer: anonymous

Review of the second edition of the work (1742). The book had already been published, but it is now reissued with a new title page and a new anonymous Introduction. The author of the new Introduction expresses dissatisfaction with Gottsched and others. Every reader is curious to see what their response will be. Regarding the work itself, there is a new account of the life of Longinus, carefully prepared, which attempts to shed light on what has come down to us from those very obscure times. Evaluation of the translation: “The translation has been rendered in clear German [*in reines Teutsch eingekleidet*] and conveys well the sense of the Greek text, which is printed according to Pearce’s edition” (p. 807). In the glosses, attention has been paid not only to the beauty of the German style but also to the clarification of the text. The appendix on the concept of the sublime in Longinus is worth reading, and this edition, due to its many merits over all the others, deserves the attention of lovers of eloquence.

2.7 Reviews to: [T7 =] *On the Sublime*, ed. and trans. by William Smith, London: Watts, 1739. Language: English

This book contains an English translation of *On the Sublime* by William Smith (1711–1787), including the translator's glosses. Reviewers put in emphasis that this is the fourth English translation of the treatise, but the first to be made directly from the original Greek.

2.7.1 [R16 =] In: *Göttingische Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, [no vol. indication], pp. 479–80. Year: 1739. Reviewer: anonymous

This is a report in a *Sammelrezension*. The reviewer opens the review with the following statement: “The translator was moved by the intrinsic—and universally recognized by scholars—beauty of Longinus to translate him into English” (p. 479). His translation had already been undertaken when he became aware of the work of others. During his work, three English translations came to his eyes. The first was that of Welstedt (1724). Smith notes that this is a translation from the French into poor English, in which all the beauties of the French are lost, while all its errors, including misprints, are carefully preserved. The second is that of John Hall (1654), and the third is an anonymous one published in Oxford in 1698, which also includes the French. Smith judges these translations to be such that he does not regret having prepared one of his own. His translation had been ready for nine years, but he had it read by friends and reviewed it several times in light of the Greek text. The reviewer states: “He paid particular attention to drafting it in such a way that it did not seem like a translation, without thereby weakening the spirit and force of Longinus” (p. 480). Through his edition of the text and his notes, Pearce not only shed light for him in many passages, but also improved certain translations here and there. Smith, however, had already completed the majority of his glosses when he read Pearce's Latin. Moreover, he found in English writers many passages where he could illustrate Longinus's judgments [*Critiken*]. One can only rejoice if he refined the taste of his readers and enabled them to distinguish truly meaningful words from hollow sounds, false brilliance from true magnificence, and the sublime from bombast [*Bombast*] and pomposity [*Schwulst*]. The critical apparatus is very well prepared. It would only have been better if the notes were printed below the text rather than at the end.

2.7.2 [R 17 =] In: *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von gelehrten Sachen auf das Jahr 1740*, vol. I, Issue 24, p. 152. Year: 1740. Reviewer: anonymous

This is a few-lines report. There were already three English translations of Longinus's treatise. The work under review, however, is the first English translation made directly from the original Greek. Some of the glosses were suggested to the author by Pearce, who was working on the second edition of his own edition of Longinus.

2.7.3 [R 18 =] In: *Nöthiger Beytrag zu den Neuen Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, Part 6, pp. 222–23. Year: 1740. Reviewer: anonymous

Brief German report of an English review published in the English journal *History of the Works of the Learned*. Three English translations of Longinus' treatise have already been published, but Smith's is the most beautiful of all. He has proven to be well-suited to undertake this translation. His thoughts and expressions are so elevated that they can serve as examples for Longinus' rules on elevated style. The apparatus is better than that of Boileau. Smith's glosses on Longinus, partly his own and partly by Pearce, can be found at the end of the translation.

2.8 Reviews to: [T8 =] *De sublimitate*, text and glosses by Zacharias Pearce, trans. by Samuel Friedrich Nathanael Morus, Leipzig: Weimann und Reich 1769. Languages: Ancient Greek, Latin

This is an edition of the Pseudo-Longinus text edited by Pearce, but with a new Latin translation by Friedrich Nathanael Morus (1736–1792). The Greek text and annotations are by Pearce, while the new Latin translation is by Morus. The Greek and Latin texts are printed on facing pages.

2.8.1 [R 19 =] In: *Hallische Gelehrte Zeitungen*, vol. IV, Issue 91, pp. 723–25. Year: 1769. Reviewer: anonymous

The reviewer welcomes this publication with pleasure, noting polemically that

in our times—both with regard to Greek literature and our own literature—it is more fashionable to publish only some fleeting remarks and sell them whenever the opportunity arises (or even when it doesn't), rather than truly study these works at their sources (pp. 723–24).

The edition is valuable, and we must thank Morus, who possesses a command of the language, has taste, and does not lack critical accuracy. In a word: he has been formed according to the best model. The Preface explores themes such as why Longinus enjoys prestige among both those who merely offer reflections on the sublime etc. and those who investigate their causes, as he unites both approaches in his treatise. The Greek text follows Pearce's 1732 edition, as he collated the Parisian manuscript with greater accuracy than his predecessors. Morus included the variants in the footnotes and provided a new Latin translation. Through this translation, Morus "aims to make the text understandable to those who know nothing of Greek" (p. 724).

It is a praiseworthy intention, which proves useful to someone who does not have the opportunity to learn Greek and who, through this translation—besides that of Heinecke—can come to know what Longinus is saying! Only, there is the fear that many, for this reason, might neglect the study of the Greek text. I have

always liked Geßner's method¹⁸ of omitting the Latin translation. Nonetheless, it must be noted that with the present translation from time to time it seems that something from the Greek text has been sacrificed for the sake of a beautifully dressed Latin version.

The critical apparatus is useful. Superfluous elements have been cut, as well as audacious emendations. The reviewer concludes:

We place this Longinus even in the hands of the young lover of Greek, because—partly through the explanatory notes, partly through the linguistic analogies between Greek and Latin—he can read this short, yet fundamental, text almost on his own (p. 725).

2.8.2 [R 20 =] In: *Philologische Bibliothek*, vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 15–28. Year: 1770. Reviewer: "M." [= C. Meiners?]

This edition is a "gift" to lovers of ancient literature of such importance that the reviewer deems it appropriate to discuss it with the readers of the journal. Already from its Preface, it is clear that Morus is able to read the ancient authors with taste and to think with the genius of the moderns. Included here—along with references to the pages of the Preface in which they appear—are some of Morus's reflections from the Preface, both aesthetic and historical in nature. E.g., the deep investigations into the nature of the beautiful and the good were not, unlike for the moderns, in fashion among the ancients; Longinus speaks far more to the moderns than to the ancients, even though he focuses on what seem to us to be trivialities; he writes in a sublime language, rich in imagery, bordering on bombast—something for which he was reproached by later ancient critics—due to his heightened sensitivity; Longinus enjoyed an inordinate esteem, almost bordering on superstition; he held an incomplete and incorrect concept of the sublime, placing many "sources" where there is in fact only one, and lingering excessively on "rhetorical trivialities." The reviewer admits that he would not have wanted to see these critical reflections merely presented, but rather overcome by Morus in his edition, since the reviewer trusts no one but Morus to do so. Let this serve as a suggestion to Morus for his future work, as it seems he wishes to devote himself to Greek aesthetics, and in his notes, he has acted not only as a philologist but also as a philosopher (p. 17). It would be an exaggeration to deem the rhetorical works of antiquity superfluous simply because they "think in too national a way" (p. 18), and because they derive their ideal of the beautiful and the sublime in both poetic art and oratory solely and exclusively from the great minds [*Geister*] of their own nation. Such criticism would be valid only if there were nothing to be gained from them. But there is much of value to be drawn from Longinus and from other Greeks of refined taste. Even those insights that

¹⁸ In this case, the reviewer is referring to the Conrad Geßner (1516–1565), a noted humanist, polyglot and botanist.

refer solely to the Greek sense of beauty deserve our attention, to the extent that in order to judge them, we must think and feel in their way. The task of the critic is to show what is national and to determine that those aspects from which we rightly distance ourselves stem from a difference between our genius and that of the Greeks. For this reason, what seemed essential to the ancients appears insignificant to us: it is a matter of national character. We do not read Demosthenes with the same enthusiasm as the ancients, nor we are convinced by rhetorical rules that are suited to the genius of the ancients. The reviewer does not know whether Morus chose not to develop these topics out of a concern for being verbose; what is certain is that the readers would not have found it unpleasant. As for the commentary, Morus has reported the notes of other commentators, trimming the superfluous, and his editorial decisions, judged on a case-by-case basis, are not to be criticized. The commentary addresses two kinds of readers: language experts and beginners. It would have been better to include the names of the authors next to their commentary notes, “and the reasons are too obvious to require explanation” (p. 20). The reviewer appreciated the explanations of difficult passages. The reviewer values that Morus has provided a glossary in which technical terms from ancient rhetoric are translated into German. As for Morus’s Latin translation, it is judged as “excellent—neither too free nor too literal” [*vortrefflich, weder zu weitläufig noch zu slavisch*] (p. 21). The reviewer believes Morus when he says the translation costed him great effort. He would likely have gained even more favour among those he wishes to impress, if he had provided such a beautiful translation in German. No list will follow of places where Morus failed to grasp the sense of the text, in order not to cast a shadow on the merits of the translation. A list follows, however, of instances where the translator offered a correct translation but gave an inaccurate explanation in the notes. Both Morus and Pearce find Longinus unintelligible when he uses expressions common in philosophical schools to refer to ordinary things. Actually, an additional list follows of passages where both Pearce’s and Morus’s translations are incorrect (pp. 23–27). The reviewer has compared Morus’s version with Pearce’s. Pearce draws more frequently on passages from Quintilian in his explanations. The reviewer hopes Morus will continue his work. The review is signed with “M.” However, the author can probably be identified as Christoph Meiners (1747–1810), who was a student in Göttingen at the time.¹⁹

2.8.3 [R 21 =] In: *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, vol. X, pp. 303–10. Year: 1770. Reviewer: anonymous

The reviewer begins this review by stating that Longinus’ translation has appeared at just the right time, as today’s young writers are preoccupied with judg-

¹⁹ The collaborators of the *Philologische Bibliothek* were professors, teachers, and students of the University of Göttingen, as well as members of the *Philologisches Seminar*. They were recommended by Christian Gottlob Heyne (see Habel 2007, 417).

ing or critiquing the works of Spirit and Genius, laying down laws for Beauty, and self-satisfied teaching the reasons for both. The ancient authors might serve to guide them back onto the right path. The reviewer expresses appreciation for both the Preface and the Introduction written by Morus. In the Preface—a fine part of this edition—Morus demonstrates sharp insight. In the Introduction, he argues that Longinus possesses a distinct merit in comparison with modern aestheticians, insofar as he shows how one may arrive at the “Great” and the “Sublime,” while also explaining and evaluating the models and examples with such sensitivity that the reader experiences the very same feelings as Longinus himself. “A general merit of the ancient method,” the reviewer notes, “is that it tends more toward practical application, even if it may be flawed in other respects” (p. 304). The method of the ancients is this: some collect all the beautiful passages from various writers, extract general principles from them, and young students must imitate these. Other ancient authors, however, focus more on the emotional impact on the reader or listener; they examine the differences in these effects and identify their causes in arrangement, structure, and so on. Longinus belongs to this latter group. Longinus’ merit lies in having understood that the only true effect of the sublime is “astonishment” [*Erstaunen*], even if he failed to grasp precisely how this effect is produced. Longinus dwells more on the sublime in expression than on the sublime in thought. Modern aestheticians are concerned with the causes that make beauty and the sublime produce such effects. Perhaps these inquiries belong more to the realm of psychology than to the fine arts. There is a lament that the work of Longinus has come down to us in a fragmentary state. The review references the Paris manuscript—the oldest—and notes that all other manuscripts are merely copies of it and have little independent value. This observation, the reviewer suggests, ought to have made Morus somewhat bolder in proposing emendations (p. 306), and some examples follow. Pearce’s editorial improvements are given in the footnotes. The explanatory glosses of Greek terms are positively evaluated. The text is also useful for younger scholars, particularly in demonstrating how an author can be explained by means of his own words. There follows a discussion of some terminological explanations. Regarding the Latin translation, Morus is to be commended for the modesty with which he presents his work, given the inherent difficulty of translating Longinus. Yet the reviewer is confident that no one will read this translation without finding it beautiful. Despite the challenges, the Latin captures the style of Longinus. While some of Longinus’ character may be lost, the reader gains in aesthetic enjoyment. Finally, the reviewer also extends praise to the publisher for undertaking such a worthy project.

2.8.4 [R 22 =] In: *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von gelehrten Sachen auf das Jahr 1770*, vol. XXXI, Issue 14, pp. 107–9. Year: 1770. Reviewer: anonymous

Morus is known for his work on Greek literature. His edition will be instructive and very useful, especially in light of the current zeal with which contemporary scholars engage with the concept of beauty and its determinations. The

reading of Morus's edition will be appreciated both by connoisseurs of the Greek language and by those in need of a translation. Morus offers improvements to Pearce's edition based on manuscripts or through his own conjectures, which he places in the footnotes. The translator deemed it necessary to produce a new translation, as those currently available are partly inaccurate and flawed, and partly verbose. He does not expect, however, universal approval in this regard and notes that, despite all efforts, he has not succeeded in faithfully rendering the metaphors employed by Longinus. A detailed discussion of certain Latin translations follows, in which the reviewer suggests improvements. The reviewer appreciates the explanatory glosses, though he points out a few cases where he disagrees. The concluding remarks focus on Morus's Preface and Introduction. The reviewer displays clear expertise in the field.

2.8.5 [R 23 =] In: *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen auf das Jahr 1770*, vol. LVI, Issue 14, pp. 108–12. Year: 1770. Reviewer: anonymous

This review appears in a *Sammelrezension*. Morus is well known for his efforts in the field of Greek literature. His edition will be instructive and very useful, especially in light of the current zeal with which contemporary scholars engage with the concept of beauty and its determinations. The Greek text chosen for the edition is that of Pearce; textual critics will find in the footnotes the changes proposed by Morus, either based on manuscript evidence or on his own conjectures. There is an evaluative comment on Morus's explanatory glosses. The notes were selected from other authors, and Morus added some of his own. He considered it overly verbose to list all the parallel passages in ancient authors where the words under discussion are used with the same meaning as in Longinus. Nevertheless, he made considerable efforts to provide helpful insights into the metaphors employed by Longinus. The translator deemed it necessary to produce a new translation, as those currently available are partly inaccurate and flawed, and partly verbose. At p. 110 the reviewer begins to offer judgments on the translated renderings and textual readings, and the examples and opinions are nearly identical to those found in another review. In fact, several propositions in this review recur *verbatim* in [R 22]; see p. 109, lines 5–7; p. 110, lines 3–13; pp. 110–112, *passim*. Nevertheless, this review displays stylistic originality, which makes it unlikely that the two reviews share the same author.

2.8.6 [R 24 =] In: *Göttingische Anzeige von gelehrten Sachen*, [no vol. indication], Issue 1, pp. 388–90. Year: 1770. Reviewer: anonymous

This review appears in a *Sammelrezension*. Much has been said about Longinus, but in this edition Morus says no more than what is necessary for our understanding of Longinus' treatise—and he also says something that previous scholars had neither mentioned nor noticed. It is an excellent text for young readers, particularly in the field of aesthetics. The translation possesses its own Latin elegance, which can be admired in only few other translations.

A preface is included, in which, with great intelligence, the true value of recent aesthetic inquiries into what pleases—and their relation to Longinus's method, and more generally to that of the ancients—is clearly established (p. 390).

The quality of the printing is praised. This is not a technical review; there are no references to the Greek text.

2.8.7 [R 25 =] In: *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, vol. XV, Issue 1, pp. 315–16. Year: 1771. Reviewer: "I." [= C.G. Heyne]

At the opening of this review, the reviewer offers some interesting cultural reflections. This edition of one of the finest critics of antiquity does honor to our Germany in the eyes of all foreigners. The editor and publisher have done everything to endow it with the value it deserves. If German booksellers were to procure for themselves the great classical Greek authors—not with an overflow of annotations, but as correct as possible, simple, and in a middle ground between the tasteless Dutch luxury and the cheap German printings—then it might indeed be possible, given the gradually reviving interest in Greek literature, to stand firm against the influx of frivolous *belles lettres* and journalistic pedantry. For, once someone has shaped their taste according to the ancient Greeks, he can no longer be tempted either to waste an entire life—of which our homeland and fellow citizens have such a strong claim to the greater part—nor to submit to the debasing cabal of the journalists. This is followed by a brief description of Morus's edition: the published text is that of Pearce, suggested improvements to the text are placed in the footnotes etc. Judgment on the translation: "The Latin translation is more elegant and beautiful in Latin than it is faithful in character to Longinus; but precisely for that reason, it will openly please less" (p. 316). Though brief and not focused on technical matters, the review is remarkably brilliant and written in a refined style.

2.8.8 [R 26 =] In: *Hallische gelehrte Zeitungen*, vol. IX, Issue 13, pp. 97–9. Year: 1774. Reviewer: anonymous

This review appears in a *Sammelrezension*. The edition is of considerable value and was published several years ago. At the beginning, there is a dissertation by Morus in which he demonstrates both taste and philosophical insight. He argues that the term $\psi\upsilon\chi\omicron\varsigma$ does not carry the same meaning across the various chapters of Longinus's work, and that it does not always correspond to what we now call "the sublime." According to Morus, the term $\psi\upsilon\chi\omicron\varsigma$ has the following meanings: (1) The grand or elevated that astonishes [*Erstaunen*]; (2) The grand through which we ourselves are drawn into a feeling of our own greatness—this pertains to critical judgment ("and this is the twofold kind of the sublime, as we use the word", pp. 97–98); (3) It refers to the vehemence and fire of thought; (4) It refers to the powers of thought insofar as they set in motion; (5) It refers to the refinement through which certain objects are made beautiful by the intellect.

Morus applies this conceptual analysis to the five characteristics Longinus proposes for the sublime expression. The reviewer acknowledges that, in order to establish a true understanding of Longinus's treatise, more is to be gained from this brief dissertation—which is also praised for Morus's literary style—than from the treatises of theorists or from other editors of ancient works. Rarely are such profound linguistic knowledge and philosophical depth found together (p. 98). The notes are highly useful and well worth reading.

2.9 Reviews to: [T9 =] ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΥ ΛΟΓΓΙΝΟΥ ΤΑ ΣΩΖΟΜΕΝΑ. *Dionysii Longinii quae supersunt*, ed. by Jonathan Toup, with the emendations of David Ruhnken, Typographia Clarendoniana: London, 1778. Languages: Greek, Latin

This is a collection of all the “fragments” (“*quae supersunt*”, τὰ σωζόμενα) attributed to Pseudo-Longinus. The introductory dissertation and the commentaries are in Latin. The Latin translation appears below the Greek text. A fourth edition was published in 1806.

2.9.1 [R 27 =] In: *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen auf das Jahr 1779*, vol. LXV, Issue 1, pp. 129–32. Year: 1779. Reviewer: anonymous

The review opens with a brief description of the book. The edition begins with a disputed dissertation [*Disputation*] by Ruhnken titled *De vita et scriptis Longini*. This is followed by the text of the treatise *On the Sublime*, as well as the other fragments, with Pearce's Latin translation printed beneath the Greek. Starting from p. 133, Ruhnken's glosses are included, while Toup's begin on p. 153. The reviewer reports some emendations suggested by Toup in the notes, followed by a brief discussion. Toup often draws apt comparisons between the style of Longinus and that of Plutarch; at times, however, he is too hasty in asserting that a particular word must be used in the text merely because it appears in another passage of Plutarch, of another author, or even of Longinus himself. For example, in a passage from section XXIX [par. 29.1] of the text, Toup prefers the word ἐπίκαιρον (opportune) to the one transmitted ἐπικηρον (risky), simply because it occurs in a similar expression in another passage of Longinus. But that is not the issue. The question is whether it should appear in this particular passage. The Greek text contains few conjectures, though numerous improvements are suggested in the glosses. The critical apparatus is excellent and is based on the editions of Robortello and Manutius, three Paris manuscripts (that of Pearce, that of Voss, and one shared with Toup by Larcher), and a codex that Toup was able to consult personally in Cambridge. The reviewer reports on Toup's attempts to fill in gaps in the text. There are mentions of supposed relations between Manutius and Porto, and some notes on Ruhnken's glosses. It is useful for the reader to compare the notes of Toup and Ruhnken, even when they disagree, and there is no regret in seeing some things explained twice in this edition. This edition certainly confirms, supplements, and corrects previous editions, though it does not render them superfluous. Perhaps it is unnecessary

to recall Morus's *Animadversiones ad Longinum* (1773), where here and there one reads with pleasure some explanations of terms or expressions—explanations that Toup's edition rightly identifies as incorrect or to which he assigns the same meaning already given by Morus. The anonymous reviewer demonstrates expertise in the subject, particularly in linguistic matter, through his criticism. The reviewer, however, does not propose any improvements or new conjectures regarding the editors' readings.

2.9.2 [R 27* =]: *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, vol. ?, pp. 362–63. Year: 1780? Reviewer: C.G. Heyne?

This review appears to be unavailable. Although it can be retrieved from the GJZ18 project database, it does not appear in the journal's records for the years 1778–1782, which I have consulted.

2.10 Reviews to: [T10 =] *Vom Erhabenen*, trans. by Johann Georg Schlosser, Weidmann und Reich: Leipzig 1781. Language: German

German translation of *On the Sublime*. Following the translator's preface, there is a brief account of the life of Pseudo-Longinus, followed by an analysis of his work. After the translation, the volume includes an essay on the sublime by Schlosser. For further information on this book and its reception in German culture—excluding journal reviews—see Zanicchi 2015.

2.10.1 [R 28 =] In: *Gothaische gelehrte Zeitungen*, vol. XVI, Issue 90, pp. 737–39. Year: 1781. Reviewer: anonymous

We already possess a German translation of this author by Heinecke [sic], which, however, in our century—one that places great value on the beauty of sound—has found few readers due to its flatness. Mr. S. has therefore attempted to provide literature enthusiasts with a new translation which, as he flatters himself, would surpass Heinecke's (p. 737).

It follows a brief commentary on the glosses: in the notes, Longinus's examples are expanded upon with others, mostly taken from English writers; the correctness of Longinus's observations is examined; the misapplication of his rules and observations to misleading examples is demonstrated; and his reflections are traced back to psychological motives. In the concluding section of the book, there is an essay on the sublime by Schlosser, in which he "discusses the concept of the sublime and shows how it is possible for the sublime to arise in us through words and the representation of ideas" (p. 737). Had he made use of David Runken's [sic] treatise *De vita et scriptis Longini*, published in Toup's edition, Schlosser could have enriched the brief section he dedicated to the life of Longinus with more interesting information. The reviewer would also have liked Schlosser to use the editions of Morus and Toup, described as "two of the

greatest critics of our time” (p. 738). The translation reads, aside from a few awkward word connections and expressions, in a light and pleasant manner. “We doubt, however, whether it may not itself lose something when compared to the original, as we have occasionally lamented the translator’s lack of fidelity” (p. 738). In this regard, a discussion follows of several renderings from the Greek, including terminological ones—the Greek text or word is provided, along with Schlosser’s translation and the reviewer’s commentary. Notably: there is a literal rendering of the word *προπεπωκότες* [par. 32.2], literally “drank away,” as *zugesunken*, which does not sound natural to the German ear; the translator should have used a different metaphor. The reviewer raises these critical points so that the public may form its own opinion. Translating Longinus is no easy task—as the reviewer notes “from personal experience” (p. 739). Schlosser also sketched out a plan for a theory of the sublime that is so beautiful the reviewer regrets it remained only a plan.

2.10.2 [R 29 =] In: *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen auf das Jahr 1781*, vol. LXVII, Issue 71, pp. 573–76. Year: 1781. Reviewer: anonymous

This report appears in a *Sammelrezension*. The review opens with a series of critical remarks. It begins with a quotation from Schlosser’s Preface, in which he claims to have conferred greater prestige on Longinus than Heinecke did. According to the reviewer, Schlosser would have done well to make better use of Morus’s work. It seems that Schlosser is unfamiliar with Toup’s recent edition. Schlosser states that he aims to write more for lovers of literature than for scholars (“what a contradiction!,” p. 574). The reviewer, however, notes that only scholars can make use of this translation and of his essay on the sublime. In fact, the treatise by Longinus discusses rhetorical categories such as metonymies, asyndeta etc., which are not accessible to non-specialists. Moreover, Schlosser’s own essay on the sublime employs philosophical and psychological concepts. This is a valuable part of the book, and the translation is also good (“pleasant to read and useful”). Before printing, however, the translation should have been cleaned of unusual, foreign, or peculiar constructions and words. Nevertheless, pompous expressions, flatness, and errors are evident. Examples follow. The reviewer would have wished, as in the “much-maligned” edition by Heinecke, that the Greek text had been printed alongside the translation, so that one could consult the original when the latter proved unclear. Continuing with examples, the reviewer states the following: in some cases, certain words have been left untranslated; and there are passages that have been mistranslated. Despite this, this “German Longinus” is a “valuable publication” (p. 575), and the author deserves thanks.

2.10.3 [R 30 =] In: *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, Supplement [*Anhang*] to voll. XXXVII-LII, Part 2, pp. 1250–52. Year: 1783. Reviewer: “Ik.” [= F. Gedike]

Since Heinecken’s translation is awkward and, for the most part, incorrect, there was a desire for a better translation of this treatise, which, although frag-

mentary, remains a precious remnant of ancient aesthetics. This translation not only surpasses those of its predecessors in every respect, but is indisputably one of the few translations of Greek authors that is readable in our language, and it may rightly be placed alongside Boileau's esteemed French translation. The expression is pure, fluent, full of vigor and dignity. Nevertheless, it is at times too free, and occasionally it seems as if we are reading Schlosser more than Longinus. Anyone familiar with the original Greek also knows the difficulties a translator must contend with, and it is often nearly impossible to extract a coherent meaning from passages where the text is corrupted. Yet, where the translation occasionally lacks a precise understanding of the Greek language and its nuances, this shortcoming is rightly compensated for by Schlosser's sensitivity and insight, especially where he penetrates the thought of Longinus. Often, in passages where critics—with all their emendations and interpretations—have failed to extract any acceptable meaning from the text, Schlosser intuitively grasps Longinus's intent. The reviewer states that in many passages of the text we must ask ourselves: Longinus must have meant this, even if the text as it stands seems to say something else or nothing at all. The passages from poetic works cited in the treatise are excellently translated. The translation is based primarily on Morus's edition. The reviewer would have liked Schlosser to have also consulted Toup's more recent version. Fortunately, the translator does not belong to that group of translators who, out of blind enthusiasm for their author, see in him nothing but beauty and revere every word as if it were an oracular pronouncement. The notes are well judged. The reviewer recommends Schlosser's essay on the sublime to all theorists and scholars of aesthetics, as a rich collection of psychological and aesthetic observations and reflections, which—although not always expressed with sufficient precision—nonetheless reveal sound taste and clear judgment. The style in which the essay is written is warm and lively, though at times a bit too assertive and dismissive. The review is signed with the initials "Ik." The reviewer is identified as Friedrich Gedicke (1754–1803).

3. Some Valuable Facts and Recurring Themes in the 18th Century Reviews of Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime*

In this concluding section, I aim to briefly highlight some recurring themes or valuable facts found in 18th century German journal reviews of the treatise *On the Sublime* which emerged during my analysis of the sources and which I consider relevant from the point of view of the history of knowledge.

1) I would like to begin by highlighting a point that may seem insignificant at first glance but is, upon closer inspection, far from trivial from the perspective of the history of knowledge: the recurring emphasis on commercial aspects (target audience, book price, print quality etc.) in the reviews of various editions and translations of the treatise *On the Sublime*.²⁰ In many of these reviews, *On*

²⁰ Cfr. [R1], [R2], [R3], [R5], [R7], [R8], [R9], [R12], [R19], [R20], [R21] and [R24].

the Sublime is targeted toward a young readership; the low cost of the editions is praised, and the editors' glosses positively evaluated precisely because they include only what is essential for understanding the text, avoiding the superfluous and selectively incorporating the most useful notes from more expensive editions. Reviews—both in the 18th century and today—create a market; they shape and influence public opinion about a product. It is also through these features, repeatedly emphasized in the reviews of *On the Sublime*, that the treatise was able concretely to become a “golden book” for the younger generation of the German *Aufklärung*, starting in the early decades of the 18th century.

2) Reviews of *On the Sublime* sometimes appear to have had an influence on the publishing world. For example, a suggestion made by a reviewer ([R2]) when reviewing the second edition of Hudson's edition of the treatise ([T1])—namely, the wish to see the notes from the later Schurtzfleisch incorporated into the editor's glosses— was realised in the third edition. It is also a well-known phenomenon, observable in these cases as well, that reviews engage in dialogue with other reviews through cross-references (e.g., [R5] refers back to [R2]), polemics, and even plagiarism. In the latter case, for instance, [R23] is noteworthy for having plagiarized very technical linguistic critiques from [R22] (see Table 1). This evidence shows that the reviews of *On the Sublime*—as well as reviews more generally—were not ineffective or isolated acts of criticism.

3) The aspect that most captured my attention was the recurring presence of linguistic issues in the reviews of *On the Sublime*, particularly those concerning translation. First and foremost, it is important to highlight the multilingual context in which these reviews are situated—a context shared by reviews published in the *Gelehrte Journale* more broadly.²¹ Latin, Italian, French, Dutch, and German translations of the treatise are reviewed. In two instances ([R9] and [R18]), the contents of reviews originally written in other languages are conveyed in translation when discussing editions or translations of the treatise. References to Greek are not uncommon, and the adequacy of Latin renderings is frequently assessed. In these instances, the reviewers appear to be highly proficient in the relevant languages. Moreover, the reviewers acknowledge that the treatise is particularly difficult to translate. In one case, a reviewer even notes this from personal experience [R28]. Within this framework, the relationship between various languages and cultures and the notion of (German) national identity comes to the fore (see [R12], [R20]). These issues also resonate with themes deeply rooted in German intellectual culture since the time of Luther—for example, in [R19], where the Lutheran principle is clearly evident: that the aim of translation is to make a text accessible to those who do not know the original language. Even the evaluative register and criteria used to assess translations find their foundation in Luther's

²¹ For discussions of multilingualism in journal reviews and Luther's *Sendbrief* as the reviewers' “gold standard” for evaluating translations, see Pizzichemi 2026. On translating as an intrinsic part of scholarly work, to which a particular economy was attached, in mid-eighteenth century, see Gantet 2025.

approach.²² Notably, in [R19], there is a strikingly modern awareness that translations may lead to a loss of the knowledge of the original language. Finally, Latin is often regarded as a useful intermediary for accessing Greek, and the taste in translations—as reflected in the changing assessments of Heinecken's translation of the treatise over the decades—appears to evolve over time.

4) Longinus—whose identity is never questioned in the 18th century—receives unanimous appreciation from both editors and reviewers. The reviewers also acknowledge the modernity of the treatise (e.g., see [R21] and [R22]). As 'knowledge actors,' the reviewers play a key role in disseminating ideas about the sublime that will become part of the shared intellectual heritage and serve as a foundation for later work by prominent authors.

5) What proved most striking in my research was not what I found, but what was missing from the sources I examined—an *absence* I had not expected. In fact, in the final surviving section of the treatise (par. 44.1–12; Halliwell 2022, 68–73), Pseudo-Longinus imagines a dialogue with a “philosopher,” to whom the most politically suspicious and dangerous views are attributed. In this part of the treatise, the decline in the literary quality of the time is discussed, and the “philosopher” identifies its cause in the loss of freedom: it is democracy, he argues, that truly nurtures the sublime. Democracy, by granting liberty, allowed the flourishing and expression of the talents of great minds, whereas the condition of servitude imposed by an authoritarian regime becomes a prison for the mind. To this argument, Pseudo-Longinus replies that the decline lamented by the “philosopher” is, in reality, the result of a general moral deterioration of the society, and that authority plays a beneficial role in restraining the negative passions that have led to this decline. He writes:

But perhaps for people such as we are it is *better* to be ruled than to be free: if our greedy instincts were entirely let loose, as if released from prison, against those around us, they would deluge the world with evil (par. 44.10; Halliwell 2022, 73).

Now, this is the ‘epochal’ theme of the German *Aufklärung*: what relationship should exist between individual freedom and political authority in order to foster the flourishing of both individual and societal qualities? It is a problem, for instance, to which Kant would later respond by proposing the distinction between the “public” (free) and “private” (authority-bound) use of reason. I asked myself how it is possible that such an epoch-defining issue, also present in the treatise, is *not* even briefly addressed in the reviews I analysed, despite the fact that they span the period from 1710 to 1783. This is particularly striking given that the audience of the *Gelehrte Journale* was a bourgeois, and that the theme of the literary decline of the time is indeed discussed in several of these reviews (e.g., [R19], [R21]), with the reading and the study of *On the Sublime* even being proposed as a remedy for it. At present, I am not able to provide a definitive and convincing answer to account for the aforementioned absence. It seems to me, at

²² Cfr. [R10], [R11], [R15], [R16], [R20], [R21], [R25], [R28], [R29] and [R30].

least, that no single explanation is entirely satisfactory. One possible hypothesis is that the reviewers were concerned solely with matters of erudition—though this does not appear to be the case. Another possibility is that, out of respect for Longinus, they chose not to highlight an opinion from which they felt ideologically distant. Or, perhaps more plausibly, this theme was deliberately avoided in the reviews for political reasons—either to sidestep censorship or to avoid engaging in politically sensitive debates.

What is certain, however, is that even today, this “golden book”—which in the 20th century saw more editions and translations than ever before—continues to favour the genre of the review as a battleground for critical debate.²³

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²³ E.g. see the critical review of Halliwell’s edition of *On the Sublime*—and particularly its Italian translation—by Lombardo 2022.

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G. F. Meier's Received Reviews

Riccardo Pozzo

Abstract: This paper investigates the reviews to works of Georg Friedrich Meier in relation to questions such as the specificity of individual journals, the restraints imposed by religious denominations, the actual impact of reviews on controversies, and the relation between reviews and the institutions that supported or hindered them. The first part reconstructs Meier's overall impact at the newly instituted University of Halle during the decades of his teaching (since 1739) and research (to his passing in 1777). The second part examines the journals that published reviews of Meier's works, their confessional and institutional bindings. The third part examines the content of some famous reviews written by Moses Mendelssohn and Thomas Abbt, which are startling example of how some tendencies can be identified to privilege some perspectives instead of others. The fourth part considers the impact of Meier's received reviews on philosophical issues of the time, especially about the relations between the University of Halle and the University of Königsberg, both under the administration of the Prussian Etats-Ministerium as regards Kant's planned succession on the professorship held by Meier.

Keywords: Thomas Abbt, 18th-Century Journals, Immanuel Kant, G. F. Meier, Moses Mendelssohn, Reviews, University of Halle.

1. Meier at Halle

The most interesting legacy of Meier's philosophy lies quite possibly in the proof that a reasonable entanglement of logic and rhetoric can take place only in the context of an enlarged concept of truth, while embracing all its epistemic nuances. One can say that Meier went beyond his teacher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten insofar as he laboriously built into a system of *artes sermocinales* all theoretical principles and practical rules connected with traditional logic and rhetoric. Nevertheless, it is easy to see where the limits of Meier's endeavor are, since his continuous reference to the canons of the tradition of rhetoric eventually implies that Meier loses sight of the initial intention of elaborating every special art according to a compulsory legality, and exhausts himself in enumerating concrete instructions for poetizing.

Research questions are:

- 1) Checking which authors or ideas were disseminated by specific journals and which tendencies can be identified to privilege some perspectives instead of others.
- 2) Assessing whether the confession of the journal determined the judgment expressed in the review.

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- 3) Assessing how reviews influenced or had an impact of the philosophical controversies of the time.
- 4) Assessing the relation between reviews and the organizations that funded the journal.

Most articles in the scholarly journals concern the subjects of scholarly history, theology, history, the arts, and jurisprudence. Another large area is the information they provide on learned institutions such as academies and universities. Search entries are therefore also useful for the areas:

- Development of science, scientific terminology.
- Culture of debate in the Age of Enlightenment.
- Networking of the sciences.
- Personal research, history of reception.
- Media history (newspaper/magazine research).
- Book production, publishing history.

2. Organs that Published Received Reviews to Meier's Works. Assessing the Relation Between Reviews and the Organizations that Funded the Journal

The project *Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen als Netzwerke des Wissens im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (GJZ 18) has made available a corpus of sixty-five multidisciplinary journals published between 1688 and 1800, which are mostly dedicated to providing timely book-reviews.

The most relevant journals are:

- 1) *Jenaischen Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen oder Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen* (*J.G.Z.*). This review-journal appeared from 1749 to 1786, albeit with a long hiatus from (1757)1758 to 1764. Adolph Friedrich Hamberger [1727–1750] was apparently its founder. Hamberger was appointed associate professor in Jena in 1749 and taught medicine there until his premature death the following year. In addition to his work as an editor, he is also known as the author of reviews of writings in the fields of medicine and physics. Other editors also contributed to the *J.G.Z.*, such as Johann Ernst Immanuel Walch [1725–1778], who was involved from 1749 to 1756. Walch was a conservative spirit, deeply rooted in the old scholarship as a philologist and natural scientist. After the journal ceased publication in 1756, it was he who was responsible for its reappearance in the mid-1760s. As the son of Johann Georg Walch [1693–1775], a professor of theology who taught at Jena from 1718, Walch represented the conservative orientation of the Jena scholarly journals, defending the positions of Lutheran orthodoxy. He himself wrote mainly philological reviews. There is little evidence of the editorial work of Georg Christoph Hamberger [1726–1773], who is nevertheless said to have worked for the *J.G.Z.* between 1749 and 1755. Furthermore, from 1749 until his untimely death in 1751, the lawyer Christian Heinrich Eckhardt [1716–1751] was part of the editorial team and was responsible for legal reviews. A friend of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing [1729–1781] Christian Nicolaus Naumann

[1720–1797], who was part of the editorial team from 1749 until his departure for Marburg in 1751, was, in contrast, a more free-thinking scholar. He wrote reviews on history, philosophy, and the fine arts. In keeping with the customs of review journals of the time, the *J.G.Z.* aims to be unbiased and fair, and accordingly, many of its articles are objective reports or limited to summaries of content. However, the actual evaluation is carried out subtly through the pre-selection of the books reviewed, which is extremely biased. Most of the selected books receive appropriate praise. If the praise is justified, the agreement with scholarly tradition (theology) or the good knowledge of the history of a science (medicine), including the ancient sources of the subject, is often emphasized. In contrast, direct polemics are not used very often, and outright condemnation is even rarer. Here, the fads of “innovation mania” or “reform frenzy” are explicitly condemned.¹

- 2) *Compendium historiae litterariae novissimae, oder Erlangische gelehrte Anmerkungen und Nachrichten*. The journal was founded in 1746 “at his own expense” by Johann Friedrich Klett [1731–1785] (see Clemens Alois Baader (ed.), *Lexikon verstorbener Baierischer Schriftsteller des achtzehnten und neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2, part 1, Augsburg 1825, pp. 129–130). Its editors included Johann Christoph Rudolph [1723–1792] and Johann Georg Krafft [1740–1782], professors at the University of Erlangen. The following individuals have been identified as reviewers: Johann Georg Hofmann [1743–1820], who wrote most of the theological and philosophical reviews before 1765 (cfr. *Erlangische gelehrte Nachrichten* 1764, issue 40, p. 320); Johann Christoph Rudolph, editor from 1749 to 1765. “Since he had renounced the publication, he still worked on many reviews, but from 1769 onwards he had to decide to edit them for over 15 years” (see Georg Wolfgang Augustin Fikenscher, *Vollständige akademische Gelehrten-Geschichte der königlich preussischen Friedrich-Alexanders Universität zu Erlangen, Nürnberg* 1806, pp. 220–221); and Johann Georg Krafft, editor from 1765 to 1768. “In addition to publishing, he also played a major role in writing” (*Ibidem*, p. 92). Predominantly neutral to positive reviews, scathing reviews are extremely rare. Criticism is exercised, so to speak, by ignoring book titles.²
- 3) *Hamburgische Berichte von neuen Gelehrten Sachen*. During its publication period, the journal had no significant competitors in Hamburg and Altona, which further underscored its status as the city’s leading scholarly publication. The *Hamburgische Berichte* was not only an indispensable source of information on regional and national scholarly debates, news, and new publications on the book market, but also provided information on auctions of books and other collections (natural history and coin cabinets etc.) in and beyond Hamburg. The journal was discontinued in 1757—as was typical for many reviews at the time—largely without reason. However, editorial

¹ See: <<https://adw-goe.de/gjz18/>> (Accessed May 20, 2026).

² See: <<https://adw-goe.de/gjz18/>> (Accessed May 20, 2026).

communications from the publisher Johann Peter Kohl [1698–1778] shed some light on the circumstances. As early as 1756, Kohl had speculated about the possible discontinuation of this popular journal, saying that “the current *Hamburgische Berichte* on new scholarly matters, which have been published continuously since 1732, will perhaps come to an end in the current year of 1756.” It is possible that, in addition to his workload, Kohl was demoralized by the late payments of various subscribers. During its publication period, the journal had no significant competitors in Hamburg and Altona, which further underscored its status as the city’s leading scholarly publication. At least, that is what can be inferred from a clear statement made at the end of the same year: “Although the editor of these reports, particularly because of the many bad payers who make the production of a work very vexing [...] has for some time been in doubt and uncertainty as to whether he would continue these reports in the coming year or not: nevertheless, the favorable reception of this scholarly journal to date and the undeserved but nevertheless flattering praise with which the most famous men, and most recently the venerable Dr. Kr. of L., have honored our journal, together with the hope of better sales in the future, have persuaded him to continue the aforementioned *Hamburgische Berichte* in the coming year, God willing.” Ultimately, the infrastructural disruptions to magazine distribution caused by the onset of the Seven Years’ War may also have hastened the magazine’s demise.³

- 4) *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von Gelehrten Sachen*. The publisher is unknown. The names of the authors are primarily found in publisher advertisements and letters to the editor, with a few isolated contributions by named authors, such as Georg Heinrich Behr [1708–1761] in 1742 and Gottfried Benedikt Schmiedlein [1739–1808] in 1774. The *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von gelehrten Sachen* was created in 1740 as a new publication alongside the *Kurtz-gefassten historischen Nachrichten zum Behuf der neuern europäischen Begebenheiten*, which had been published and printed by Christoph Gottlieb Seiffart [d. 1752] in Regensburg since 1727. After Seiffart’s death, his widow took over the publishing house. Between 1740 and 1783, 44 volumes were published. The program of the review includes book reviews and advertisements for current new publications from both Germany and neighboring European countries. In addition, there is news from scholars, scientists, and well-known figures in the academic world, as well as news from academies, colleges, and universities. From the preface to the first volume in 1740: “We hereby open our scholarly showcase [...] with the assurance to our esteemed readers and patrons that we will act with the utmost diligence in accordance with the established structure of our scholarly news: 1) Of new books and writings, a) In Germany. b) In foreign empires and states. 2) Of learned persons, societies, and other scholarly news [...] but we are obliged not to let it go unno-

³ See: <<https://adw-goe.de/gjz18/>> (Accessed May 20, 2026).

ticed that many learned and other highly esteemed foreign and local patrons and friends have already assured us of their approval, and also their kindest support in communicating useful matters to our pages, and that several have already made an active and commendable start [...].⁴

To date, a perusal of the *Index deutschsprachiger Zeitschriften 1750-1815* of the Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen (1989) has made it possible to list most of received reviews to works by Meier, which in the following pages are collected according to their disciplinary headings. Most interestingly, the group of investigators led by Klaus Schmidt has provided for each review a grade, namely either positive, or neutral, or negative. However, we have no information whether the grading was done autoptically or by artificial intelligence.

2.1 Logik (6 Reviews)

- 1) [Rezension] Vernunft-Lehre. *Critische Nachrichten*. (1752, Bd. 3, S. 313–315) POSITIVE *Critische Nachrichten*, Greifswald, Dähnert, (1750–1754).
- 2) [Rezension] Vernunftlehre. *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1752, Bd. 4, S. 539–540) POSITIVE
- 3) [Rezension] Vernunftlehre. *Compendium historiae litterariae novissimae, oder Erlangische gelehrte Anmerkungen und Nachrichten*. (1752, Bd. 7, S. 314–318) POSITIVE
- 4) [Rezension] Vernunftlehre. *Compendium historiae litterariae novissimae, oder Erlangische gelehrte Anmerkungen und Nachrichten*. (1752, Bd. 7, S. 326) POSITIVE
- 5) [Rezension] Vernunftlehre. *Tübingische Berichte von gelehrten Sachen*. (1752, S. 723–731) POSITIVE (Tübingen: Cotta, 1762–1763)
- 6) [Rezension] Vernunftlehre. *Tübingische Berichte von gelehrten Sachen*. (1752, S. 739–748).

2.2 Metaphysik (13 Reviews)

- 1) [Rezension] Beweis der vorherbestimmten Uebereinstimmung. *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1744, S. 94–95) POSITIVE (Göttingen: Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1739–1752) *Munterkeit und den lebhaften Geist des Herrn Verfassers*.
- 2) [Rezension] Gedanken von der Ehre. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1746, Bd. 3, S. 319–320) NEGATIVE NO DIG (Hamburg: Grund, 1744–1759).
- 3) [Rezension] Gedancken von der Ehre. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1748, Bd. 34, S. 206) POSITIVE (Leipzig: Zeitungs-Expedition, 1715–1784)

⁴ See <<https://adw-goe.de/gjz18/>> (Accessed May 20, 2026).

- 4) [Rezension] Metaphysik. Th. 2–4. *Gelehrte Nachrichten*. (1759, Bd. 8, S. 301–302) POSITIVE (Bützow: Berger u. Boedner, 1752–1763)
- 5) [Rezension] Gedancken von dem Einfluße der göttlichen Vorsehung in die freyen Handlungen der Menschen. *Neue Berichte von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1763, Bd. 2, S. 49–53) NEUTRAL (Rostock 1762–1765)
- 6) [Rezension] Gedanken von dem Einflusse der göttlichen Vorsehung in die freyen Handlungen der Menschen. *Gelehrte Nachrichten*. (1763, Bd. 12, S. 117–120) AMBIVALENT
- 7) [Rezension] Metaphysik. Baumgarten, A.G.; Meier, G.F. *Ausführliche und kritische Nachrichten von den besten und merkwürdigsten Schriften unsrer Zeit*. (1767, S. 667–671) NEGATIVE (Lindau, Leipzig, Frankfurt: Otto, 1763–1769)
- 8) [Rezension] Untersuchung verschiedener Materien aus der Weltweisheit. T.1. *Neue Hallische Gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1768, Bd. 3, S. 775–776) NEUTRAL NO DIG (Halle: Curt, 1766–1792)
- 9) [Rezension] Untersuchung verschiedener Materien aus der Weltweisheit. T.2. *Neue Hallische Gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1769, Bd. 4, S. 557–559) NEUTRAL NO DIG
- 10) [Rezension] Untersuchung verschiedener Materien aus der Weltweisheit. T.1. *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*. (1770, Bd. 11, S. 266–269) (Kiel: Boehn, 1765–1796) NEUTRAL NO DIG
- 11) [Rezension] Untersuchung verschiedener Materien aus der Weltweisheit. T.2. *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*. (1770, Bd. 13, S. 534–536)
- 12) [Rezension] Untersuchung verschiedener Materien aus der Weltweisheit. T.3. *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*. (1771, Bd. 14, S. 569–570)
- 13) [Rezension] Untersuchung verschiedener Materien aus der Weltweisheit. T. 4. *Auserlesene Bibliothek der neuesten deutschen Litteratur*. (1772, Bd. 2, S. 268–300) POSITIVE (Lemgo: Meyer, 1772–1781)

2.3 Ontologie (15 Reviews)

- 1) [Rezension] Beweis, daß keine Materie dencken könne. *Frankfurter Gelehrte Zeitung*. (1743, Bd. 8, S. 102–103) AMBIVALENT (Frankfurt: Bronner, 1736–1771)
- 2) [Rezension] Beweis, daß keine Materie dencken könne. *Hamburgische Berichte von neuen Gelehrten Sachen*. (1743, Bd. 12, S. 138–139) POSITIVE
- 3) [Rezension] Beweis, daß keine Materie dencken könne. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1743, Bd. 29, S. 550–551) AMBIVALENT
- 4) [Rezension] Beweis, daß keine Materie dencken könne. *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1743, S. 95–96) NEUTRAL
- 5) [Rezension] Beweis, daß keine Materie dencken könne. *Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen*. (1744, Bd. 1, S. 339–340) NEGATIVE references to Wolff and Baumgarten as a proof of no originality (Zürich: Heidegger, 1744–1763). Edited by Johann Jacob Bodmer
- 6) [Rezension] Beweis, daß keine Materie dencken könne. 2.verm.Aufl. *Neue Bibliothek*. (1751, S. 162–173) POSITIVE (Altenburg 1751–1753)

- 7) [Rezension] Beweis, daß keine Materie dencken könne. 2. verm. Aufl. *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1751, S. 588) POSITIVE
- 8) [Rezension] Vertheidigung seines Beweises des ewigen Lebens der Seele, und seiner Gedancken von der Religion. *Gelehrte Nachrichten*. (1752, Bd. 1, S. 486–488) POSITIVE (Bützow: Berger, Boedner, 1752–1763)
- 9) [Rezension] Vertheidigung seines Beweises des ewigen Lebens der Seele, und seiner Gedancken von der Religion. *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1753, Bd. 14, S. 94–95) NEUTRAL
- 10) [Rezension] Abermalige Vertheidigung seines Beweises, daß die menschliche Seele ewig lebe. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1754, Bd. 11, S. 257–259) NEGATIVE
- 11) [Rezension] Metaphysik. T. 1. *Gelehrte Nachrichten*. (1755, Bd. 4, S. 422–424) AMBIVALENT
- 12) [Rezension] Metaphysik. T. 1. *Gelehrte Nachrichten*. (1755, Bd. 4, S. 430–431) NEGATIVE
- 13) [Rezension] Metaphysik. T. 1. *Compendium historiae litterariae novissimae, oder Erlangische gelehrte Anmerkungen und Nachrichten*. (1756, Bd. 11, S. 108–109) POSITIVE
- 14) [Rezension] Metaphysik. Th. 2. Die Cosmologie. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1757, Bd. 14, S. 300–303) POSITIVE
- 15) [Rezension] Metaphysik. T. 4. *Compendium historiae litterariae novissimae, oder Erlangische gelehrte Anmerkungen und Nachrichten*. (1759, Bd. 14, S. 279–280) POSITIVE

2.4 Philosophische Anthropologie (37 Reviews)

- 1) [Rezension] Beweis der vorherbestimmten Uebereinstimmung. *Freyemüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen*. (1744, Bd. 1, S. 345–346) NEGATIVE
- 2) [Rezension] Theoretische Lehre von den Gemütsbewegungen überhaupt. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1744, Bd. 1, S. 459–461) POSITIVE
- 3) [Rezension] Sendschreiben an den Verfasser des Aufsatzes: Etwas Merkwürdiges de mundo archetypo, in dem dritten Beytrage der fortgesetzten Sammlung von alten und neuen theologischen Sachen auf das Jahr 1742. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1744, Bd. 1, S. 793–797) NEGATIVE
- 4) [Rezension] Theoretische Lehre von den Gemütsbewegungen überhaupt. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1744, Bd. 30, S. 526–527) POSITIVE
- 5) [Rezension] Theoretische Lehre von den Gemütsbewegungen überhaupt. *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1744, S. 526–527) POSITIVE
- 6) [Rezension] Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1745, Bd. 2, S. 815–820) POSITIVE

- 7) [Rezension] Sendschreiben an den Verfasser des Aufsatzes: Etwas Merkwürdiges de mundo archetypo, in dem dritten Beytrage der fortgesetzten Sammlung von alten und neuen theologischen Sachen auf das Jahr 1742. *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1745, S. 29–30) NEGATIVE
- 8) [Rezension] Beweis der vorher bestimmten Uebereinstimmung. *Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen*. (1746, Bd. 3, S. 42–44) NEGATIVE
- 9) [Stellungnahme] Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1746, Bd. 3, S. 49–53) POSITIVE
- 10) [Stellungnahme] Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1746, Bd. 3, S. 153–156) POSITIVE
- 11) [Rezension] Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode. *Frey-müthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen*. (1746, Bd. 3, S. 206–208) NEUTRAL
- 12) [Rezension] Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seelen nach dem Tode. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1746, Bd. 32, S. 53–55) POSITIVE
- 13) [Rezension] Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode. *Göttingische Bibliothek, darinnen der gegenwärtige Zustand der Gelahrheit in und ausserhalb Deutschland prüfend vorgestellet wird*. (1747, S. 197–210) POSITIVE (Göttingen: Schmid, 1746–1747)
- 14) [Rezension] Versuch eines Lehrgebäudes von den Seelen der Thiere. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1748, Bd. 5, S. 777–780) POSITIVE
- 15) [Rezension] Versuch eines neuen Lehr-Gebäudes von den Seelen der Thiere. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1748, Bd. 34, S. 886–888) POSITIVE
- 16) [Rezension] Versuch eines neuen Lehrgebäudes von den Seelen der Thiere. *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1749, Bd. 1, S. 17–20) POSITIVE
- 17) [Rezension] Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode. *Vollständige Einleitung in die Monatschriften der Deutschen*. (1749, Bd. 1, S. 432–434) POSITIVE (Erlangen: Müller 1747–1754)
- 18) [Rezension] Versuch eines Lehrgebäudes von den Seelen der Thiere. *Berlinische Bibliothek*. (1749, Bd. 3, S. 260–263) NEUTRAL (Berlin: Rüdiger, 1747–1750)
- 19) [Rezension] Versuch eines Lehrgebäudes von den Seelen der Thiere. *Frey-müthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen*. (1749, Bd. 6, S. 203–204) POSITIVE
- 20) [Rezension] Versuch eines Lehrgebäudes von den Seelen der Thiere. *Frey-müthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen*. (1749, Bd. 6, S. 388–389) POSITIVE
- 21) [Rezension] Versuch eines Lehrgebäudes von den Seelen der Thiere. *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1750, S. 439–440) NEUTRAL

- 22) [Rezension] Beweis, daß die menschliche Seele ewig lebe. *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1751, Bd. 3, S. 178–182) POSITIVE
- 23) [Rezension] Essais sur un nouveau Système des ames des bêtes. Meier, G.F.; Helwing, Christian Friedrich. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1751, Bd. 37, S. 222–223) AMBIVALENT
- 24) [Rezension] Essay sur un nouveau systeme de l'ame des betes. Meier, G.F.; Helwing, Christian Friedrich. *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1751, S. 152) NEGATIVE
- 25) [Rezension] Vertheidigung seines Beweises des ewigen Lebens der Seele, und seiner Gedancken von der Religion. *Gelehrte Nachrichten*. (1752, Bd. 1, S. 486–488) POSITIVE
- 26) [Rezension] Abermalige Vertheidigung seines Beweises, daß die menschliche Seele ewig lebe. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1752, Bd. 9, S. 529–533) NEGATIVE
- 27) [Rezension] Abermalige Vertheidigung seines Beweises, daß die menschliche Seele ewig lebe. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1752, Bd. 9, S. 537–543) NEGATIVE
- 28) [Rezension] Vertheidigung seines Beweises des ewigen Lebens der Seele, und seiner Gedancken von der Religion. *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1753, Bd. 14, S. 94–95) NEUTRAL
- 29) [Rezension] Abermalige Vertheidigung seines Beweises, daß die menschliche Seele ewig lebe. *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1754, Bd. 6, S. 11) NEUTRAL
- 30) [Rezension] Zuschrift an seine Zuhörer, worinnen er ihnen seinen Entschluß bekannt macht, ein Collegium über Locke's Versuch vom menschlichen Verstande zu halten. *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*. (1754, S. 1112) NEUTRAL
- 31) [Rezension] Betrachtungen über die Schrancken der menschlichen Erkenntnis. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1755, Bd. 41, S. 708–710) POSITIVE
- 32) [Rezension] Betrachtungen über die Schranken der menschlichen Erkenntniß. *Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen*. (1756, Bd. 13, S. 114–115) POSITIVE
- 33) [Rezension] Theoretische Lehre von den Gemüthsbewegungen. Andre verb. Aufl. *Gelehrte Nachrichten*. (1759, Bd. 8, S. 219–222) POSITIVE
- 34) [Rezension] Beyträge zu der Lehre von den Vorurtheilen des menschlichen Geschlechts. *Erneuerte Berichte von gelehrten Sachen*. (1766, Bd. 1, S. 211–215) AMBIVALENT
- 35) [Rezension] Beyträge zu der Lehre von den Vorurtheilen des menschlichen Geschlechts. *Neue Critische Nachrichten*. (1766, Bd. 2, S. 37–38) NEUTRAL (Greifswald: Röse, 1765–1774)
- 36) [Rezension] Beyträge zu der Lehre von den Vorurtheilen des menschlichen Geschlechts. *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1766, S. 35–36) AMBIVALENT
- 37) [Rezension] Beyträge zu der Lehre von den Vorurtheilen des menschlichen Geschlechts. *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*. (1769, Bd. 10, S. 184–189) NEUTRAL (Lambert)

2.5 Parapsychologie Okkultismus (3 Reviews)

- 1) [Rezension] Gedancken von Gespenstern. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1748, Bd. 34, S. 158–159) POSITIVE
- 2) [Rezension] Vertheidigung seines Gedanken von den Gespenstern. *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1749, Bd. 1, S. 179–184) POSITIVE
- 3) [Rezension] Gedanken von Gespenstern. *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1749, Bd. 1, S. 179–184) POSITIVE

2.6 Religionsphilosophie (9 Reviews)

- 1) [Rezension] Sendschreiben an den Verfasser des Aufsatzes: Etwas Merkwürdiges de mundo archetypo, in dem dritten Beytrage der fortgesetzten Sammlung von alten und neuen theologischen Sachen auf das Jahr 1742. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1744, Bd. 1, S. 793–797) NEGATIVE
- 2) [Rezension] Sendschreiben an den Verfasser des Aufsatzes: Etwas Merkwürdiges de mundo archetypo, in dem dritten Beytrage der fortgesetzten Sammlung von alten und neuen theologischen Sachen auf das Jahr 1742. *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1745, S. 29–30) NEGATIVE
- 3) [Rezension] Beurtheilung des abermaligen Versuchs einer Theodizee. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1747, Bd. 4, S. 493–494) NEUTRAL
- 4) [Rezension] Beurtheilung des abermaligen Versuchs einer Theodizee. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1747, Bd. 4, S. 537–539) NEUTRAL
- 5) [Stellungnahme] Beurtheilung des abermaligen Versuchs einer Theodizee. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1747, Bd. 4, S. 620–623) NEUTRAL
- 6) [Rezension] Beurtheilung des abermaligen Versuchs einer Theodicee. *Frey-müthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen*. (1748, Bd. 5, S. 239–240) POSITIVE
- 7) [Rezension] Beurtheilung des abermahligens Versuchs einer Theodicee. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1748, Bd. 34, S. 38–39) POSITIVE
- 8) [Rezension] Gedanken von der Religion. *Critische Nachrichten*. (1750, Bd. 1, S. 219–222) POSITIVE
- 9) [Rezension] Metaphysik. T. 4. *Compendium historiae litterariae novissimae, oder Erlangische gelehrte Anmerkungen und Nachrichten*. (1759, Bd. 14, S. 279–280) POSITIVE

2.7 Naturrecht (8 Reviews)

- 1) [Rezension] Recht der Natur. *Neue Hallische Gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1767, Bd. 2, S. 429–431) POSITIVE
- 2) [Rezension] Recht der Natur. *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1767, S. 677) NEUTRAL

- 3) [Rezension] Auszug aus dem Rechte der Natur. *Neue Hallische Gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1768, Bd. 3, S. 815–816) POSITIVE
- 4) [Rezension] Auszug aus dem Rechte der Natur. *Neue Critische Nachrichten*. (1769, Bd. 5, S. 207–208) POSITIVE
- 5) [Rezension] Recht der Natur. *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*. (1769, Bd. 8, S. 273–274) NEUTRAL
- 6) [Rezension] Lehre von den natürlichen gesellschaftlichen Rechten und Pflichten der Menschen. T. 1. *Neue Hallische Gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1770, Bd. 5, S. 405–406) NEUTRAL
- 7) [Rezension] Lehre von den natürlichen gesellschaftliche Rechten und Pflichten der Menschen. T. 1–2. *Gelehrte Zeitung*. (1771, Bd. 1, S. 452–455) AMBIVALENT
- 8) [Rezension] Lehre von den natürlichen gesellschaftlichen Rechten und Pflichten. T.1. *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*. (1771, Bd. 14, S. 570–571) POSITIVE Lambert

2.8 Moralphilosophie (10 Reviews)

- 1) [Rezension] Gedancken von der Ehre. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1748, Bd. 34, S. 206) POSITIVE
- 2) [Rezension] De virtutis philosophicae cum Christiana convenientia et disconvenientia. Diss.phil. Meier, G.F.; Schmaling, G.C. Freye *Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*. (1750, Bd. 7, S. 635–636) NEUTRAL
- 3) [Rezension] De virtutis philosophicae cum christiana convenientia et disconvenientia. Meier, G.F.; Schmaling, Gottlieb Christoph. *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1750, Bd. 11, S. 119)
- 4) [Rezension] De somno morali. Meier, G.F.; Sucro, Johann J. *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1750, Bd. 11, S. 162) NEUTRAL
- 5) [Rezension] Philosophische Sittenlehre. T. 2. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1754, Bd. 40, S. 628–629) POSITIVE
- 6) [Rezension] Philosophische Sittenlehre. T.1–3. *Vermischte Abhandlungen und Urtheile über das Neueste aus der Gelehrsamkeit*. (1756, S. 327–343) POSITIVE
- 7) [Rezension] Philosophische Sittenlehre. T.4. *Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen*. (1759, Bd. 16, S. 39) POSITIVE
- 8) [Rezension] Philosophische Sittenlehre. T.4. *Tübingsische Berichte von gelehrten Sachen*. (1759, S. 43–44) POSITIVE
- 9) [Rezension] Philosophische Sittenlehre. T.4. *Vermischte Abhandlungen und Urtheile über das Neueste aus der Gelehrsamkeit*. (1760, S. 319–342) NEUTRAL
- 10) [Rezension] Betrachtung über die natürliche Anlage zur Tugend und zum Laster. *Neue Hallische Gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1776, Bd. 11, S. 662–663) POSITIVE

2.9 Populäre Moralphilosophie (33 Reviews)

- 1) [Rezension] *Gedancken von Schertzen. Bemühungen zur Beförderung der Critik und des guten Geschmacks.* (1743, Bd. 1, S. 190–191) POSITIVE
- 2) [Rezension] *Gedancken von Schertzen. Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen.* (1744, Bd. 1, S. 379–380) POSITIVE
- 3) [Rezension] *Gedanken von Schertzen. Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen.* (1744, S. 9) POSITIVE
- 4) [Rezension] *Gründliche Anweisung, wie jemand ein neumodischer Weltweiser werden könne: in einem Sendschreiben an einen jungen Menschen. Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen.* (1745, S. 79–84) NEGATIVE
- 5) [Rezension] *Der Mensch, eine moralische Wochenschrift.* T.1., St.1–4. Meier, G.F.; Lange, S.G. *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen.* (1751, Bd. 3, S. 52–53) NEUTRAL
- 6) [Buchanzeige] *Der Mensch, eine moralische Wochenschrift.* St.1–15. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. *Compendium historiae litterariae novissimae, oder Erlangische gelehrte Anmerkungen und Nachrichten.* (1751, Bd. 6, S. 105–107) ANNOUNCEMENT
- 7) [Buchanzeige] *Der Mensch, eine moralische Wochenschrift.* St.16–27. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. *Compendium historiae litterariae novissimae, oder Erlangische gelehrte Anmerkungen und Nachrichten.* (1751, Bd. 6, S. 138–139) ANNOUNCEMENT
- 8) [Rezension] *Der Mensch, eine moralische Wochenschrift.* T.1. Lange, S.G.; Meier, G.F. *Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen.* (1751, Bd. 8, S. 200) POSITIVE
- 9) [Rezension] *Der Mensch, eine moralische Wochenschrift.* T.1. Lange, S.G.; Meier, G.F. *Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen.* (1751, Bd. 8, S. 225–226) POSITIVE
- 10) [Rezension] *Der Mensch, eine moralische Wochenschrift.* St.1–9. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen.* (1751, S. 95–96) NEGATIVE
- 11) [Rezension] *Gedancken vom Glück und Unglück. Gelehrte Nachrichten.* (1753, Bd. 2, S. 167–168) POSITIVE
- 12) [Rezension] *Untersuchung einiger Ursachen warum Die Tugendhaften in diesem Leben ofte unglücklicher sind, als die Lasterhaften. Gelehrte Nachrichten.* (1756, Bd. 5, S. 59–60) POSITIVE
- 13) [Rezension] *Der Mann, eine wöchentliche Sittenschrift.* Jg.1. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt.* (1757, Bd. 14, S. 75–78) POSITIVE
- 14) [Rezension] *Das Reich der Natur und Sitten. Eine moralische Wochenschrift.* T.1. Anonym (Meier, G.F.). *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt.* (1757, Bd. 14, S. 126–128) POSITIVE

- 15) [Rezension] *Der Mann, eine wöchentliche Sittenschrift. Jg.1. (?) Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen.* (1757, Bd. 14, S. 392) POSITIVE
- 16) [Rezension] *Das Reich der Natur und der Sitten. St. 1–12. Jenaische Beyträge zur neuesten gelehrten Geschichte.* (1757) POSITIVE
- 17) [Rezension] *Der Mann, eine wöchentliche Sittenschrift. Jg.2. (?) Das Neueste aus der anmuthigen Gelehrsamkeit.* (1758, S. 64–67) POSITIVE
- 18) [Rezension] *Betrachtungen über die Trostgründe in Kriegszeiten. Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern und Andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen.* (1760, Bd. 17, S. 243–245) POSITIVE
- 19) [Rezension] *Das Reich der Natur und Sitten, eine moralische Wochenschrift. T. 11. Tübingsische Berichte von gelehrten Sachen.* (1762, S. 369–371) POSITIVE
- 20) [Rezension] *Das Reich der Natur und Sitten, eine moralische Wochenschrift. T. 12. Tübingsische Berichte von gelehrten Sachen.* (1762, S. 661–663) POSITIVE
- 21) [Rezension] *Der Glückselige, eine moralische Wochenschrift. T. 1. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. Neue Berichte von Gelehrten Sachen.* (1763, Bd. 2, S. 181–182) POSITIVE
- 22) [Rezension] *Der Glückselige. Eine moralische Wochenschrift. T.1. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. Tübingsische Berichte von gelehrten Sachen.* (1763, S. 421–423) AMBIVALENT
- 23) [Rezension] *Der Glückselige. Eine moralische Wochenschrift. T. 2. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. Tübingsische Berichte von gelehrten Sachen.* (1763, S. 702–706) POSITIVE
- 24) [Rezension] *Gedanken von dem unschuldigen Gebrauche der Welt. Neue Critische Nachrichten.* (1765, Bd. 1, S. 351–352) NEGATIVE
- 25) [Rezension] *Der Mensch, eine moralische Wochenschrift. 2. Aufl. T.1.2. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek.* (1766, Bd. 2, S. 263–264) NEGATIVE
- 26) [Rezension] *Gedanken von dem unschuldigen Gebrauche der Welt. Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen.* (1766, S. 29–31) POSITIVE
- 27) [Rezension] *Der Glückselige. Eine moralische Wochenschrift. Th.6. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen.* (1766, S. 44–45) AMBIVALENT
- 28) [Rezension] *Der Glückselige. Eine moralische Wochenschrift, T. 9. Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen.* (1767, Bd. 53, S. 598–599) POSITIVE
- 29) [Rezension] *Der Glückselige, eine moralische Wochenschrift. T.7. Lange, S.G.; Meier, G.F. Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek.* (1768, Bd. 8, S. 266–267) NEGATIVE
- 30) [Rezension] *Der Glückselige. Eine moralische Wochenschrift. T. 10. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen.* (1768, S. 29–30) AMBIVALENT
- 31) [Rezension] *Der Glückselige. Eine moralische Wochenschrift. T. 11. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen.* (1768, S. 244–245) POSITIVE

- 32) [Rezension] Der Glückselige. Eine moralische Wochenschrift. T. 12. Lange, Samuel Gotthold; Meier, G.F. *Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen*. (1768, S. 868–869)
POSITIVE
- 33) [Rezension] Der Glückselige, eine moralische Wochenschrift. T.8–12. Lange, S.G.; Meier, G.F. *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*. (1769, Bd. 10, S. 298–299)
NEGATIVE

2.10 Schriften für Bestimmte Gruppen (1 Review)

- 1) [Rezension] Das Reich der Natur, und der Sitten. Eine moralische Wochenschrift. T. 9–10. *Tübingsche Berichte von gelehrten Sachen*. (1761, S. 764–766)
POSITIVE

2.11 Schriften Zur Förderung Der Menschenkenntnis (2 Reviews)

- 1) [Rezension] Gründliche Anweisung wie jemand ein neumodischer Weltweiser werden könne. In einem Sendschreiben an einen jungen Menschen. *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1745, Bd. 31, S. 600) POSITIVE
- 2) [Rezension] Gedanken vom Glück und Unglück. *Gelehrte Nachrichten*. (1753, Bd. 2, S. 175–176) POSITIVE

2.12 Philosophische Schule Systematische Darstellungen (1 Review)

- 1) [Rezension] Versuch eines neuen Lehrgebäudes von den Seelen der Thiere. *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von Gelehrten Sachen*. (1749, Bd. 10, S. 43) NEUTRAL

2.13 Other Disciplinary Headings

It remains to be said that the Göttingen Corpus lists no reviews of Meier's works under the following disciplinary headings:

- Kritische Philosophie (0 Reviews).
- Praktische Philosophie (0 Reviews).
- Rechtsphilosophie (0 Reviews).
- Völkerrecht (0 Reviews).
- Philosophische Schulen (0 Reviews).
- Verteidigungs- Und Angriffsschriften (0 Reviews).
- Philosophie Und Andere Wissenschaften (0 Reviews).

Finally, I was able to list twelve reviews that are missing in the Göttingen Corpus, which I indicate with no disciplinary headings:

2.14 Missing (12 Reviews)

- 1) [Anonym:] Announcement of *Der Mensch, eine moralische Wochenschrift*, edited by Georg Friedrich Meier and Samuel Gotthold Lange [Halle, Hemm-

- erde 1751–1756], in: *Siegm. Jac. Baumgartens Nachrichten von merkwürdigen Büchern*, Jahrgang 1752, 9. Stück, Halle, Gebauer, 279 <<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10600588?page=156>> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
- 2) Announcement of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Essay sur les Apparitions, Traduit de l'Allemand en Français par Frédéric Charles Baer* [Halle, Hemmerde 1748], in: *Siegm. Jac. Baumgartens Nachrichten von merkwürdigen Büchern*, Jahrgang 1752, 12. Stück, Halle, Gebauer, 511. <<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10600588?page=156>> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
 - 3) Announcement of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Gedanken von Glück und Unglück* [Halle Hemmerde 1753], in: *Siegm. Jac. Baumgartens Nachrichten von merkwürdigen Büchern*, Jahrgang 1752, 12. Stück, Halle, Gebauer, 546. <<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10600588?page=156>> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
 - 4) [Anonym:] Review of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Gedanken vom philosophischen Predigen*, [Halle: Gebauer, 1754], in: *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, Jahrgang 1754, p. 293–294. <https://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/id/PPN31973076X_1754> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
 - 5) [Anonym:] Review of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Vorstellung der Ursachen, warum es unmöglich zu seyn scheint, mit Herrn Profefor. Gottsched eine nützliche und vernünftige Streitigkeit zu führen* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1754], in: *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* Jahrgang 1754, p. 110–111. <https://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/id/PPN31973076X_1754> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
 - 6) [Anonym:] Review of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Versuch einer allgemeinen Auslegungskunst* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1751], in: *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, Jahrgang 1757, p. 1428–1433. <https://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/id/PPN31973076X_1757> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
 - 7) [Anonym:] Review of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Versuch einer Erklärung des Nachtwandelns*, [Halle: Hemmerde, 1758], in: *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, Jahrgang 1758, p. 1192. <https://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/id/PPN31973076X_1758> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
 - 8) Moses Mendelssohn: Review of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Auszug aus den Anfangsgründen aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1757], in: *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, Jahrgang 1758, Bd. 3, St. 1, p. 130–138 [Edited in: Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe*, hrsg. von I. Elbogen, J. Guttmann, E. Mittwoch, fortgesetzt von A. Altmann, Bd. 4, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1977, p. 196–201, 461–464.
 - 9) Moses Mendelssohn: Review of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Versuch einer Erklärung des Nachtwandelns. Sieben und neunzigster Brief von Herrn Prof Meyers Versuch einer Erklärung des Nachtwandelns* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1758], in: *Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend*, Jahrgang 1760, Teil 6, p. 250–256 [Edited in: *Jubiläumsausgabe*, Bd. 5.1, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1991, p. 184–186]. <https://ds.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/image/1921386_003/254/LOG_0028/> (Accessed May 20, 2026).

- 10) Thomas Abbt: Review of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Betrachtungen über die Natur der gelehrten Sprache. Zweyhundert und ein und siebenzigster Brief Beurtheilung des Hm Prof Meiers Abhandlung von der gelehrten Sprache* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1763], in: *Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend*, Jahrgang 1764, Teil 17, S. 105–122. <https://ds.lib.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/image/1921386_010/110/LOG_0012/> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
- 11) Johann Heinrich Lambert: Review of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Beyträge zur Lehre von den Vorurtheilen des menschlichen Geschlechts* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1766], in: *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* Bd. 10/I (1769), p. 184–189, new edition aus der Handschrift neu herausgegeben in: J. H. Lambert, *Logische und philosophische Abhandlungen*, edited by Johann Bernoulli III, Berlin, 1782–1787 [reprint in: *Philosophische Schriften*, Hildesheim 1967–1969, Bd. 6–7], Bd. 2, p. 206–212. <https://ds.lib.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/image/2002572_019/1/LOG_0003/> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
- 12) Johann Heinrich Lambert: Review of *Georg Friedrich Meier, Auszug aus dem Rechte der Natur* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1773], in: *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, Bd. 13/I (1770), p. 266. <https://ds.lib.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/image/2002572_025/1/LOG_0003/> (Accessed May 20, 2026).

The *Vernunftlehre* and the *Auszug* were announced among the books printed in Halle with Gebauer in the *Siegm. Jac. Baumgartens Nachrichten von merkwürdigen Büchern*, which were edited S. J. Baumgarten and printed by Gebauer. Thanks to a kind information from Klaus Schmidt, we learned that the *Vernunftlehre* had been discussed in at least two other review organs. The list published so far by the Göttinger Arbeitsstelle still lacks some items, as for example Johann Heinrich Lambert's review of the *Beyträge zu der Lehre von den Vorurtheilen des menschlichen Geschlechts* and various reviews in the *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* demonstrate.

The question of whether Johann Heinrich Lambert also wrote a review of Meier's *Vernunftlehre* remains open. It is only certain that Lambert read the *Vernunftlehre* in July 1752 and that the “endlich 1753 gelungene Lektüre von Meyers große[r] Logik [finally successful reading of Meyer's great logic in 1753]” led him to work out a reformulation of Meier's *Vernunftlehre* into a “Zeichensprache [language of signs].” The question remains open as to whether Johann Heinrich Lambert also wrote a review of Meier's *Vernunftlehre* verfasst hat. (Lambert 1766, in *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* 1769, Bd. 10/I, 184–185)

In the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* Lambert published two further reviews of works of Meier's (Lambert 1770, vol. 13/I, 266; Lambert 1774, 21/II, 556–557).

3. Content of the Reviews

Two points were particularly emphasized by Moses Mendelssohn, one of the most influential personalities of the *Aufklärung*. Firstly, the problem of the unclear authorship between Baumgarten and Meier, which was repeatedly raised (Meier used to give a conscientious answer to the question of authorship, Pozzo 2000 par. 33.); secondly, Meier's enormous productivity.

On the first item, see the not innocent notation with which Mendelssohn begins his review of the *Auszug aus den Anfangsgründen aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften*:

Herr Prof. Meyer fährt fort, sich um die Aesthetik des Herrn Prof. Baumgarten zu Frankfurt a. d. Oder, verdient zu machen.

[Prof. Meyer continues to distinguish himself in the field of aesthetics under Prof. Baumgarten in Frankfurt an der Oder (in *Jubiläumsausgabe IV*, 5, 196)].

To the second item: item, see again Mendelssohn in his review of Meier's *Versuch einer Erklärung des Nachtwandeln*s:

Mich dünkt, wenn Herr Meier nicht so entsetzlich viel schriebe; so könnte er ein guter Schriftsteller seyn.

[It seems to me that if Mr. Meier didn't write so terribly much, he could be a good writer. (in *Jubiläumsausgabe V*, 1, 184)].

Most interesting is Thomas Abbt's review of Meier's *Betrachtungen über die Natur der gelehrten Sprache*. This treatise is an occasional writing whose source of inspiration can probably be found in the discussion about the purity of language at the time, but also in the first chapters of the third book of Locke's *Essay*. This treatise was discussed with subtle irony by Thomas Abbt. It contains and expands on the grammatical considerations from the third main part of *Vernunftlehre* and the *Auszugs*.

Abbt (1738–1766) was educated at the Gymnasium of Ulm, where he was born.⁵ In 1756 he was registered in Halle, where he received his master's in theology in 1758 under the direction of S.J. Baumgarten. In 1758 he started giving courses at Halle, until his first appointment to the University of Frankfurt an der Oder, the *Academia Viadrina*.

Martens points out that as a student of Meier's, Abbt wrote several articles for the weekly magazine edited by Lange and Meier, *Das Reich der Natur und der Sitten* (Martens 1971; DBA 1986; Gawlick 1989, Abbt 1783)

Thomas Abbt pointedly recognized that Meier had based his writings on a unique classification scheme:

Zwar wußte ich ebenfals, daß Herr M.[eier] einige Grundfaden beständig im voraus vorrätig hat, die ihm zu allen seinen Schriften dienen, und in die er nachher nur die veränderten Figuren, so ferne sie sich zu jedem neuen Titul schicken, gleichsam hineinwürket.

[I also knew that Mr. M.[eier] always had a few basic themes in reserve that he used in all his writings, and into which he would later insert the changed characters, as long as they were suitable for each new title (Abbt 1764, 105)].

⁵ See DBA, Mf. I, 187–227; ADB, Bd. 1, Leipzig 1875, 5. 2–4; NDB, Bd. 1, Berlin 1953, pp. 4–5 and the short biography by Erich Bödeker 1989.

To all appearances, by these basic threads themes Abbt means both the division according to the rhetorical pattern of a) *inventio*, b) *dispositio*, c) *elocutio* as well as the maximization of the respective objects through the doctrine of perfection in Meiers *Anfangsgründen aller schönen Wissenschaften* (1748–50), *Vernunftlehre* (1752) und *Betrachtung über die gelehrte Sprache* (1763). With his rapid systematization of grammar, logic and aesthetics (aesthetics probably partly represents rhetoric and poetics), Meier represents a novelty in the history of *philosophia leibnitio-wolffiana* insofar as he sees the goal of the Enlightenment in the improvement of natural languages through scientific ones.

Der Aufbau einer gelehrten Sprache wird durch den Fleiß der Sprachgelehrten, der Redner, der Dichter und der Gelehrten realisiert, und jene dient dazu, daß die natürlichen Sprachen *nach und nach* verbessert werden: *so bekam eine Sprache eine verbesserte Natur*.

[The development of a scholarly language is achieved through the diligence of linguists, orators, poets, and scholars, and serves to gradually improve natural languages: in this way, *a language acquires an improved nature* (Abbt 1764, 106)].

Abbt moans about Meiers habit of establishing patterns,

zu jedem §en nur einen Gedanken, das ist, am häufigsten das Glied einer Abtheilung zu nehmen, und das übrige dieses §ens mit einer erläuternden Umschreibung anzufüllen, die bey dem Professorvortrage, so viel ich Laye davon verstehe, recht gut seyn mag, die aber den armen Leser, der nicht auf einer Universität lebt, zu seinem grossen Verdrusse unendlich lange an einerley Stelle sitzen lässet. Herr M.[eier] hat durch diese Methode die Kunst, bey allen Anstalten zur möglichsten Klarheit doch immer weiter zu rücken, und das Licht um den Leser, den man mit sich fortreißt, und auch hinter ihm zu verbreiten, gänzlich verlohren.

[For each section, just one thought, which is, most often, to take the link of a division, and to fill the rest of this section with an explanatory paraphrase, which, as far as I, a layman, understand, may be quite good in a professor's lecture, but which, to the great annoyance of the poor reader who does not live at a university, leaves him sitting in the same place for an infinitely long time. By this method, Mr. M.[eier] has completely lost the art of advancing as far as possible toward clarity in all institutions and of spreading the light around the reader whom one carries along with one, and also behind him (Abbt 1764, 106)].

Again, the references to the reviews discussed above,

- 1) Moses Mendelssohn: [Rezension von] *Georg Friedrich Meier, Auszug aus den Anfangsgründen aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1757], in: *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, Jahrgang 1758, Bd. 3, St. 1, p. 130–138. (Mendelssohn 1977, 196–201, 461–64).
- 2) Moses Mendelssohn: [Rezension von] *Georg Friedrich Meier, Versuch einer Erklärung des Nachtwandeln's. Sieben und neunzigster Brief von Herrn Prof Meyers Versuch einer Erklärung des Nachtwandeln's* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1758],

- in: *Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend*, Jahrgang 1760, Teil 6, p. 250–256 (Mendelssohn 1991, 184–86). <https://ds.lib.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/image/1921386_003/254/LOG_0028/> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
- 3) Thomas Abbt: [Rezension von] *Georg Friedrich Meier, Betrachtungen über die Natur der gelehrten Sprache. Zweyhundert und ein und siebenzigster Brief Beurtheilung des Hm Prof Meiers Abhandlung von der gelehrten Sprache* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1763], in: *Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend*, Jahrgang 1764, Teil 17, S. 105–122. <https://ds.lib.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/image/1921386_010/110/LOG_0012/> (Accessed May 20, 2026).
 - 4) Johann Heinrich Lambert: [Rezension von] *Georg Friedrich Meier, Auszug aus dem Rechte der Natur* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1773], in: *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, Bd. 13/I (1770), p. 266. <https://ds.lib.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/image/2002572_025/1/LOG_0003/>.
 - 5) Johann Heinrich Lambert: [Rezension von] *Georg Friedrich Meier, Lehre von den natürlichen gesellschaftlichen Rechten und Pflichten der Menschen* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1773], in: *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* [Halle: Hemmerde, 1770], in: *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, Bd. 21/II (1774), p. 556–557. <https://ds.lib.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/image/2002572_034/1/LOG_0003/>.

4. Impact of the Reviews on the Philosophical Controversies of the Time

Kant read his logic lectures in accordance with Meier's textbooks for about forty years: from the Summer of 1755 to the Winter of 1755/56 he adopted the *Vernunftlehre* and from the Summer of 1756 to the Summer of 1796 the *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre*, of which Kant brought to class an interleaved desk-copy. It is not at all surprising, then, that Kant's own logical writings as well as his *Critique of Pure Reason* were influenced by Meier. This is evident already from the terminology. One also finds in Kant's *Reflections on Logic* and *Lectures on Logic* elaborations of the fundamental issues addressed by Meier, such as the articulation of the conditions for the constitution of a horizon and the analysis of prejudices. Of course, other philosophers of the German Enlightenment also discussed such matters, but it was Meier's texts that provided the point of departure for Kant. Locke's philosophy played an especially important role in this context. In fact, Meier served as mediator between Locke and Kant, helping to introduce Lockean issues such as the "extent of human knowledge" and the "degrees of assent" into the teaching of logic in the German universities. Most importantly, he made such issues salient for Kant. There was, in any case, no overcoming of Meier by Kant, just as there was no double life of Kant as a teacher in Königsberg and as a philosophical scholar within the *république des lettres*. There was rather a genuine connection of teaching and research.

In his consideration of continuities and transformations in Kant's logical writings, Norbert Hinske (1998) shown that Kant gradually developed a new philosophical language by drawing upon traditional Greek-Latin or Latin terms and recent Germanizations. Both sorts of terms were available to Kant from Meier in great number. (One thinks first and foremost of "doctrine of reason,"

“egoism,” “genius,” “horizon,” “logic,” “logical,” “party,” “popular,” “prejudice,” and “pure”). One example may suffice: in moving from an initial adherence to Wolff’s mathematical method to his own critical formulation in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant passes through his remarks upon Meier’s notion of a system as a connected set of “dogmatic truths.”

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A System of “Higher Idealism”, of “Preformation”, or of the “Epigenesis of Pure Reason”? Kant’s response to the first Review of the *KrV* and to Schultz’s Review of Ulrich’s *Institutiones Logicae*

Anna Leonilde Bucarelli

Abstract: This paper reconstructs a short story in the troubled reception process of transcendental idealism. As is well known, some interpreted it as a radical form of idealism, not very different from that proposed by Berkeley, while others found a substantial similarity with the Leibnizian doctrine of pre-established harmony. Through the reconstruction of a polyphonic debate, it will be argued that Kant considered these problems resolved with the second edition of the Deduction of the Categories, where he describes transcendental philosophy as an epigenetic system. It will thus be shown the relevance of the review as a tool for philosophical discussion in the eighteenth century, highlighting the influence that two reviews had in the history of the Deduction.

Keywords: Scepticism, Idealism, Preformation, Deduction, Epigenesis.

1. Introduction¹

Kant has often been considered an author detached from the context in which he studied and worked, closed off from dialogue with others due to the superiority and extreme innovativeness of his work, which supposedly marked a decisive turning point in the history of philosophy. However, there is no shortage of more recent studies that have focused on the continuity between transcendental philosophy and its Latin-German sources, which are extremely useful for understanding the Kantian conception of metaphysics.² Studies on anthropology and

¹ I cite the “philosophical reviews” in the original edition: the English translation is mine. I cite Kant’s and his contemporaries’ works from standard English translations, when available: only the two editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for which I follow Guyer’ and Wood’s translation, are cited following the original page numbering (A for the first, B for the second). For Kant’s letters and reflection, I cite from the *Akademie Ausgabe*, and I am responsible for the English translations.

² Among many others, I would cite the studies of Hinske 1970; Tonelli 1987; Rumore 2007; Tommasi 2009; Lorini 2017.

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geography have finally shown how, in Kant, academic research was intertwined with pedagogical activity, and how disciplines long considered minor or merely popular had a fundamental function within the critical investigation itself, whose cosmic concept of philosophy [*Weltbegriff*] could not fail to involve the human being as a citizen of the world [*Weltbürger*].³ This paper will therefore attempt to restore the image of a Kant attentive to the reception and understanding of his work, open to dialogue and even, if necessary, to the revision of some aspects of his philosophy. The guiding thread I am going to follow will be the troubled understanding of transcendental idealism, which was attacked on several fronts by Kant's contemporaries. As is well known, some interpreted it as a radical form of idealism, not very different from that proposed by Berkeley,⁴ while others found a substantial similarity with the Leibnizian doctrine of pre-established harmony.⁵ Through the reconstruction of a polyphonic debate, it will be argued that Kant considered these problems resolved with the second edition of the Deduction of the Categories, where, through a very well-known biological metaphor,⁶ he describes transcendental philosophy as an epigenetic system. It will thus be shown the relevance of the review as a tool for philosophical discussion in the eighteenth century, highlighting the influence that two reviews had in this process: the first one is the famous first review of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which appeared anonymously in the *Göttingischen Anzeige der gelehrten Sachen* but was the result of the joint work of Feder and Garve (the question of authorship, as I shall show, is debated), and the second one is another, less known review for the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, also published anonymously but written by a pupil and friend of Kant, Schultz, and addressed to the *Institutiones logicae* of Ulrich, a professor at the University of Jena who was attempting to bring transcendental philosophy back under the traditional schemes of Leibnizian metaphysics.

1.1 The First Review of the *Critique*: "Higher Idealism"

Upon the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the first reaction was a long silence, which a less confident author than Kant might have interpreted as indifference. But Kant, aware of the enormous novelty that his work would

³ Among others, the recent works of Fiorilli (2024) about the connection of anthropology to transcendental philosophy and of Morawski (2024) on geography and critical thinking show how this pragmatical disciplines are strictly connected to the concept of philosophy itself.

⁴ This was the account of the first review of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that I am going to analyse, but also of the anonymous epistolary novel *Aenesidemus* (1792). Jacobi's interpretation of the thing in itself in the Appendix to the *David Hume* (1787) was also long associated to *Aenesidemus'* critique, but a recent study suggests by Sandkaulen (2019, 169–97) suggests a different reading.

⁵ As I shall show, this was the account of Ulrich (1785) and of the anonymous reviewer of his *Institutiones logicae et metaphysicae*.

⁶ Malabou (2014) has proposed a philosophical interpretation of transcendental epigenesis. Among the historical studies, see Wubnig 1969; Genova 1974; 1975; Igensiep 1994. Bouveresse (1991) confronts Kant's epigenesis with Frege's critique of psychologism. For a general reconstruction of organicism in transcendental philosophy, Mensch (2013).

bring to the philosophical reflection of the century, greeted the silence with a sly smile, if we can trust what he declares in the Appendix to the *Prolegomena*:

I feel obliged to the honored public even for the silence with which it for a long time favoured my *Critique*, for this proves at least a postponement of judgment, and some suppositions that in a work, leaving all beaten tracks and striking out on a new path, in which one cannot at once perhaps so easily find one's way, something may perchance lie, for which an important but at present dead branch of human knowledge may derive new life and productiveness (Kant 1783, 135).

However, the first appendix of this work is dedicated to responding to those who wanted to express a judgment on the *Critique* without first conducting that careful examination which should have nourished the initial silence. This refers precisely to the review that appeared anonymously in the *Göttingischen Anzeige der gelehrten Sachen* on January 19th, 1782. The author would only reveal himself in response to this open attack by Kant, in an epistolary exchange, very useful also for the study of the editorial history of the review.⁷ Christian Garve explained that he had chosen to write the review already interested in the author, of whom he had read some previous works. But in a short time, he realized how different this work was from the others and how the effort required for the review was immeasurably exceeding the norm. With great difficulty, he had therefore drafted a very long review, trying to account for the breadth and complexity of the work, but aware of having taken on a task beyond his capabilities. Handing over the review to the journal, he had left the editors free to shorten and improve it as they saw fit - it must be remembered that the text was to be published anonymously. However, he received no comments until, finally, he had the published review in his hands. He immediately realized that he could hardly call this text "his" any longer, given the cuts and extensive modifications that had been made to it. The editor of the review, and therefore perhaps its true author, was Johann G. H. Feder, a professor at the University of Göttingen: to him should therefore be attributed all the harsher expressions used towards the *Critique*, while Garve published a version of the review faithful to the original manuscript in another journal, the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*. Kant was as condescending with Garve as he was severe towards Feder. However, the relationship between Garve and Kant would continue, and not always in the most relaxed form, if it is true, as Förster has shown, that Garve's *Cicero* is the direct controversial objective of the first part of Kant's *Groundwork*.⁸ In this paper, I am not interested in analysing the difference between the two versions of the first review, nor the real relationship between Feder and Garve and between

⁷ For the first letter from Garve to Kant, see AA X, 328–33; there are also two letters from Spalding, who mediated between them, to Kant, AA X, 333–4; 347–48; and finally, Kant's answer to Garve AA X, 336–44.

⁸ Förster 2000, 123 ff. According to Förster, Garve was also the first person which Kant told his project on the *Opus postumum* and the "gap" problem (Förster 2000, 48 ff.).

the latter and Kant, but for a detailed philological analysis, I refer to other studies.⁹ Here, instead, I will only adhere to the first published version of the review, which is, after all, the only one that was the object of Kant's attention, as much as of his public indignation.¹⁰

The review complains, firstly, about the obscure language used by Kant, as well as about the excessive length of the work. In the cultural *milieu* of the *Aufklärung*, a process of popularization of philosophical practice had begun, in which cultural journals were the primary instrument. As the results of the project on *Philosophical Reviews* abundantly demonstrate, the review itself had a role in this activity, returning to a wider audience the content of a book accessible to few.¹¹ This also explains why Kant was so annoyed by the negative outcome of the first review, which would influence that wider audience, to whom he finally decided to address the *Prolegomena*. The question of the intertwining between pedagogical and transcendental function in this latter work is extremely interesting and allows us to shed light on the very cosmic concept [*Weltbegriff*] of philosophy, connected with its practical and cosmopolitical [*weltbürgerlich*] primacy. It is not possible here to delve into the concept of "authentic popularity" in transcendental philosophy, but it is enough to know that the *Critique of Pure Reason* certainly did not present itself as a "democratic" work, at least in the immediate sense of public accessibility, and this must have upset enlightened *Populärphilosophen* like Garve or Feder (whichever of the two is actually attributable to the review).

The text, as is still customary today, roughly summarizes the entire *Critique*, to advance an opinion, argued in fact in a rather approximate manner, only in conclusion. However, already in the opening, the reviewer, perhaps believing to return in a synthetic and neutral way the overall intent of the work, actually already expresses his judgment:

This work [...] is a system of higher idealism [*des höhern Idealismus*] or, as the author names it, transcendental; an idealism that encompasses spirit and matter alike, transforms the world and ourselves into representations, and let's all objects consist in appearances through this: that the intellect connects them in a chain of experiences, and reason necessarily attempts, though in vain, to explain them and unite them into a whole and complete system of the world. (Anonymous reviewer 1782, 40).

⁹ See Hohenegger (1996, VII–IX). Benno Erdmann and Emil Arnoldt discussed about the editorial history of the *Prolegomena*. Erdmann (1878) thought that *Prolegomena* should be a compendium of the *Critique*, and in his edition underlies all the parts written after Kant read the first review, by contrast Arnoldt (1879) thought that *Prolegomena* were another project, distinct from the compendium one.

¹⁰ Förster (2000, 123 ff.) argues differently and considers the second edition of the review. However, the object of Kant's attention in this case would be the Doctrine of Elements, which is not in question here.

¹¹ See also the first volume edited by Sgarbi (2024), in particular in Sgarbi's *Introduction*, 7–14.

The designation of Kantian idealism as "higher" hides a certain understanding of the phenomenal appearance [*Erscheinung*] that degrades it to what Kant would indicate as mere semblance [*Schein*]. In fact, the thesis of the ideality of space and time is reduced by the anonymous reviewer to the consideration of sensations as mere modifications of the self: a thesis on which Berkeley's idealism was already based. The reviewer's juxtaposition of Kant with Berkeley is openly denigrating, because the idealism of representations advocated by the Irish bishop was considered, even by Kant himself, a failed attempt to reduce experience to consciousness, which ended up denying the reality of the external world. In conclusion, the review establishes that Kant, instead of choosing the middle path between dogmatism and scepticism, has taken the errors of both: on the one hand, he argues that the categories of substance and of effective reality [*Wirklichkeit*] can only be applied to objects of the external sense, failing to recognize interiority (and therefore the soul), but on the other hand, he brings the entire external world under simple internal representations, reducing nature "to a certain mode of representation and language" (Anonymous reviewer 1782, 48). In the eyes of the reviewer, Kant seems to convert the internal sense into the external, and the external into the internal: thus, like the Humean sceptic, he would consider only external sensations as objects of knowledge, but like a dogmatical idealist he would end up considering these sensations as simple subjective products of the representative faculties. Everything that is commonly called "the world" would therefore be, according to the higher idealism thus reconstructed, nothing more than a play of representations devoid of anchors to reality.

The criticism advanced by the reviewer actually rests on the presupposition, not made explicit, that representations are effects in causal terms of things in themselves. This formulation, which shifts the objection to the level of a use of the category of cause beyond transcendental limits, will be reported more precisely by another sceptical/empiricist critic, Gottlob Ernst Schulze, a professor in Helmstädt before and in Göttingen later, and linked to Feder by personal ties. His most famous work was an epistolary novel that appeared anonymously, *Aenesidemus* (1792), which resonated greatly in Germany. In the novel a Humean-style scepticism was defended against the transcendental philosophy of Kant but especially of Reinhold, who was the explicit controversial objective in the title of the work (*Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von H. Pr. Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementarphilosophie*). The *Aenesidemus* has been canonized in the history of philosophy thanks to another review, which marked a fundamental step in the emergence of German idealism. This is Fichte's *Review of Aenesidemus* (1793/94), in which the author of the *Doctrine of Science* deals with the Reinholdian question of the first principle of transcendental philosophy. The "Göttingen school" had a certain influence in the longer *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the distinction between appearances and things in themselves: Arthur Schopenhauer also attended Schulze's courses in Göttingen, from which he was influenced in his interpretation of Kantian thought. Moreover, the question of the ontological understanding of the noumenon continues to be a philosophical or interpretative problem until rather recent times: the juxtaposition of Kant with

Berkeley has been suggested again by Peter Strawson (1966, 6), and there is still an ongoing complex debate between epistemological interpretations¹² and others, much more refined than the Strawsonian one, but still sympathetic to ontologist readings.¹³

Kant did not consider the problem raised by Feder and/or Garve to pose a serious difficulty for the *Critique*. In fact, in both the Appendix and the Preface to the *Prolegomena*, he seems almost to mock his anonymous reviewer. Yet he also regarded it as important to clarify the nature and aim of critical philosophy, and to ensure that future readers would not be misled by the distorted interpretation proposed in that first review. For these reasons, he explicitly rejected the designation of his philosophy as “higher idealism”:

It may be permitted me however, in future, as has been above intimated, to term it the formal, or better still, the critical Idealism, to distinguish it from the dogmatic Idealism of Berkeley, and from the sceptical Idealism of Descartes (Kant 1783, 131).

Note: By no means “higher.” High towers and metaphysically great men resembling from them, round both of which there is commonly much wind, are not for me. My place is the faithful *bathos*,¹⁴ the bottom-land, of experience; and the word transcendental, the meaning of which has often been explained by me, but not once grasped by my reviewer, (so carelessly has he regarded everything), does not signify something passing beyond all experience, but something that indeed precedes it *a priori*, but that is intended simply to make cognition of experience possible (Kant 1783, 130).

This footnote encapsulates several recurring motifs of Kant’s thought, such as his architectural metaphors for metaphysics—whether ruins of a bygone age, a Babel tower whose builders no longer understand one another, or the attempt to reach celestial objects through human and earthly constructions. Above all, however, Kant underscores—here with considerable rhetorical force—that the entire transcendental framework aims at nothing other than legitimating the empirical domain. The transcendental is never given apart from experience, but only in conjunction with it; it is only from experience that its conditions can be inferred. The priority of the transcendental over experience is thus neither temporal nor axiological, but is defined exclusively in terms of the relation between condition and conditioned. Just as without light we would not even have dark-

¹² One of the most important epistemological interpreters is Henry Allison (1983; 2004).

¹³ Such as the readings proposed by Langton 1998; Allais 2015; Rosefeldt 2022 in the recent debate.

¹⁴ The expression “Bathos” is used by Kant probably in reference to the Romantic reception of the anonymous work *On The Sublime*, and Alexander Pope’s parody *Peri Bathous, or The Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1728) which played on a manuscript transcription error, whereby the sublime, which should have been defined as ἡ πάθους τέχνη (the art of feeling), was instead transmitted as ἡ βάθους τέχνη (the art of bottom-land). For this observation, I am grateful to Lorenzo Pizzichemi for his contribution to the conference in Rome, which is included in this volume.

ness (cf. Kant 1787, B 349), so the conditions become accessible only through the givenness of the conditioned.

In the Appendix, Kant discourages readers from taking the objections of the review too seriously, and refers them instead to a (re)reading of specific passages in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is in the Transcendental Aesthetic, where the thesis of the ideality of space and time is explained, that the distance between Kant and Berkeley must be sought; and an explicit refutation of Berkeley's idealism is contained in the resolution of the Fourth Paralogism, devoted to the problem of the ideality of outer relation. This is not the place to provide an exhaustive discussion of the last paralogism—an argument that has been subject to widely divergent interpretations,¹⁵ and of which Kant himself may not have been entirely convinced, as suggested by its removal in the second edition of the *Critique*. The paralogism takes the following syllogistic form:

1. That whose existence can be inferred only as a cause of given perceptions has only a *doubtful existence*. 2. Now all outer appearances are of this kind: their existence cannot be immediately perceived, but can be inferred only as the cause of given perceptions. 3. Thus, the existence of all objects of outer sense is doubtful. This uncertainty I call the ideality of outer appearances, and the doctrine of this ideality is called *idealism* in comparison with which the assertion of a possible certainty of objects of outer sense is called *dualism* (Kant 1781, A366–7).

Kant accepts only the first premise. He rejects the second, which posits a causal relation between representations and things in themselves—a relation that would indeed lead to a form of idealism not far from Berkeley's, which Kant labels "empirical idealism" and equates with transcendental realism. The Kantian system, by refraining from any ontological pronouncements concerning the noumenon, instead constitutes itself as transcendental idealism—also termed "empirical realism," since it secures the reality of experience.

In the Appendix to the *Prolegomena*, Kant distinguishes his idealism even more sharply from all earlier forms by identifying the fundamental principle that guides his inquiry:

The dictum of all genuine idealists from the Eleatic school to Bishop Berkeley is contained in this formula: 'All cognition through the senses and experience is nothing but sheer semblance'¹⁶ [*Schein*], and only, in the ideas of the pure understanding and reason lies the truth.'

¹⁵ Many have compared the Fourth Paralogism with the Refutation of Idealism: some have argued the incoherency of transcendental idealism, such as Guyer (1983; 1987, 290–92) and Rosefeldt (2013), by contrast others have defended the system, like Allison (2004, 275–303) and Beiser (2002, 104–31). However, the scientific debate is very wide and I cannot cite every significant article or work here.

¹⁶ In the English translation by Paul Carus the German word *Schein* is rendered in "illusion," but I prefer the weaker expression of "semblance". It seems to me that in "illusion" is meant a purposiveness which is not implied in the *transzendentales Schein*.

The principle that throughout dominates and determines my Idealism is on the contrary: 'All cognition of things merely from pure understanding or pure reason is nothing but sheer semblance, and only in experience is there truth' (Kant 1783, 130).

Here Kant draws on the semantic distinction between *Schein* (semblance) and *Erscheinung* (appearance), which evidently escaped his reviewers but is essential for understanding how the phenomenal world constitutes objective reality [*objektive Realität*], while every transcendent use of the categories must be regarded as illegitimate. Whereas classical metaphysics, from Plato onward, had construed the empirical world as mere semblance, attributing higher ontological status to entities beyond the senses and possible experience, Kant radically inverts the paradigm: reality is grounded in experience itself, while the great metaphysical "truths" dissolve into nothing more than the inevitable and illusory semblance of human reason.

2. Schultz's Review: A Pre-established Harmony?

Kant's reflection on the status of transcendental idealism and on the very name of his new philosophical proposal was most fruitfully stimulated by another review. This was not, however, a review of a Kantian work itself, but rather a review authored by a loyal Kantian disciple and confidant, Johann Schultz, of the recently published *Institutiones logicae et metaphysicae* (1785) by Johann A. H. Ulrich, a Wolffian-oriented thinker and professor at the University of Jena, who was among the first to lecture on Kant's philosophy.

In his *Institutiones*, Ulrich sought to reconcile the *Critique of Pure Reason* with the traditional Leibnizian-Wolffian metaphysical framework. His central thesis maintained that it was possible to apply the categories to things in themselves, thereby recasting Kant's category of causality as a reformulation of the principle of sufficient reason. This seemed particularly evident to Ulrich in the case of consciousness: by ordering representations in temporal sequence, consciousness would generate a real succession [*wirkliche Succession*] in the course of its transcendental activity—something irreducible to the succession that the intellect must apply to appearances. In Ulrich's view, despite Kant's repeated rejection of any transcendent use of the categories, the *Critique* itself resorted to such a use on more than one occasion, thereby approximating a more traditional metaphysical outlook. Moreover, this procedure did not concern only the principles of the understanding in relation to things in themselves, but also, and above all, the principles of reason. Ulrich interpreted the natural needs of reason as presented in the Dialectic—such as the principle that, given the conditioned, there must also be an unconditioned absolute—as referring to realities grounded in human reason itself. God, the soul, and the world would thus not be mere "ideas of reason", as Kant presents them, but rather "real concepts of reason" [*reale Vernunftbegriffe*].

On the 13th of December 1785, an anonymous review of Ulrich's work appeared in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*. Kant was well aware that the author was Schultz, a pupil whom he considered to have grasped the critical system

sufficiently to assist in its dissemination and clarification,¹⁷ and with whom he also commented upon the two versions of the first review of the *Critique* (AA X, 348–54). He therefore expected from his friend's review an explicit defence of the coherence of the *Critique*. Instead, he was disappointed by the indulgence with which Schultz responded to Ulrich's objections. The reviewer did not conclude with a full agreement with Ulrich's, but he discerned a certain affinity in their respective ways of representing Kantian philosophy, especially on issues intersecting with its fundamental principles.

Schultz maintained that the *Institutiones logicae* lacked the demonstrative clarity required to undermine the critical edifice, since it did not directly confront the Deduction of the Categories, upon which the very stability of Kant's system depends. He lamented that in the *Critique*, precisely that section which ought to be the clearest is, instead, the most obscure, leaving room, if not for outright objections, then at least for fundamental doubts about the way experience is constructed. Schultz concentrated his attention on the Kantian concept of experience: if the objective reality of the categories or synthetic concepts is deduced from the fact that without them no experience [*Erfahrung*] would be possible, then it is crucial to clarify what concept of experience is at stake.

Here Schultz invoked a distinction absent from the *Critique of Pure Reason* but introduced by Kant in the *Prolegomena*, specifically in the second section, which, in addressing the possibility of a pure natural science, partly fulfils the function of the Deduction of the Categories. Par. 18–20 in *Prolegomena* are devoted to distinguishing between two types of empirical judgment: judgments of mere perception [*Wahrnehmung*] and judgments of experience [*Erfahrung*]:

Empirical judgments, so far as they have objective validity, are *judgments of experience* [*Erfahrungsurteile*]; but those which are only subjectively valid, I name *judgments of perception* [*Wahrnehmungsurteile*]. The latter require no pure concepts of the understanding, but only the logical connection of perceptions in a thinking subject. But the former always require, besides the representation of sensuous intuition, particular *concepts originally begotten in the understanding*, which produce the objective validity of the judgment of experience (Kant 1783, 65).

As has been noted (Allison 2015, 292–93), this distinction parallels one proposed by Georg Friedrich Meier in his *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* (1752), between intuitive and discursive judgments (par. 319). Intuitive judgments, for Meier, are based on sensations and concern immediate singular experience; discursive empirical judgments, by contrast, require observation and experimentation for their validation. For Kant, however, every judgment is discursive, and the very notion of an intuitive judgment would be contradictory. His formulation, as often, reworks a terminological distinction already present in earlier

¹⁷ For the relationship between Kant and Schultz, see Bonelli Munegato (1992). Schultz wrote also a compendium on Kantian philosophy, whose relation with Kant's *Prolegomena* is still in question (Schultz 1791).

tradition, but employs it with a transcendental meaning. Kant's "judgments of perception" refer to judgments based on the momentary sensation of a single subject, in which the association of a given predicate with a certain object can and indeed must be questioned in order to yield knowledge. Judgments of experience, by contrast, concern the very constitution of objective reality as the coherent totality of experience, universally valid for all subjects. They thus represent a transition from the singular to the intersubjective dimension, a passage that depends on the function of the categories and their applicability to the manifold of experience. Judgments of perception do not involve the table of categories, since they operate with empirical concepts tied to momentary impressions and always open to revision. It is only in the constitution of objective experience that the universal necessity implied by a priori judgments comes into play.¹⁸

In some respects, this distinction echoes another one drawn by Kant in the logical domain—namely, between preliminary¹⁹ and determining judgments. It is worth noting that in his lectures on logic, preliminary judgments [*vorläufige Urtheile*], also linked to momentary perceptions, are presented as the necessary condition for the elaboration of determining judgments [*bestimmende Urtheile*], which in turn establish the objectivity of experience (AA IX, 74). Knowledge always begins at the empirical level, but its constitution into a coherent and intersubjectively valid system depends on the determination of the transcendental structures at work. Judgments of perception, however, cover a broader scope than preliminary judgments, since the latter must first be sifted through the identification of prejudgments [*Vorurtheile*] (AA XVI, 409). A mere judgment of perception, as the inner state of a singular consciousness, may thus harden into a prejudice if taken as a principle without proper caution. By contrast, the preliminary judgment appears to be a merely subjective judgment that, once tested for validity, may ultimately be elevated into a determining judgment of the understanding, which implies the employment of a transcendental category.

¹⁸ On this point Béatrice Longuenesse and Henry Allison were in controversy. Longuenesse (1998; 2000) argued that categories played a specific synthetic role in judgments of perception, on the contrary Allison (2015) thought that categories have only a subsumptive function in judgments of experience. Longuenesse (1998, 243–44) also interprets this *synthesis* of the categories as the true meaning of "epigenesis of pure reason", which precedes the determination under intellectual *subsumption*. However, on this point there is an older debate: among others, Kemp Smith (1918, 288–89) found inconsistent par. 18–20 of *Prolegomena* because it seems that a certain kind of consciousness or awareness (the one implied by judgments of perceptions) is possible without categories. By contrast, Uehling (1971, 44–5; 1996) argues that this distinction means that there are other, non-cognitive ways to be in relations with things, and refuses the possibility (chronologically understood) for judgments of perception to become judgments of experience.

¹⁹ Allison also suggests this parallelism (2015, 304–5). I am following Allison's choice to translate the German *vorläufige* with "preliminary" instead of "provisional" precisely because these judgments shall be distinct from prejudices insofar as they are the *termini a quo* of scientific knowledge—on the other hand, determining judgments could be considered the *termini ad quem* of this process.

Coming back to the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* review, Kant appeared ambiguous in Schultz's eyes precisely in his use of the notion of experience. For if by "experience" one understands *Wahrnehmungsurteile*, the result would be an evident paradox for transcendental philosophy: in order to judge empirically, each subject would already need to have formulated a synthetic a priori judgment. Schultz illustrates this with the example of a rock heated by the sun: in order to issue a judgment of perception regarding the warmth of the rock, one would already have to know that sunlight is its cause. According to the reviewer, Kant falls into this ambiguity several times in the *Critique*, especially in the Analogies of Experience, where the manifold of appearances must be successive, and yet succession is not contained in the phenomena themselves, but only in their connection within the intellect. As was already the case with the Garve/Feder review, this second review seems to highlight difficulties that remain unresolved in the interpretations of the transcendental system, as Allison (2015, 294) notes in his reconstruction of the Deduction, where he associates Schultz's interpretation with that of Guyer (1987, 92–121, in particular p. 94). Although this is not the place to examine Guyer's reading in detail, it is worth noting the enduring relevance of ontological or semi-ontological interpretations of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Schultz himself acknowledges that this was clearly not Kant's intention, which was rather to present the applicability of the categories as a condition of experience understood in terms of *Erfahrungsurteile*, i.e. of objective reality. Yet even in this case, according to the brief analysis offered in the review, the Deduction faces irresolvable problems, since Kant's argument collapses into a mere tautology. If the categories bore no necessary relation to appearances, perceptions would remain a disordered multiplicity and no knowledge would be possible at all. Both routes therefore lead to the same outcome: the presupposition of the union between a priori categorical structure and world of experience, demonstrated inconsistently in the first case, and tautologically in the second. In conclusion of his review, Schultz proposes to resolve the difficulties of the Deduction of the Categories by appealing to the will of a benevolent creator, who might have so ordered the human understanding that its concepts are perfectly harmonized with the laws of nature, thereby guaranteeing both the objective reality and the universal communicability of human knowledge:

Suppose appearances were an unregulated multitude, a mere aggregate of *simultaneis* and *successivis*, which seems to us to conform to rules only because their existence, in accordance with spatial and temporal relations, has been most wisely *pre-established* by the will of a creator in such a way that certain appearances (which in themselves are nothing but representations within us, or determinate modifications of our consciousness) would always follow others in a fixed order, without there being the least *real* connection between the appearances themselves; then the categories of *cause* and *community* would not be applicable at all to the appearances of nature, and in that case our understanding, rather than prescribing laws to nature, would derive its merely apparent conformity to law from a *posteriori* perceptions (Anonymous reviewer 1785, 299).

In this way, however, the entire mission of transcendental philosophy fails, for the critical turn is reduced to transferring Leibniz's pre-established harmony from the ontological to the epistemological plane, entrusting the ultimate ground of knowledge to the benevolent will of a personal creator.

3. Kant's Response to Schultz (and Ulrich) in the *Metaphysical Foundations*

Kant, who had expected a different outcome from Schultz's review, was concerned to respond to the objections raised by his friend. Even before clarifying the difficulties pointed out by the reviewer, however, it was necessary to take up the task that Schultz had failed—namely, to answer the attack that Ulrich had already directed against the critical system. For this reason, I shall follow two different lines of Kant's response to the review, which serve two distinct functions. In fact, we have only one explicit reference in a published text by Kant to his reviewer, in a long footnote in the Preface of the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), a text which, like the *Prolegomena*, appeared in the period between the first and second editions of the *Critique*. It is nevertheless possible to trace another, indirect reference to this review through the resumption of the theme of a pre-established harmony between intellect and nature, expressed through the metaphor of preformation. As is well known, preformation was a biological theory according to which the embryo was already complete in all its parts at birth. The preformationists clashed with the supporters of epigenesis, who instead believed that the embryo developed in response to environmental stimuli. That Kant, in the second version of the Deduction, refers to transcendental philosophy as "a system of the epigenesis of pure reason" is very well known. Less investigated, however, has been the contextual reference to the discussion with Schultz, which we will attempt to reconstruct here through the study of the debate, in the hope that it may contribute to a better understanding of par. 27 of the Deduction.

In the note in the *Metaphysical Foundations*, Kant, in considering the objections of Ulrich and Schultz, distinguishes two issues that deserve to be treated separately. The first concerns the limitation in the use of pure reason, which takes the place of the answer that Schultz should have given to Ulrich's objection. The second, much more delicate, concerns an internal issue of the Deduction, namely the difficulty of the pre-established harmony between intellect and world brought to light by Schultz. In a way that may perhaps be surprising, Kant in the note restricts the main purpose of the *Critique* to the first issue—namely, to demonstrate *that* the categories are applicable only to the objects of experience—whereas what is the objective of the Deduction, namely *how* this takes place, is presented as of secondary importance:

If we can prove *that* the categories which reason must use in all its cognition can have no other use at all, except solely in relation to objects of possible experience (insofar as they simply make possible the form of thought in such experience), then, although the answer to the question *how* the categories make

such experience possible is important enough for *completing* the deduction where possible, with respect to the principal end of the system, namely, the determination of the limits of pure reason, it is in no way *compulsory*, but merely *meritorious* (Kant 1786, 10).

In the course of the note, Kant also acknowledges that there are considerable difficulties in the published version of the Deduction, and declares that he is working on an improved edition, although the modifications should concern only the aspect of exposition and not the content.

At this point, it is legitimate to ask why Kant relegates to such a secondary level a part of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that has never appeared secondary to the eyes of interpreters. If the declaration that the Deduction is not necessary but only meritorious may seem out of place—since the entire critical system appears to depend on the possible mediation between intuitions and concepts—one must nevertheless recognize that, with regard to the advancement of metaphysics as a science, the great novelty marked by transcendental philosophy consists in the reversal, already noted above, of the concepts of reality and semblance. In relation to this discovery, the investigation into the use and applicability of the categories constitutes a complement. However, one must also take into account the context in which this statement appears. For here Kant's polemical target is Ulrich, a rationalist who attempts to overturn the critical limits by reducing transcendental philosophy to the Leibnizian-Wolffian tradition. It is thus against the dogmatic objection that Kant reinforces the sceptical-empiricist aspect of the *Critique*—namely, the limitation of the use of the categories to the objects of possible experience. The arguments briefly repeated, or rather restated in the note, are those of the *Aesthetic* on the ideality of space and time, and thus on the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments, together with the validity and completeness of the table of categories. Once the transcendental restriction is admitted, the principal aim of critical philosophy is achieved: for it consists in the determination of the limits of pure reason, whereas the task of explaining how the application of the categories to experience occurs is not "necessary" for this framework, but only "meritorious". As for this second issue—whose importance is not denied—Kant nevertheless avoids pronouncing himself, in fact renouncing to answer Schultz's objections. Kant, however, acknowledges that the difficulties which led the reviewer to resort to a doctrine of pre-established harmony are due not simply to the obscurity of the exposition in the first edition, but to the "common fortunes of the understanding in its investigations, in which the shortest way is commonly not the first way that it becomes aware of" (Kant 1786, 11). Kant thus leaves the reader in doubt about the nature of the promised changes in the second edition, whether they are merely improvements in exposition or also in content. The hypothesis of divine harmony is, however, vigorously rejected, since it would reduce the objective necessity of the categories to a mere contingency that appears necessary only subjectively, precisely as Hume had maintained when he explained causal connection by means of habit. The response that must be sought, and which is lacking in the footnote, is there-

fore the one to Schultz's sceptical objection, rigorously distinguished by Kant from Ulrich's dogmatic objection.

4. The Argument of the Refutation of Idealism

As anticipated above, a terminological resumption of the issues raised by Schultz's review can be found in the B Deduction, where in par. 27 Kant distinguishes between *generatio aequivoca*, preformation and epigenesis of pure reason. Before turning directly to this dense paragraph, however, it is helpful to make some more general remarks about the changes between the two editions of the *Critique*. Schultz's review, although much more refined in its arguments than that of Feder and/or Garve, ultimately does not reach significantly different conclusions: critical philosophy appears to oscillate between a Leibnizian-style idealism—grounded in a pre-established harmony between intellect and nature that would justify objective reality—and the radical scepticism of Hume, into which it would risk falling. It was precisely the theme of idealism and its refutations that, as is well known, stood at the center of the revisions of the second edition. The section on the Fourth Paralogism (concerning the ideality of the external world), to which Kant had referred in his answer to the first review, disappears from the 1787 version. It is replaced by the new *Refutation of Idealism*, no longer located in the Dialectic but rather in the Postulates of the Analytic of Principles, where Kant introduces the critical concept of "objective reality". In this place is not possible to deal in detail with the argument of the Refutation and its differences with the former one, but will be given just a general sketch of the question.

The aim of the Refutation is to establish the correlation between inner and outer sense, and thus the necessity of external representations in order to affirm the existence of the empirical subject. The argument in fact relies on other passages of the *Critique*—some of those modified in the second edition—especially in the Aesthetic, in the First Analogy of Experience (on the permanence of substance), and, above all, in the B Deduction. It is only in this second version of the Deduction that Kant introduces the problem of self-knowledge, which implies an ego-splitting into transcendental and empirical consciousness. This issue is addressed in par. 24–25, where Kant explains that the object of inner sense is given solely through the material of external representations; in this way the dependence of the inner on the outer is demonstrated. On the basis of this theoretical advance, the *Refutation* demonstrates the link between empirical consciousness and the real existence of spatial objects in the following way:

I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. All time-determination presupposes something *persistent* in perception. This persistent thing, however, cannot be something in me, since my own existence in time can first be determined only through this persistent thing. Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is possible only through a thing outside me and not the mere representation of a thing outside me. Consequently, the determination of my

existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself. Now consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore, it is also necessarily combined with the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me (Kant 1787, B 275–76).

The distinction between “a thing outside me” and “the mere representation of a thing outside me” made in this passage has been read (Guyer 1983) in a realist key, taking the object of the proof to be the existence of things in themselves behind the phenomena. More likely, however, this distinction should be understood in terms of the constitution of experience as a coherent whole, in the sense of the “objective reality” discussed in the preceding paragraph, namely the Second Postulate of Empirical Thought. Accordingly, the “things outside me” can be read as representations in the sense of the *Erfahrungsurteile* of the *Prolegomena*, whereas the “representations of things outside me” would correspond to the immediate sensations of the individual subject, that is, the *Wahrnehmungsurteile*. In this way, the *Refutation of Idealism* shows that the metaphysical question about the reality of the external world is misguided: it conflates empirical consciousness with transcendental consciousness on the one hand, and the transcendental concept of world with the empirical concept of objects of outer sense on the other. From the empirical standpoint, however, the question is simply meaningless, since the very material of inner intuition is given only in outer sense, which is constituted as objective reality through the activity of transcendental imagination. The confusion between transcendental and reproductive imagination—which, according to Kant, had led Descartes to doubt external representations—thus conceals a more fundamental confusion, one that lies at the level of the concepts of consciousness and world that are at stake.

5. The New Deduction: A System of the Epigenesis of Pure Reason

We can thus read par. 27 of B Deduction within the thematic framework of clarifying the concept and the terminology of transcendental idealism, as well as the revisions made between the two editions of the *Critique*. This paragraph closes the Deduction and introduces the Analytic of Principles, where Kant intends to explain how the categories are applied to experience. Before delving into this analysis, he raises one of the fundamental questions of the *Critique*—the *how*, a task deemed only *meritorious* in the note to the *Metaphysical Foundations!*—namely: how can a necessary accord between the categories and nature be thought? Kant indicates three possible paths, the illustration of which connects to the lexical domain of Schultz’s review.

The necessity of the agreement between categories and experience can be explained in two primary ways: “either experience makes these concepts possible, or these concepts make experience possible” (Kant 1787, B 166). Clearly, regard-

ing the categories, Kant favours the second hypothesis. It is, however, interesting to focus on the terms he proposes for these two positions, borrowed from the biological sciences. The former, i.e. the empirical generation of concepts, is called *generatio aequivoca*, whereas the latter, reflecting the demands of critical inquiry, is named a “system of the epigenesis of pure reason”. In this way, Kant alludes to a millennial debate, already originated at the times of Aristotle and Galen, concerning the generation of living organisms and the evolution of species, which resurfaced in the modern era with particular intensity.

Generatio aequivoca, also called spontaneous generation, was the classical theory according to which living organisms could arise spontaneously from non-living matter, definitively refuted only by Louis Pasteur in the 20th century. By contrast, the theory of epigenesis was a kind of *generatio univoca*, according to which organisms instead develop gradually from an original seed, so that the growth of new parts can be determined from an initial embryo. Kant introduces between them an intermediate term, or a third possibility: the so-called theory of preformation, which was another kind of *generatio univoca*, traditionally opposed to epigenesis. Preformationists, widely diffused at the time Kant wrote, believed that the generation of a living being depended on original seeds rather than inert matter, but in these seeds, they placed the entire organism of the adult animal, already structured in all its parts. For readers familiar with Schultz’s review, it is not difficult to recognize in the theory of preformation the traits of that pre-established harmony between intellect and nature that Kant’s pupil found out in the *Critique*. Even more, in par. 36 of *Prolegomena* Kant already counterbalanced the possibilities of the empirical origin of laws of nature, and of nature’s derivation from these *a priori* laws: the fact that here the third option of preformation is not mentioned, let imagine that Kant thought on it after having read Schultz’s review. Indeed, Kant himself guides the interpretation in this way, associating a system of preformation of pure reason with the will of a good creator who ensures the harmonious agreement between intellect and nature. If one adopts a preformationist theory for reason, the categories would not function as conditions of experience, but as “subjective predispositions for thinking, implanted in us along with our existence” (Kant 1787, B 167): critical philosophy would thus be reduced to a form of psychologism resting ultimately on merely arbitrary subjective necessity, which could fail for future representations. The fundamental error in this reading of the *Critique* lies in separating condition and conditioned, the laws of the intellect and the nature they determine. This idea assumes that nature is something other than the world of phenomena, in which only our knowledge is possible, thus falling back into Berkeleyan idealism, that, as has been argued, degrades *Erscheinung* to mere *Schein*. The concluding paragraph of the B Deduction is therefore yet another, new refutation of idealism, aiming to distinguish critical philosophy from both empiricism (*generatio aequivoca*) and dogmatism (preformation) and reveal a more complex relationship between the transcendental structures and the empirical plane. How exactly this occurs, however, remains somewhat unclear.

When speaking of nature in Kant, it is important to recall the distinction, already introduced in the Deduction and fundamental in the third *Critique*, between "nature in general" [*Natur überhaupt*], i.e., nature considered in accordance with the laws of the intellect in space and time, and "particular nature", which appears in empirical observation of specific phenomena and obeys empirical or particular laws, not determinable a priori but all reducible to the categories (Marcucci 1996). In the Deduction, it is therefore nature in general that is at stake, regarding which the categories are "first principles spontaneously thought a priori" [*selbstgedachte erste Prinzipien a priori*]. It appears thus clear why the *Critique* is not a system of preformation of pure reason, yet it remains less obvious in what sense reason should possess an epigenetic structure.

To better understand what Kant means by epigenesis, it is useful to refer to par. 80–1 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, where these biological theories are considered in relation to the concept of finality.²⁰ In fact, par. 80 makes clear that *generatio aequivoca* works only through natural mechanism, whereas *generatio univoca* lets teleology in nature be possible. Then, the classification of positions on generation differs from that in par. 27 of the first *Critique*: preformation, based on the creation of original seeds, is opposed to occasionalism, according to which the divine being would intervene multiple times in nature to create individual living beings. If this latter position is incompatible with philosophical reasoning, then it is only with preformation that one engages within a rational discourse. Preformation is further subdivided into two forms, individual and generic. The former sees seeds containing all individual organisms at the moment of the creation of the world, easily linked by Kant to a form of occasionalism, that places supernatural intervention at the original instant of creation rather than over created time, in a way that generates complications in scientific comprehension of the natural world, such as in the case of hybrid generation. Both occasionalism and individual preformation are thus for Kant ways to attribute an objective finality to organisms in the world, depending on the Creator. On the other hand, the second mode of preformation concerns not the individuals but the species, hence termed "generic," or "epigenetic:" it is then a reflective teleological system, referred only subjectively to the faculties of knowledge. Par. 81 of *KU* concludes with praise for Blumenbach, a biologist who, according to Kant, avoided a reckless use of epigenesis, because "at the same time, however, he leaves natural mechanism an interminable but at the same time also unmistakable role under this inscrutable *principle* of an original *organization*". (Kant 1790, 292).

This description of epigenesis thus clarifies the Deduction paragraph. If epigenesis is a generic preformation, it allows understanding organism development

²⁰ In fact, Kant deals with epigenesis and preformation several times, starting in his pre-critical writings and later in *Geography* and *Anthropology*. Here, however, I am not interested in reconstructing Kant's biological theory (which also could be useful for this reconstruction and is very interesting in the anthropological field), but only in explaining the transcendental metaphor in the Deduction. For this reason, it is sufficient the reference in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. For an account of biology in Kant's geography and anthropology, see, among others Cohen 2006; Marcucci 2010; Demarest 2017.

according to the purpose of species reproduction, which does not determine individual's particular characteristics, but only its original organization according to the broader unity it belongs to. Kant thus understands epigenesis as a force, an original impulse that unifies under a single, finalizing principle the multiplicity of individual organisms appearing in nature. Though the principle itself is "inscrutable" to us, it appears "unmistakable" because the entities of nature present themselves in a way that necessitates recourse to a finalistic unity for comprehension.

At the end, par. 27 of *KrV* still does not aim to explain *how* the agreement of categories with experience occurs, as this will be the object of the Analytic of Principles. Even less is it Kant's aim to explain *why* this agreement exists and from what it derives. Transcendental analysis is not genetic but static: that this agreement exists is a fact, as is the existence of Newtonian physics in the B Introduction to the first *Critique* (Kant 1787, B 20–1), countering sceptical objections. The agreement of cognitive faculties with the empirical world thus appears contingent, insofar as it could have been otherwise, as it is exemplified by the intuitive intellect. But this agreement is yet also radically necessary, since it determines all that is really possible for a sensible rational being. Since transcendental structures present themselves only within experience and intertwined with the empirical, from which they are inseparable, critical analysis does not reveal innate subjective structures, but those original spontaneous forces that make experience possible in general. The biological metaphor provides access to the plastic structure of the transcendental, always in contact with the environment and the empirical, yet also teleological and aimed at the rational unification of the multiplicity of experience. Transcendental epigenesis and biological epigenesis of the third *Critique* operate on two distinct but interdependent levels. The first concerns "nature in general" and its *a priori* laws, the second the investigation of particular laws in empirical nature. However, as evidenced by the study of contingency in Kant's last critical work, the concept of finality, essential to the unifying structure of categories, requires empirical observation of those natural entities, which are comprehensible for us only in terms of finality: the organisms.²¹ If the transcendental plane is a condition for experience, at the same time certain conditioned experiences allow for its enlargement and redefinition. Thus, becomes clearer Kant's claim in the First Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, according to which the study of teleological judgment constitutes a new component of the system of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Our concept of a technique of nature, as a heuristic principle in the judgment of it, will belong to the critique of our faculty of cognition, which indicates what occasion we have to make such a representation of it to ourselves, what origin this idea has, whether it is to be found in an *a priori* source, and also what the scope and boundary of its use are; in a word, such an inquiry will belong as a part to the system of the critique of pure reason, but not to doctrinal philosophy (Kant 1790, 10–1).

²¹ On the relation between categories and finality, see Marcucci 1991, for this point in particular pp. 31–2.

That the critical system is epigenetic means that the transcendental itself is plastic, immersed in experience, gathered incompletely and contingently, perceived at a certain stage in the development of reason: only by tracing back to the original seed can one grasp its teleological unity. This teleology is limited from the perspective of a finite being, determined and renegotiated each time within the contingencies of experience. The formative force of matter is limited, as in Blumenbach's reconstruction, by the parental seed that characterizes the species, yet this does not prevent development in an environmental and evolutionary process. It is precisely this determination that, by limiting, unifies and makes comprehensible and meaningful that formless "multiplicity of experience".

As it has been argued for the distinction between *Wahrnehmungsurtheile* and *Erafrhrungsurtheile*, epigenesis also attempts to guarantee the passage from one singular consciousness to the intersubjective standards of a rational community. Genova (1974, 271–2) has argued that what is in question through the analogy of epigenesis is the "universal consciousness", which makes possible the scientific community of rational inquirers as a "transcendental we" through the abstraction from individualities and self-interests. I would add that, if this transcendental unifying force, as a seed, is what makes knowledge shareable, at the same time this seed develops itself under the influence of the "epistemological environment" (as Genova himself calls it) which stimulates the process of thinking. The environment could be the sensation that differentiates this thinking activity, but could still be the community of inquirers itself, which is also made of human beings, historically and culturally determined. Thus, I suggest to read epigenesis as the imagine of historicity and contingency of this same transcendental universal force, which makes experience in general possible.

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A Journal at the Second Power: Fichte's Project of a Review Journal

Matteo Vincenzo d'Alfonso, Maurizio Trudu

Abstract: This article has two aims. First, it situates Fichte's project of a review journal within its historical and cultural context. Second, it shows how this project is consistent with his broader philosophical orientation. The reviews are considered not only as tools of critical analysis but also as expressions of the "spirit of the age," embedded in the philosophical and literary debates of the late eighteenth century. By examining these texts and the editorial projects connected to them, the article reconstructs the intellectual dynamics of a complex period and clarifies the role of reviews in shaping contemporary discourse.

Keywords: J. G. Fichte, Reviews, Philosophy, Idealism, Romanticism.

1. Introduction¹

With this contribution, we aim to achieve two main objectives. On the one hand, we wish to outline the historical and cultural context in which Fichte conceived the project of a review journal; on the other hand, we intend to show how this project fits within the horizon of his philosophical aspiration. As we shall see, reviews are not merely instruments of critical analysis, but embody the "spirit of the age," constituting an indispensable element of the philosophical and literary reflection of the time. By examining the reviews and the editorial projects connected with them, it becomes possible to reconstruct the intellectual dynamics of a complex historical period, reweaving the threads of a debate as lively as it was decisive (Sgarbi 2025). To understand the context in which Fichte's project developed, a quotation from Schelling proves particularly illuminating. In his essay *Über die Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* (1800), Schelling elevates "criticism" to a necessary element in the search for truth:

¹ The introduction, paragraph 2 (*The Historical Context*), paragraph 3 (*Romantic Editorial Plans*), paragraph 4 (*Fichte and the Journal at the Second Power*) as well as the conclusion, were written by Matteo Vincenzo d'Alfonso; Maurizio Trudu wrote paragraph 5 (*The Plan*).

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Every dispute that is carried on in the service of truth, whatever form it may take, is something good, meritorious, and a blessing for science itself. This is the principle and conviction of every upright person devoted to truth. And this principle extends even to those controversies that are undertaken and conducted out of error or obscuring intentions, for they compel those who see and defend the better cause to gather their strength, to examine their doctrines more sharply, and, where necessary, to prove them with greater rigor (Schelling 2004, 70–1).

Hence the attention given to the review is conceived as an indispensable critical instrument. In other words, to understand one's own time means to subject it to a rigorous examination, so that criticism becomes the point of departure for a shared search for truth. Fichte's project of developing a review journal must be situated within the broader historical sensibility that permeated the age. The Romantic context, in fact, is characterised by an ambitious drive towards the elaboration of various editorial enterprises, which Horst Fuhrmans describes as a "great editorial plan" (Schulte-Sasse 1971, 44–51; Johannes and Conter 2006, 7–24). This design took concrete form in a multiplicity of initiatives and diverse projects. Let us now seek to understand the context in which these initiatives in general, and Fichte's project in particular, developed.

2. The Historical Context

The literary journals of the late eighteenth century represented a significant force within the literary world. Their considerable influence on public opinion is evident, for example, in the 1772 volume of the *Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen*, which participated in the fierce literary controversies sparked by reviews published in such journals (Berghahn 1985, 10–75). Another clear example is the *Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung* (ALZ), founded in 1785, whose importance soon eclipsed that of all competing periodicals due to its innovative character. By the end of the eighteenth century, the ALZ occupied the undisputed leading position among the reviewing organs in Germany.² In its orientation, it differed, for instance, from the contemporary *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, directed by Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, which possessed a strongly rationalistic outlook of a pre-Kantian kind. Its frequent failure to comprehend modern literature prevented it from achieving a success comparable to that of the ALZ. As we shall see, the various Romantic projects for review organs—and specifically that proposed by Fichte—would de-

² For the foundation of the ALZ, see first and foremost Haym 1920, in which the author, over several chapters, discusses the history and character of the journal, the participation of August Wilhelm Schlegel and his relationship with Romanticism in general, as well as the transfer of the ALZ to Halle in the autumn of 1803. Furthermore, see Schönfuß 1914, who provides an accurate overview, especially of the external events and circumstances surrounding the foundation of the ALZ and its development up to 1795. His investigation constitutes a point of reference for studies in the field. Indeed, it was the first to draw on numerous sources (memoirs, letters, notes), which make it possible to construct a picture of the ALZ that remains unsurpassed. For further references, see Wistoff 1992 and Kisser, 2001, 29–66.

velop in opposition to this periodical. The *ALZ* had been founded by the professor Christian Gottfried Schütz and by Weimar Johann Justin Bertuch.³

To understand its aims and to grasp the significance of its foundation, it is sufficient to recall what Wieland wrote in August 1784 in the *Teutscher Merkur*. Wieland argued for the necessity of a new literary journal, since the increase in book production had made it impossible to keep up with every new publication. The reviews of the *ALZ* would therefore make it possible to take account of the boundless growth of printed works through regular, comprehensive, and reliable criticism. In short, the purpose of the *ALZ* was to inform the reading public through impartial reviews of all German literary productions worthy of attention. The reviews were divided into sixteen scientific sections, organised according to a previously published system of the sciences, that the reviewers were required to follow strictly. This systematisation began with the *Realwissenschaften* (real sciences), which were divided into *bloß nützliche* (theology, jurisprudence, medicine, philosophy, mathematics) and *Historische* (history and geography). The *nützlichen Realwissenschaften* were followed by the *Schönen Wissenschaften* (philology, literary history, and miscellaneous writings). The fundamental principle that was to guide the reviews was objectivity. For this reason, no book could be reviewed by its own author, personal judgements were not permitted, and both praise and criticism had to be measured. The first issue of the *ALZ*, published on 3 January 1785, was preceded by a preface in which the principles of the journal were reaffirmed, and the editors reiterated the reasons for their choice of anonymous reviews—namely, that the reader should pay attention solely to the content and not to the name of the reviewer. Moreover, this practice had already been observed in the best journals, since for twenty years the impartiality of reviewers and the comprehensiveness of the survey of the book market had been recognised as essential virtues. The editors of the *ALZ* took advantage of the public's dissatisfaction with the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, promising that the rigorous implementation of those principles—which had become increasingly difficult for the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* to uphold—would be fully realised by the *ALZ*. Nicolai himself reflected in 1801 on the foundation of the *ALZ* and emphasised the kinship of that journal with his own *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* (Nicolai 1801, 1–45). More generally, it may be said that the *ALZ* was conceived according to principles close to those of the German Enlightenment, whose promotion was, for the editors, both a general objective and a guarantee of the journal's lasting success. The first issue, published on 3 January 1785, contained a review on a theological subject, probably written by Johann Jacob Griesbach. A few days later, the philosophical section was opened with a review of *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity* by Kant and by Herder. These reviews immediately became a source of complaints. Herder, for example, was infuriated by the Kantian review of his *Ideas*

³ They are the ones cited by Goethe (1825). Gruber, Böttiger, and Schiller (1989, 142–50) also name Christoph Martin Wieland among the journal's founders.

for a *Philosophy of the History of Humanity*, an emblematic fact that helps to understand the overall position of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (ALZ), which indeed played a decisive role in spreading Kant's philosophy. Elfriede Naumann draws attention to the fact that, as early as 1782, Schütz gave lectures on genius and on Lessing's writings, during which he supported the strongly Kantian positions that would later appear in the ALZ (Naumann 1934, 2). In fact, Schütz, as the founder of the ALZ, was a fervent supporter of Kantian philosophy and gathered around himself collaborators who shared this orientation. Works were reviewed from this philosophical standpoint, and every attempt to go beyond it was rejected and refuted. In conclusion, although it soon gave up its claim to completeness, the ALZ quickly gained notoriety and prestige thanks to its large number of distinguished contributors and established itself as the leading critical journal in Germany. When, in 1795, the first reviews of Romantic works appeared in its pages, it could already be regarded as an undisputed authority.

Among the reviewers of the ALZ, a position of undisputed prominence in the final decades of the eighteenth century was held by August Wilhelm Schlegel, who joined the journal in 1796 at the request and wish of Schiller, who himself had been an active contributor until 1794.⁴

However, it was precisely Schlegel's gradual departure from conventional aesthetic positions and his orientation towards Romanticism that led him, over time, to increasingly oppose most of the ALZ's contributors, who based their reviews predominantly on a Kantian-rationalistic standpoint. The episode that prompted Schlegel to end his collaboration with the ALZ occurred on 26th October 1799. In that year, a review appeared of Friedrich Nicolai's novel *Vertraute Briefe von Adelheid B an ihre Freundin Julie S** (ALZ 1799, 4, 245–48). Nicolai had long made a name for himself as a critic of Idealism, harshly attacking Kant, Goethe, and Fichte alike, whom he classified as "aberrations" of the German spirit. In the ALZ, Ludwig Ferdinand Huber praised the novel as a substantial and witty work; however, Schlegel read this review as a direct attack on himself and on the *Athenäum*, which he published. Although no names were mentioned in the review, it unmistakably included the Schlegel brothers and the Romantic circle. This episode is emblematic of the conflict that arose between the Romantics and the ALZ milieu, and even more emblematic is the statement that Schlegel had published in the ALZ on 13 November 1799, entitled *Abschied von der Allg. Lit.-Zeitung*. In it, he excluded any future collaboration, adducing the following reasons:

Partly, the ever-increasing number of insubstantial reviews, for whose proximity I have often had cause to be ashamed, and of which several now in particular betray, not obscurely, the endeavour to throw the state of criticism back by some thirty years; but far more, I find the considerations and intentions by which the editorial board is unmistakably guided to be irreconcilable with my own principles (A. W. Schlegel 1847, 427).

⁴ Schiller's reviews were, in 1788, Goethe's *Egmont*; in 1791, Bürger's *Poems*; and in 1794, Matthisson's *Poems*.

Evidently, these two conflicting episodes appear to have served as triggering factors within a broader context in which antagonistic tendencies were intertwined. On the one hand, there was growing discontent among the younger authors towards the *ALZ*, which reviewed the works of Romantic poets and philosophers in an unsympathetic, hostile manner. On the other hand, there was the journal's structural incapacity to move beyond its own aesthetic-normative standpoint and to grasp the significance of the Romantic revolution. In short, an open conflict arose between the Romantics and the *ALZ*. Friedrich Schlegel, for example, mocked the *ALZ* in the *Athenäum*; Tieck, who until then had not contributed to the journal, was regarded as an undesirable collaborator and, in 1800, announced in the first issue of his *Poetisches Journal*, that he would no longer write reviews for the *ALZ*. Schelling, irritated by the negative and narrow-minded review of his *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* in the *ALZ*, sided—supported by Fichte—with August Wilhelm Schlegel, and in 1800, in the first issue of his *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik*, he published a polemical piece of no fewer than forty-eight pages against the *ALZ*, accusing it of being the stronghold of resistance against the spirit of the new age. Finally, the philosopher of nature Henrik Steffens also sided with the Romantics, not least because Schelling had recommended him as a reviewer for the *ALZ*, but the editorial board had rejected him at Nicolai's instigation. Although the editors of the *ALZ* had endeavoured to maintain a calm and balanced tone until then, in 1802 they deemed it necessary to respond sharply. In the reviews of some of Schelling's works, polemical remarks were inserted that echoed malicious rumours according to which he had, in some way, caused the death of Caroline Schlegel's young daughter, Auguste Böhmer, through inadequate medical treatment during her illness. Offended, Schelling replied with a vehement twenty-eight-page pamphlet, published by August Wilhelm Schlegel under the title *An das Publikum*, in which he condemned the *ALZ*'s defamatory accusations—and which was immediately reviewed unfavourably by Schütz. At the same time, Friedrich Nicolai joined the *ALZ*'s side, offering it strong support in its struggle against the Romantics. In a sixty-four-page review, he praised the *ALZ* and defended it against attacks from the progressive camp, particularly those directed against the *Neue allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, which in 1801 had launched fierce assaults, first against Schelling and then against Fichte.

From these personal disputes it clearly emerges that what was at stake was not merely the gaining or losing of readership, nor solely the defence of personal reputation, but also the reputation of the conception of art that each of the contenders represented.

3. Romantic Editorial Plans

As has already been observed, the editorial projects that arose within the Romantic *milieu* were intended to replace the most influential review organ of the time, the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*. Of particular interest is the period between 1798 and 1802, during which several central figures of the philosophical

and literary debate emerged, among them Schelling (1775–1854), Fichte (1762–1814), the brothers August and Friedrich Schlegel (1767–1845; 1772–1829), and Schleiermacher (1768–1834). These editorial ventures reflect an acute awareness of living in an age of profound transformation in spiritual and social life, and of the necessity of acting as promoters of such change by engaging broader, educated, and educable segments of society. Consequently, they were characterised by a strong pedagogical and formative ambition, accompanied by pronounced intransigence towards the public's expectations and reading habits. However, most of these initiatives failed—not only because of external resistance and low circulation figures, but also owing to conceptual and personal divergences among editors and authors. Many of them ended after only a few years, and in some cases, after just a few issues.

Such was the case with *Die Horen* (1794–1798), which brought Schiller into conflict with Fichte and August Wilhelm Schlegel (Weber 2010, 201–14); with the *Athenaeum* of the Schlegel brothers (1798–1800), hindered by disputes with the publisher; with Goethe's *Propyläen* (1798–1800), whose circulation remained limited; with Ludwig Tieck's *Poetisches Journal* (1800), which came to an end after a single issue; and with Friedrich Schlegel's *Europa* (1803–1805). In the same context belong Achim von Arnim's *Zeitung für Einsiedler* (1808) and *Phöbus* (1808) by Heinrich von Kleist and Adam Müller (Schmitz 1991, 247–313). The *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft deutscher Gelehrter*, edited by Niethammer and co-edited by Fichte from 1797 onwards, did not survive the Atheism Controversy and ceased publication in 1800 after five years. The *Erlangen Literatur-Zeitung* managed to maintain itself as an organ of the new philosophers and writers only between 1799 and 1802, before being forced to reduce its format under pressure from its opponents, among them the aforementioned Friedrich Nicolai, until its definitive closure. Schelling's journals—the *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik*, the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, and the *Neue Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik*—likewise had only a brief existence. Nevertheless, the analysis of these projects makes it possible to grasp more deeply the meaning of the period and the various theoretical claims that underpinned it. The beating heart of these editorial enterprises was the review.

4. Fichte and the *Journal at the Second Power*

Let us now turn to Fichte's project. To understand his plan to publish a major critical journal, it is necessary first to consider the Jena *milieu*. When Fichte was called to Jena in 1793 to succeed Reinhold, he came into contact with the Jena cultural *élite*. Among the many figures to be mentioned are Niethammer; Schad (who became professor of philosophy at Jena in 1799); Schütz, editor of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*; Schiller, holder of the chair of history at Jena; von Hardenberg, Hölderlin, August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, Tieck, Bernhardt, and finally, of course, Schelling.

In this context—particularly in the house of August, Caroline, and Dorothea Schlegel—there developed what came to be known as the *Jenaer Kreis*, the

nucleus of the proto-Romantic movement. Equally fundamental, in view of its biographical consequences for him, was the relationship that Fichte established with Niethammer, with whom he co-edited the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*. For Fichte, the *Philosophisches Journal* represented an important publishing vehicle, as demonstrated by the *Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre*. However, in his view, the journal remained too indeterminate and too broadly structured to consistently pursue a clearly defined philosophical direction.

Although Niethammer intended to continue the discussion on the method of philosophy and on the difficulties of a philosophy founded on a first principle, he considered such a philosophy to be, at the same time, both superfluous and impossible. In any case, Niethammer was not a supporter of the *Doctrine of Science* [*Wissenschaftslehre*], and, in fact, the relationship between the two co-editors was only apparently amicable. In the first volume of the *Philosophisches Journal* (1795), Niethammer published the programmatic essay *Von den Ansprüchen des gemeinen Verstandes an die Philosophie*, which, according to his own words, was directed against Fichte's system, questioning the very necessity of a systematic conception of philosophy. Fichte, by contrast, soon conceived the project of a rigorously structured journal through which it would be possible to conduct effective philosophical work. Within the Jena intellectual milieu—characterised by a strong commitment to criticism and by the discussions arising from the presentation of the *Doctrine of Science* and the emergence of Idealism—the project of a shared journal could take shape and develop. It was to intervene in the philosophical debates of the time with a broad critical outlook, defending the transcendental standpoint inaugurated by Kant, while at the same time aspiring to exert an influence on the spirit of the age, then shaped by the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* (NADB), the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (NBM), and the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (ALZ).

The break with the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (ALZ), carried out by Schelling and A. W. Schlegel in the autumn of 1799 with the approval of the other members of the circle, made Schelling all the more insistent towards Fichte regarding the project of a new journal. On 1 November 1799, Schelling asked Fichte not only for “a few vigorous contributions” to his own polemic against the ALZ—which, according to Fichte's proposal, was to be entitled *Annals of the Philosophical Tone, Second Part, or History of Two Reviews of the ALZ*—but also invited him to come to Jena “so that we may think about the execution of our plan” (Schelling 2001, 242). Fichte replied on 19th November 1799 (Schelling 2001, 245), reporting, among other things, that the publisher Johann Friedrich Bohn of Lübeck had expressed the opinion that the moment was ripe to launch an attack on the ALZ.

5. The Plan

On 4 December, Fichte arrived in Jena, and on 23 December he presented to the Schlegel brothers a first *Entwurf zu einem Plane über ein zu errichtendes*

kritisches Institut (*Draft of a Plan for the Establishment of a Critical Institute*). Fichte immediately introduced the project in a solemn tone, presenting it as a direct critique of the contemporary cultural context. He wrote:

1) Above all, we must bind ourselves—each of us to himself, and to one another—by a sacred pledge that no ulterior or secondary intention shall exert any influence upon our plan, but that we shall aim solely at carrying out, in the best possible way, that which we ourselves recognise as the best. The execution will in any case fall short of the plan; but errors in the plan itself, however insignificant they may appear, would in execution lead us immeasurably far from the right path ...] Let us consider:

- a) that in the field of half-measures and bungling we ourselves are the worst bunglers, and that, when it comes to patching up, cobbling together, or trying to improve in execution something clumsily undertaken, those who have spent their whole lives doing nothing else will always surpass us, who strive for perfection;
- b) that if we ourselves should come to doubt the feasibility of the proposed plan (which I believe to be the only truly thorough one), it would be far better to do nothing at all than to fail, thereby preventing any future realisation of such a plan, and at the same time giving ourselves a dubious reputation for other undertakings (Fichte 1973, 169).

In his exposition, Fichte addresses his friends and collaborators, proposing the formation of a “sacred” pact: the common project should not be tainted by secondary or personal interests but should be directed solely towards the realisation, in the best possible manner, of what they themselves recognised as the best. He insists that the execution, however careful, could never fully equal the ideal contained within the plan, and that even seemingly minor errors in the initial conception would, in practice, lead to serious deviations that would be difficult to correct. To clarify this requirement, Fichte emphasises two points. First, he acknowledges that those who aspire to perfection are precisely the ones most likely to prove clumsy in “patching up” or correcting a poorly conceived initiative; in such operations, they would inevitably be surpassed by those who have never pursued anything other than compromise and accommodation. Secondly, he warns that, should doubts arise concerning the feasibility of the plan (which he considers to be the only truly well-founded one), it would be preferable to undertake nothing at all rather than risk a failure that would fundamentally jeopardise any future possibility of realisation and cast a shadow of discredit upon other similar endeavours.

As for the project’s content, Fichte explains that it should not be a fragmentary or occasional work, but rather a *Pragmatic History of Literature and Art*. From this idea stem the fundamental lines of the undertaking. According to him, the enterprise is articulated in two stages. First, it is necessary to establish clearly the point of departure: to formulate a determinate concept of science and of art in general, together with the “spirit” that animates them, and to assess the epoch from which the proposed review begins—an epoch that could conveniently be situated at the end of the eighteenth century—in relation to this normative

idea. In other words, it is a matter of determining what has been achieved up to that point, what deficiencies remain, and in what direction the human spirit ought to advance. To this first part also belongs a reconstruction of the history of criticism (literary and public), with the identification of the dominant prejudices that have conditioned its development. From this first stage there follows, according to Fichte, the second: the systematic examination of everything that is produced in the literary and artistic fields. Each new work must be classified under specific categories and headings, examined according to the previously established criteria, and assigned its proper place within the overall history of criticism.

The second task of the project, he observed, follows directly from the first. Everything that is published must be examined according to rigorous criteria, systematically classified into categories and sections, and assigned a place based on the resulting critical judgment. From this orientation, an important consequence arises: the plan leaves no room for isolated individual reviews. Fichte rejects the idea of discussing a book merely on occasion, to introduce personal allusions, scattered insights, or momentary impressions. It is precisely this "realm of mere hints and suggestions" that is to be brought to an end; it therefore cannot form any part of the project itself. The enterprise must retain the form of a systematic and organic synthesis, and not degenerate into a mere collection of episodic observations.

Any possible "mercantile" justification—namely, the attempt to conform to the book market and its conventions—is likewise excluded. Having deliberately renounced, from the outset, every "secondary intention," it would be contradictory to try to compete with mediocre institutions on their own ground. Rather, the goal must be to replace them in the future, but on solid foundations, ultimately to supplant them entirely. From this perspective, even the economic argument loses its force: the public, Fichte observes, will quickly grow accustomed to a new form—apparently unfamiliar, yet in reality far more appropriate and fruitful—through which it will be offered what truly possesses value. The criterion of the "pragmatic history of the time" is then further specified: the publication rhythm is to follow that of the book fairs.

Thus, for example, at the Easter Fair of 1802 there should appear the report of the Easter Fair of 1801; and at the Michaelmas Fair, the account of that of the previous year, and so on. Fichte acknowledges that it would be desirable to reduce the interval between the event and its treatment to six months rather than a full year. Yet he also explains that, as will become clear from subsequent considerations, this is not practically feasible. The principal object of the work, Fichte insists, is and must always remain the history of the present age. For this reason, the first instalment of the work must contain not only the introductory volumes but also the report of a book fair that actually belongs to the period under consideration. Finally, Fichte also suggests an editorial strategy: the work should make its authors stand out, not the other way around. He therefore proposes that nothing be announced in advance—not even orally—but that work proceed in silence, so that the project may suddenly appear as a fully initiated

enterprise. The effect, he observes, would then be quite different and far more striking. Having defined its method and purpose, Fichte proceeds to outline the internal structure of the undertaking. The work is to be organised into thematic sections corresponding to the principal domains of the spirit and of culture.

- 1) "General State of the Scientific Spirit and the Artistic Sense". The aim here is, first of all, to describe the overall condition of science and art. This initial overview will serve as a point of reference: subsequent developments will naturally emerge from the periodic reports. Fichte suggests, however, that at regular intervals—every five years, for instance—specific reports should be drawn up on the state of public criticism, prevailing opinions among scholars, and similar matters.
- 2) "Philosophy". In this domain, no fixed subdivision is envisaged: the classification must follow the needs of the time. At that historical moment, Fichte notes, everything is connected with the persistent conflict between dogmatism and idealism, accompanied by a widespread desire to rid oneself of philosophy altogether, and to lapse either into the crudest empiricism or into forms of mysticism. This tension runs through every branch of the discipline.
- 3) "Mathematical Sciences". In this section, what is already established is taken as given. Particular mention is due, for the recent past, to certain discoveries in astronomy and in combinatorial analysis. It is emphasised, however, that there is a lack of a philosophy of mathematics and that this absence entails significant drawbacks: the history of the age must record this limitation until it is overcome.
- 4) "Scientific Physics in All Its Branches and Related Disciplines". The central focus of the treatment must be the prevailing tendency of the age, and in particular the conflict between empiricists and apriorists, which constitutes the true key to interpreting contemporary physical science. Therapeutics in the strict sense (*materia medica*, clinical practice) is not included here; its possible placement within the Institute will be discussed later.
- 5) "History". Fichte distinguishes between *descriptive history* (natural and geographical sciences) and *narrative history* in the proper sense. The introduction must clarify what history ought to be; the history of the age must then continually compare actual production with this idea until progress is achieved. This section includes: universal history (together with the question of whether such an undertaking is possible); the history of culture in general; the history of states, both general and particular; the history of opinions—that is, literary and philosophical history; learned theology, understood as the historical exposition of Christian doctrine (with the practical aspect excluded); and jurisprudence, conceived as the history of what has been, and is, regarded as law (juridical evaluation properly belongs to philosophy, while practical application will be treated later).
- 6) "Auxiliary Sciences". Among these are philology (as the science of language, distinct from pure history) and hermeneutics, both as autonomous discipline and as source of linguistics. Constant attention is required for the changes undergone by living languages—particularly the mother tongue—viewed

not as matters of art or style but as linguistic phenomena. Non-binding observations may also be made concerning the possible future development of such transformations.

- 7) "Art". A distinction is made between the expressive and the visual arts. *Pure arts*: poetry, music, painting, sculpture. The introduction should provide an overview of the present state of the arts and of their tasks; the history of the age will then judge works in the light of this criterion, highlighting the most significant productions from various countries. *Applied arts*: style in general—philosophical, historical, descriptive. The evaluation of style constitutes one of the Institute's principal tasks: works already judged on scientific grounds may be re-examined from the stylistic point of view, especially when they are exemplary, whether positively or negatively. Theoretical treatises on art are also included here.
- 8) "Mechanical Arts". This group includes therapeutics (materia medica, surgery etc.), technology, agriculture, and economics in general, as well as the military sciences. In addition to books dealing with these subjects, the history of the age must also record historical reports concerning new inventions, both national and foreign.
- 9) "Pedagogy (in the Broadest Sense)". This refers to the education of the young, with attention given both to both book production and information concerning educational institutions at various levels, as well as to the state of domestic instruction. The section also includes the question of popular education: through the Church (practical theology—sermons, catechisms, agendas, and theoretical writings on the subject); and through the State (the practical aspect of jurisprudence and politics, theoretical writings, and historical reports on new constitutions, laws, and regulations).

In the concluding part of the project, Fichte addresses the question of internal organisation and the relationship with the publishing sector. According to him, the first necessity is the appointment of a chief editor, responsible for the entire enterprise: it is his task to order the whole, to prepare the introductory section on the state of the scientific and artistic spirit, to appear publicly as the sole representative, to conclude the contract with the publisher, and to be answerable, ultimately, to the public, the publisher, and the other collaborators. Alongside this general role, there must be section editors, each presiding over a specific discipline. Their task is to organise the material within their respective domains; they independently select their collaborators and communicate exclusively with them, without being required to disclose their names to the chief editor. Each section editor also possesses the full right to modify, cut, and rework the texts received, to obtain a coherent whole; the same authority belongs to the chief editor with regard to the contributions submitted by the section editors. The system of remuneration is conceived hierarchically: the publisher recognises and remunerates only the chief editor, who in turn distributes the fees to the heads of the various sections, and these, in their turn, to their respective collaborators. The idea is that each volume of the work, regardless of its length,

should have a fixed price for the public, and that from this figure the fees for all levels of work should be calculated. Fichte also proposes an estimate of the necessary personnel. In addition to the chief editor—who might also serve as the head of the philosophical section—at least thirteen editors are required for the various fields. In total, therefore, there would be fourteen coordinating figures, to which should be added around twenty collaborators, distributed across the different sections, and a certain number of correspondents charged with providing news and materials from various cultural areas. The idea is that each volume of the work, whatever its length, should have a fixed price for the public, and that, based on this figure the fees for all levels of work should be calculated. Fichte also provides an estimate of the necessary personnel. In addition to the chief editor—who might also serve as the head of the philosophical section—at least thirteen editors are required for the various fields. In total, therefore, there would be fourteen coordinating figures, to which should be added around twenty collaborators, distributed among the different sections, and a certain number of correspondents responsible for supplying news and materials from various cultural areas.

An appendix to the project concerns relations with the publishing industry. Fichte stipulates that the publisher of the critical work must hold a right of pre-emption over the collaborators' manuscripts. If he accepts the terms another publisher has already granted to the author, the publication shall belong to him. In return, he is obliged to examine and to publish, under fair conditions agreed upon with the editors, the manuscripts recommended by the Institute. Scholars not formally belonging to the group may also submit their works for evaluation and a recommendation for publication, and in such cases the publisher shall enjoy the same right of pre-emption. All this is to be secured by means of a formal contract, guaranteed by an arbitral body, so that legal recourse may be possible in the event of violations. In the immediate term, Fichte observes, the search for a publisher is not a priority. The project, as conceived, is so solid and promising that any person of means and intelligence—whether a bookseller or not—would embrace it with enthusiasm. The true urgency, rather, lies in finding qualified individuals, organising them coherently, and ensuring their loyalty to the enterprise. It is precisely for this reason that Fichte insists once again on the absolute necessity of secrecy: rumours of similar initiatives are already circulating, and premature disclosure could irreparably compromise the project.

This document represents the most detailed formulation of the grand project. Owing to the difficulties—partly unforeseen—that hindered the ambitious journal plan, Fichte Fichte, as early as 8th February 1800, in a letter to Reinhold, presented scaled-down version: “to collect and publish a plan for the review of existing critical journals”. A journal that would review only other journals—the so-called *Journal in der zweiten Potenz* (Journal at the Second Power). On 8th February 1800, Fichte wrote to Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823), proposing that he co-edit the initiative. The idea was that there was no longer any sense in continuing to produce mere reviews of books, for by then, it was not books that had the greatest impact on the educated public,

but the reviews themselves. "The general public does not read books", Fichte says; "the reviews are its book".

Thus, if in the past works such as *Letters on Literature* (Lessing), the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, or the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* had influenced culture through the reviewing of books, it was now necessary to take a further step: to intervene upon the reviews themselves, for it was there that public opinion was now being formed. For this reason, Fichte speaks of a "journal at the second power": not reviews of books (first power), but reviews of the reviews (second power) the very place where the spirit of the age now "resides." Fichte therefore came to conceive the *Journal in der zweiten Potenz* as a publication entirely devoted to the critical examination of journals already in existence. The idea also arose in response to external circumstances, and in his letter to Reinhold he formulated it in the following terms:

I conceive it thus: since, in this field, one can no longer act according to a fixed plan (as would have been the case in that first draft), but, as it were, only by chance, the time is now past when, through book reviews, that powerful influence once exercised by, for example, the *Letters on Literature*, the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, or the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* could still be maintained. The great public does not read books at all; the reviews are its book. It is here, therefore, that one must take up the matter: the age no longer stands at the first, but at the second power (Fichte 1973, 212).

The motivations underlying this modification of the editorial project lay in the practice of philosophical reviewing in the various journals, whose number had by then become excessive. Fichte considered it necessary to intervene as soon as possible to expose the abuse of the reviewing practice. In this way, the public would lose its superstitious respect for reviews, and the journals devoted to criticism would either improve their quality or be destined to disappear. In this letter, Fichte formally asks Reinhold to assume the direction of the *Revisionsblatt*, so that the project might acquire the necessary prestige. The principal work was to be carried out by Fichte and Schelling. At the same time, the Schlegel brothers—with whom Fichte at that time maintained strained relations—were to be included only as subordinate collaborators. The project would also make it possible to establish a working group that could later be transferred to a broader editorial enterprise, extending beyond the mere field of reviews. However, at that time Reinhold was distancing himself from Fichte and drawing closer to the thought of Bardili, for whom he was preparing a highly favourable review of the *Grundriß der ersten Logik*. In his reply of 1st March 1800, Reinhold raised several objections—some of a practical nature, such as the difficulty of collaboration due to geographical distance, but also more substantive issues:

As is well known, we are by no means in such agreement concerning the tone to be adopted in judging those who think differently that either of us—you or I—would wish to make the other's judgment on this tone his own, without first knowing that judgment and the matter judged (Fichte 1973, 235).

And to this he added a more general reflection:

But how, and by what means, is it to be secured and guaranteed that this supreme guidance and direction of literature itself be correct; that the producing as well as the receiving public be not led astray instead of being guided; and that criticism—intended to remedy the defects of the literary sphere—does not itself become a new and the greatest of those defects? (Fichte 1973, 235).

After Reinhold's negative reply, Fichte appears to have definitively abandoned the *Revisionsblatt* project. One of the reasons for the failure of Fichte's editorial plan was that, while he was developing it in the first half of 1800 in Berlin, A. W. Schlegel was simultaneously making preparations in Jena for a critical journal of his own. Fichte was deliberately excluded from the invitations to collaborate on A. W. Schlegel's journal. Although it was intended that he should eventually be informed of the project, this was to happen only once all the preparations had been completed. The deeper causes of this divergence may be found in a remark contained in a letter from A. W. Schlegel to Schleiermacher, dated 21 April 1800:

In Fichte's proposals for a critical institute, as he has presented them to us both orally and in writing, everything is conceived on the model of a monarchical constitution and general subordination. This might well serve his own purposes, since he would aim entirely at system and systematic form; but within our entire circle, it would be quite impossible for him to find his account in such an arrangement. (Schleiermacher 1992, 486–87).

This critique of Fichte's method—founded upon a hierarchical structure—is closely connected with the Schlegels' rejection of the priority accorded to systematic form in philosophy, of which Fichte was at that time the most authoritative representative. Although Friedrich Schlegel recognised in the *Doctrine of Science* a peculiar status, there was a clear opposition to Fichte's systematic model. Already at the beginning of 1800, in two letters to Schleiermacher, Friedrich Schlegel had expressed doubts about Fichte's (and Schelling's) critical abilities. This point is particularly significant, since, as A. W. Schlegel wrote, "criticism is an indispensable organ of the great revolution against the immense mass of dullness, superficiality, dogmatism, pacifism, and sheer stupidity". These conceptual and methodological divergences thus lay at the root of the Schlegels' refusal to collaborate with Fichte and contributed to the failure of his editorial project. On 6th September 1800, Fichte wrote a letter to Schelling in which he explicitly declared that he did not wish to undertake any permanent commitment to the Schlegels' project. In a subsequent letter, dated 13th September 1800, Fichte expressed himself with even greater clarity, having just received a letter from Schelling dated 3rd September. In it, Fichte stated that he had never abandoned the idea of the editorial project as such, but had merely considered the proposed mode of realisation impracticable—a fact that at least Friedrich Schlegel ought to have been aware of. The letter also contains his more general criticism of the Schlegels: although he acknowledged their talent, Fichte did not regard them as qualified to assume the direction of a journal capable of exerting

a significant influence. For Fichte, indeed, the management of a philosophical-scientific periodical required solid scientific training, and the absence of such competence rendered the Schlegels unfit for a position of such responsibility.

This conviction was also the reason why Fichte warned Schelling of the danger of collaborating with A. W. Schlegel, who, in his view, had by then discredited himself through his manoeuvres. According to Fichte, it was precisely Schlegel's ambiguity and opportunism that had undermined the realisation of the great editorial project originally conceived in Jena. The failure to implement that plan represented, for Fichte, a serious loss for the philosophical debate in Germany, since a genuine forum for critical discussion ought to have ensured the rigour and systematic coherence necessary for the development of philosophical and scientific thought. By contrast, the Schlegels' journal, although addressing both artistic and scientific subjects, would not, in his estimation, have been equal to such an undertaking.

At the beginning of October 1800, in response to a letter from Schelling, Fichte once again mentioned a further plan that he wished to carry out together with him. In the months that followed, both began to take concrete steps towards bringing this new editorial project to life. However, despite this renewed attempt, the joint plan of Fichte and Schelling also encountered insurmountable difficulties: financial problems, the lack of a suitable publisher, and, above all, the fragmentation of the German philosophical and academic *milieu* made it impossible to realise a *kritisches Institut* that was truly worthy of Fichte's expectations.

This phase marked the definitive failure of all the editorial plans: Fichte was unable to bring to fruition his project of a rigorously scientific and systematic journal. Schelling, for his part, gradually distanced himself from both Fichte and the Schlegels, embarking on his own independent philosophical path. Finally, the Schlegels' project—although it did reach publication—remained far removed from the ideal of a systematic and unified journal that Fichte had envisaged.

The whole episode thus reveals the fragmentation of the German intellectual debate of the time: while Fichte sought to preserve a rigorously systematic framework, the Schlegels and Schleiermacher favoured a more fluid and pluralistic conception of thought and criticism. In the end, the dream of a great critical journal capable of guiding the philosophical debate in Germany remained unrealised, and the failure of these editorial ventures also marked the definitive separation between Fichte and the Jena Romantic circle.

Between October 1800 and the spring of 1801, Schelling, who was in Jena for his university lectures, was completing the formulation of his own philosophical system. In January 1801, he published a short work in which he sought to clarify the role of the philosophy of nature within the idealist system. In the spring, Schelling sent Fichte the manuscript of his *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* (published in May 1801), with the explicit intention of obtaining Fichte's assessment. This request marked the beginning of the final stage of their collaboration: the debate on the integration between transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of nature became a point of rupture. Between the spring and summer of 1801, their correspondence developed into a genuine

philosophical controversy, at the end of which their irreconcilable divergence of views became evident. This conflict ended their friendship. The journal project, which was to have been launched in the spring of 1801, was once again discussed between April and May, after a long period of silence on Schelling's part. During the winter of 1800/01, in fact, Schelling did not refer to the journal, as he was entirely absorbed in elaborating his own system of transcendental philosophy. At that point, Fichte began to feel the necessity of publishing the journal, also to respond to the criticisms and discussions that were beginning to develop around his new works on the *Doctrine of Science*. On 29th April 1801, Fichte wrote to Cotta, lamenting Schelling's silence:

I have received no news from Schelling concerning the journal that we had agreed upon during the winter. I therefore do not know where we stand. It is absolutely necessary that such a journal be published—perhaps even during this summer semester—in order to observe the reactions to my recent works on the *Doctrine of Science* (Schelling 2010, 340).

This letter reveals Fichte's impatience, as he felt the urgent need to publish a journal to defend and promote his thought, yet found himself without a response from Schelling and without clear editorial support. In the end, his ambition to found a rigorous and critical journal was never realised. The failure of the journal was not merely an editorial episode, but a symbol of the rupture between Fichte's transcendental idealism and Schelling's new orientation. This separation marked a decisive turning point in German philosophy of the period, preparing the ground for Schelling's rise as an independent thinker and, subsequently, for the emergence of Hegelian thought. Schelling, who still hoped for a philosophical rapprochement with Fichte, saw in his *Antwortsschreiben an Herrn Professor Reinhold* the long-awaited sign of a philosophical reconciliation in prospect, and he promised serious participation in the project, now postponed until the autumn of that year.

However, in October–November 1801 and then again in January 1802, the definitive philosophical break between the two occurred, rendering the joint publication of the planned critical journal entirely obsolete. The journal that eventually saw the light of day and was published by Cotta at the beginning of 1802 was not directed by Fichte and Schelling, but by G. W. F. Hegel and Schelling: the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*. Hegel, who had arrived in Jena at the beginning of 1801 to take up a teaching position in philosophy, had written to his friend Schelling on 2nd November 1800, expressing his desire for a public exposition and activity—an intention that could exert an even greater influence on Schelling's editorial plans since, through their joint stay in Jena, a (though temporary) convergence in their philosophical paths was achieved. The new *Journal*, as shown by the programmatic declaration contained in its editorial announcement, was conceived as an organ intended to bring philosophy back to the depth of its own centre amidst the philosophical dilettantism of an indistinct multitude. The task of philosophy was to restore all particular interests—and, more generally, all separations that had gradually arisen among the individual

parts of this living whole—to totality, so that every particularity would be annihilated. This philosophical programme, expressed in general terms, must be read against the background of Hegel's decision to embark upon an academic career in philosophy at Jena and, together with Schelling, to attempt to transcend Fichte's transcendental philosophy.

5. Conclusion

Let us now draw together the essential meaning of what has been said. First, the distinctive character of Fichte's position within the Jena circle clearly emerges, both conceptually and historically. Although Fichte is often identified with the epithet *Geist von Jena*, his stance was highly autonomous and can hardly be assimilated to a uniform speculative current. What Schleiermacher called "Fichte's monarchical constitution" [*Fichtes monarchische Anlage*] refers to the systematic structure of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which, centred on the *Ich* as absolute principle, provoked considerable controversy and proved problematic both in theoretical terms and in relation to the reactions of the academic and intellectual milieu of the time. Fichte's editorial plan, moreover, mirrors his philosophy in every respect. A further crucial aspect lies in the motive that drove Fichte to undertake this philosophical initiative. The *Wissenschaftslehre* is not merely a speculative system; it also responds to a specific pedagogical need. It aims to form not only knowledge but also the knowing subject itself, establishing the basis for intellectual and moral education in a radical sense. One might even say that, for Fichte, philosophical thought is inseparable from the need to preserve and institutionalise a space of autonomous reflection, in which knowledge is not merely transmitted but actively and responsibly constituted by the subject. Both these tensions converged in the project of a *journal at the second power*, which, although it never came to fruition, remains an emblem of Fichte's philosophical framework.

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Democratic Thresholds. Freedom, Trade and Politics in Fichte's *Closed Commercial State*, through its critics

Silvestre Gristina

Abstract: This article examines Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Closed Commercial State* (1800) through the lens of its critical reviews, showing how these functioned less as neutral scholarly judgments than as polemical interventions within a political battlefield. Indeed, the work—redefining property as a right to productive activity and proposing economic closure as the basis for distributive justice—sparked intense debate between 1800 and 1803. In conclusion, it is shown that these many divergent voices illustrate how the *Closed Commercial State* became a conceptual battlefield where competing visions of democracy and political economy at the dawn of modernity were negotiated and contested.

Keywords: Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Closed Commercial State, Reviews, Trade, Politics.

1. Introduction. Writing at the threshold

The title of this contribution invokes the notion of the “threshold”, and indeed, the discourse we intend to pursue engages with several, interrelated, threshold moments. The most immediate is, of course, the temporal threshold constituted by the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. Indeed, the work that will be taken into consideration, Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Closed Commercial State*, was published in January 1800, and the debate to which we shall refer extends into the early years of the new century, concluding around the beginning of 1803.

The second threshold is historical and political: it corresponds to the period of the French Revolutionary War of the Second Coalition.¹ These events constitute a decisive rupture in European history and, together with the debate opened by Kant's *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795), serve as the immediate historical backdrop for the polemical exchanges between Fichte and his critics.

The third threshold is historical-conceptual, located within the evolving discourse on modern politics and democracy, and concerns the internal ten-

¹ For a historical account of the French Revolutionary Wars, see the following studies: Schroeder 1994; Fremont-Barnes 2001; Esdaile 2001; Schneid 2007; Rapport 2013.

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sions and transformations that mark its theoretical development at the turn of the century.

Likewise, Fichte can be understood as a threshold thinker who embodies a moment of political and conceptual crisis within modernity. Over two decades of political experimentation and his critical stance toward democracy—alongside his attempts to correct its perceived distortions—reflect his sustained effort to reconceptualize politics amid a profound historical juncture. In this light, *The Closed Commercial State* emerges as a particularly compelling case. It became a focal point for debate among competing political positions during a critical period in European history.² This debate brings into relief the core tensions that, as Claudio Cesa argues, define Fichte's political thought: the relationship between freedom and order, between government and politics (On this respect, see Cesa 1968).

In the framework of these connected and interwoven thresholds, this contribution ideally represents the second part of an investigation concerning the critical reviews of Fichte's most politically "scandalous" works and is situated within the broader framework of research on the *political* and *polemical* nature of philosophical reviews.³ Indeed, far from being neutral or purely academic exercises, Fichte's case shows how reviews functioned as politically charged texts that intervened directly in public discourse, understood as a material and conceptual *Kampffplatz*. As such, they should be interpreted not only as instruments of critique and development within the "Republic of Letters", but also as polemical devices embedded in ideological and political struggles. This perspective legitimizes the study of reviews as sources for a material and alternative histories of philosophy,⁴ where epistemological positions are closely intertwined with political commitments.⁵

In this direction, while the first part of this investigation focused on Friedrich von Gentz's review of Fichte's *Beitrag* and, consequently, on the theoretical-political tensions originated from the event of the French Revolution; the present contribution addresses the controversy surrounding the issue of democracy and the related themes of state organization, justice, and freedom.

Indeed, this paper aims to demonstrate that *The Closed Commercial State* can be interpreted as an attempt to work within the limitations inherent in the modern concepts of sovereignty and democracy, through the construction of

² For a study on the reception of Fichte's *Closed Commercial State* in the socio-economic thought of his time, see, Stahl 2016.

³ For the first part of the present study, please see Gristina (forthcoming).

⁴ Concerning the attempt to rethink the canon of the history of philosophy and to think of alternative histories of philosophy, let me refer to the work of my Marie Curie project THiMe, which started in September 2025. For information about the project: <<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101152894>> ; Porject DOI: 10.3030/101152894> or <<https://www.unipd.it/en/msca-thime-gristina>> (accessed May 12, 2026).

⁵ On this point, please allow me to refer again to my previous article and, specifically, to the section 2.2, entitled *Method: Polemic Reviews for a Politics of Reviewing* (see Gristina forthcoming).

an original theoretical model that redefines several foundational concepts of the modern state, such as “property” and “subjective freedom”. It is a work born out of the political crisis unleashed by the French Revolution and, as such, an attempt to come to terms with those conceptual transitions that are typical of threshold moments

In an attempt to disentangle the complexity of this epochal entanglement, the present contribution will be divided into three sections and will culminate in an extended conclusion.

The first section addresses the aporia of democracy in Fichte’s thought from the perspective of conceptual history, drawing particularly on the Paduan tradition as elaborated by Giuseppe Duso⁶ and Gaetano Rametta.⁷

This conceptual groundwork sets the stage for the second section, in which I situate *The Closed Commercial State* within Fichte’s theory of the State and show the theoretical-political relevance of its approach to the problem of Political Economy.

The third and most extended part of the contribution will examine ten reviews published on the *Commercial State*, with particular attention to those of a polemical nature. This aspect is especially relevant for highlighting the political dimension of many of these reviews, often aimed at neutralizing a theoretical position perceived as carrying potentially dangerous political implications.⁸

In the conclusion, I will examine what is arguably the most significant review—Christoph Friedrich Nicolai’s. Indeed, Nicolai’s intervention makes it possible to reconstruct the conceptual tensions underlying Fichte’s whole political project, linking the Fichte-Gentz debate on the Revolution to the broader problematic opened by the *Closed Commercial State*. Specifically, Nicolai brings these tensions to light by highlighting an apparent contradiction between the claims advanced in the *Beitrag* and the theoretical framework of the *Closed Commercial State*.

In this way, his review functions as a hinge that enables a circular connection between my two contributions on the philosophical and polemical reception of Fichte’s political works from the perspective of their philosophical reviews. In this respect, even though the two articles can be read independently, share both methodological and thematic continuity.

⁶ For a general outline of this position, see Duso 1999; 2008.

⁷ For a general overview of this interpretation, see Rametta 1999; 2004; 2006; 2017. For further insights into Fichte’s late political thought, along this line of inquiry, see Gambaro 2020, 249–322; 2022.

⁸ Such is the case of Gentz’s review of Fichte, which I discussed in the aforementioned contribution: Gentz attempts to discredit Fichte’s *Beitrag* on a speculative level by highlighting certain theoretical limits or contradictions. However, his true aim is merely to neutralize a theoretical and political position that, from his perspective, is problematic because it is too radical. On this specific respect, see the section 3, entitled *Gentz’s Review of Fichte’s Beitrag: Epistemology and Politics* (see Gristina, forthcoming).

2. The problem of Democracy in Fichte's *Naturrecht*

In the *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre* (1796), Fichte critiques democracy and objects to its fundamental principle: the direct exercise of power by the people. Indeed, the democratic principle carries the risk of illegitimate and unauthorized rule by the majority. According to Fichte, the central problem of democracy lies in the tendency for the prevailing force to triumph in situations of dissenting opinion. This predominance, however, is merely factual and lacks normative legitimacy, thereby risking the emergence of despotic forms of power. In Fichte's perspective, the critique of democracy implies the detection of the lack of a representative principle that establishes a political form and authorizes the legitimate use of coercion. In this respect, Fichte adheres to the Hobbesian logic of modern political science and its contractualist and jusnaturalist model, evoking the function of the social contract, through which political authority is instituted.⁹ Thus, in the *Naturrecht* we find a critique of direct democracy and a suggestion of a shift towards a representative-type democratic model.

However, while Fichte engages in a direct critique that admits the possibility of a Hobbesian solution—namely, a power-authorizing contract—he simultaneously transcends the logic of modern political theory by foregrounding the foundational problem of legitimation. Indeed, Fichte acknowledges that individuals become depoliticized when their share of power is transferred to the state formed by the contract. Thus, we see

the production of the private and depoliticized dimension of the individual and 'bourgeois' individual, 'deprived' of the capacity for political action and bound to an irresistible relationship of command and obedience based on the 'fiction' that he himself willed and established it with others (Rametta 2004, 187).

The problem then arises of how to enforce and maintain a democratic instance within a representative system—that is, how to prevent the complete extinction of the community's political nature in opposition to constituted power. At this point, Fichte envisions the ephorate: a body elected based on trust and virtue to control and potentially interdict the constituted power. While this body diverges from Hobbes' model, it does not solve the problem of representation; rather, it reveals its critical and aporetic nature.

What Fichte envisions, then, is a representative democracy supplemented by a guarantor institution: the ephorate.¹⁰ However, the need to conceptualize ephorates indicates Fichte's acute awareness of the aporetic character of the *Naturrecht* and—at the same time—the internal paradox inherent in the modern device of power authorization. Indeed, on the one side,

⁹ On the adherence of Fichte's *Naturrecht* to the model of legitimation of political power inaugurated by Hobbes and characteristic of modern political science, see Rametta 2012, 127–58.

¹⁰ On the conceptual function of the Ephorate in Fichte's *Naturrecht*, see Rampazzo Bazzan 2006.

in accordance with the tradition of modern political thought, all legitimate forms of power are *democratic* because they derive their legitimacy solely from the unified will of ‘the people’ as the total body politic (Rametta 2004, 193);

but on the other, once the state is constituted through the social covenant, any act of resistance to its authority becomes conceptually illegitimate—a rational *impasse* or internal short-circuit in the sovereign will.

In this respect, Fichte’s *Naturrecht* discloses the aporetic and intrinsically conflictual nature of political power, a tension that the institution of the ephorate ultimately cannot resolve. This is because, since the Ephorate is also a representative body, it would produce a case of recourse to infinity. In this problematic horizon we must read the *Closed Commercial State* and, consequently, to interpret the criticisms and objections that Fichte’s critics expressed through their reviews.

3. The Closed Commercial State: a Brief Outline

As its subtitle suggests, *The Closed Commercial State* is presented as a “A philosophical sketch offered as an appendix to the Doctrine of Right and as a test of a politics to be delivered in the future”.¹¹ In this sense, the work engages on the one hand, with internal theoretical debates concerning the foundations and stability of the state, while on the other, it addresses broader questions of international peace¹² and international trade. In this, Fichte understands the connection between the Modern State and war, and he addresses it through a critique of the anarchy of trade at the international level.

From a general viewpoint, the *Closed Commercial State* is a complex work, which had many interpretations in history, in totalitarian, nationalist, socialist¹³ terms.¹⁴ In this respect, Isaac Nakhimovsky’s interpretation is particularly insightful, as he writes:

The political theory of *The Closed Commercial State* is neither socialist nor totalitarian in any straightforward sense. Fichte certainly shared his radical critique of the existing European order with Gracchus Babeuf and many other contemporaries. yet Fichte added a significant twist to their vision of a communal regime based on the natural social concord that would emerge after the corrupt edifice of European power politics had been torn down. Fichte’s aim was to show that the jurisprudential foundation of [the edifice of European power]—the

¹¹ An English edition of *Der geschlossene Handelsstaat* was published in 2012, with a translation and introductory essay by Anthony Curtis Adler (see Fichte 2012; Adler 2012a; 2012b).

¹² On the theme of peace in the *Closed Commercial State*, see Acosta 2019.

¹³ For a classic piece of scholarship on Fichte’s *Closed Commercial State* and socialism, see Léon 1914.

¹⁴ For classic and recent scholarly works, offering both an introduction and a deeper exploration of Fichte’s *Closed Commercial State*, see Verwey 1981; Lauth and Gliwitzky 1988; Nakhimovsky 2011; Adler 2012b; Rametta 2012; Hoffmann 2018; 2025; Arrese Igor 2018; Sabbatini 2020; Sabbatini and Spalletti 2020; Neuhann 2024; Heisenberg 2025.

theory of the state as an artificial political union of individuals—would remain unfinished until all citizens' right to work was established on the same basis as property rights. Fichte was indeed a socialist in the original, eighteenth-century sense of that term: he aspired to a fuller notion of community than the one that had been articulated by Hobbes's doctrine of natural law and eventually came to dominate the discipline of political economy (Nakhimovsky 2011, 157).

Thus, following Nakhimovsky, Hobbes and his aporias continue to constitute the effective horizon within which Fichte's thought operates. In his preliminary remarks on the title of *The Closed Commercial State*, indeed Fichte presupposes *Naturrecht's* model, asserting that just as the closed legal state is defined as a multitude of individuals subjected to common laws and unified under a sovereign authority, so must the sphere of economic exchange be similarly bounded: the state must restrict economic interaction to its own internal domain, thereby becoming a *closed commercial state*.

The project thus entails an intensification of the economic dimensions already discussed in the *Naturrecht*, yielding a work that simultaneously engages in political theory and offers a critique of political economy. Given its contractual foundation, the state is conceived as inherently democratic in both its origin and normative orientation. Yet, the nature of the mechanisms proposed to ensure economic closure, and the internal redistribution of resources reveals what has been termed a "democratic threshold", i.e., a critical point at which the tension between liberty and order becomes most pronounced. And it is precisely in addressing political economy as a domain for the internal and external stabilization of the state, that Fichte begins to actively reconfigure central categories of modern political thought, most notably those of property and freedom.

I will now briefly outline the most pertinent aspects of Fichte's argument in order to elucidate how he redefines the aforementioned concepts and to identify the elements likely to have provoked the strongest reactions among his most hostile and critical reviewers.

As a starting point, Fichte recognizes that, even after the formal establishment of the state, a form of atomism continues to manifest within civil society. While legal order ensures formal equality, the economic sphere remains governed by a quasi-natural state, perpetuating material inequalities. Expanding the Hobbesian insight, Fichte claims that unregulated individual freedom generates conflict even within an already constituted state. Here Fichte identifies unrestrained economic activity as a source of possible social disintegration. His proposed remedy begins with a reconceptualization of property, based on two assumptions: 1) the state consists of a community of free individuals who share a common sphere of action; and 2) property has to be understood not as exclusive dominion over objects, but as a right to exercise specific forms of free activity.¹⁵

¹⁵ On Fichte's theory of property see the following studies: Hahn 1994; Perrinjaquet 1997; James 2010; 2011; 2023; Wood 2016; Sabbatini 2018; Nomer 2019; Nance 2019; Blumenfeld 2023.

On this basis, the state is obligated to prevent *collisions* among citizens in the exercise of their respective activities by rationally distributing *spheres of action*. Consequently, it must regulate inter-class relations—among producers, artisans, and traders—and ensure that everyone receives what is owed to them by virtue of their status as citizens. Indeed, since the aim of all activity is the sustenance of life, the state’s responsibility becomes the rational distribution of the totality of possible activities into discrete spheres of action, each allocated to individual citizens.

These measures have been interpreted as constituting the foundation of a form of distributive justice.¹⁶ They articulate the principles of what may be described as a proto-socialist democratic model—one grounded in fundamental rights such as the right to life, to work, and to general well-being, the latter of which includes the valorization of leisure¹⁷ as an essential component of human flourishing. According to Isaac Nakhimovsky, Fichte’s model represents an early and significant instance of a critique of political economy.¹⁸ This is a noteworthy observation. Indeed, although Fichte’s approach is not even remotely comparable to a preview of Marx’s critique of political economy—and would, in fact, have likely fallen under the critical purview of Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program*—it nonetheless constitutes a polemical intervention against dominant economic doctrines of his time. As will be explored in the final section, Fichte directs pointed, although veiled, criticism toward the Smithian school of classical political economy, drawing criticism from his followers.

¹⁶ On this point, please consider the following studies: Fleischacker 2004, 160–61; Wood 2004; Nomer 2005 (works cited in Nakhimovsky 2011, 5–6). In addition, consider the following words by Nakhimovsky: “*The Closed Commercial State* was a development of the moral critique of commercial society and power politics that had animated Fichte’s early political thought. When August Wilhelm von Rehberg dismissed the ‘naïve’ principle that only those who worked could claim a right to eat, Fichte retorted in 1793 that surely it was more naïve to conclude that only those who did not work could claim that right. Such views were not exclusive to revolutionaries like Robespierre or Babeuf, [but] they were indicative of a much broader spectrum of eighteenth-century thought. Fichte’s more expansive conception of distributive justice reflects this broad dissatisfaction with the moral opacity of seventeenth-century natural-rights theories, which—so it seemed to many, including Rousseau—readily served to justify absolute sovereignty and the tremendous inequality brought about by the modern division of labor. However, [...] Fichte embedded his expansive conception of distributive justice in a rights theory that gave absolute priority to the independence of the individual” (Nakhimovsky 2011, 126).

¹⁷ On leisure time in relation to the problem of distributive justice, see James 2012.

¹⁸ On this point, please consider the following passage by Nakhimovsky: “Fichte again took a big step beyond Sieyès and Kant in suggesting that this kind of constitutionalism could restrain an administration with a vastly greater responsibility: it would have to control the monetary system and regulate the entire economy in order to realize a significantly more expansive conception of justice. In making this kind of proposal, as contemporaries realized, *The Closed Commercial State* extended Fichte’s rights theory into a critique of political economy” (Nakhimovsky 2011, 12).

In any case, from these measures to ensure social peace and material equality among citizens, Fichte deduces the need for the closure of the State. Within this system, indeed, the progressive economic closure of the state is essential to maintaining the internal equilibrium of social functions. In fact, the introduction of external flows of trade would disrupt the carefully calibrated distribution of activity within the state, undermining the rational organization of its economic life. It can therefore be argued that it is Fichte's theory of property that requires the closure of the state as a guarantee.

This economic closure, according to Fichte, constitutes the central task of politics, understood as the science concerned with the governance of the empirical state. The aim of politics, then, is to progressively align the existing state with the rational ideal of a state governed according to reason. As a domain autonomous from law, the exercise of politics must involve the decision to sever the state from foreign trade, and to implement concrete measures directed toward commercial autarchy.¹⁹

In practical terms, this regulatory role involves a range of institutional measures: guaranteeing the right to work—as we have seen—, establishing a national currency and a monetary system,²⁰ and closing the state to foreign trade. These policies are directed toward the creation of a social order in which all individuals may attain the highest degree of human fulfillment with the least amount of labor and within the shortest working time.

As several of its critics have noted, the model of economic autarchy envisioned in *The Closed Commercial State* which aspires toward a condition of homeostatic equilibrium, necessitates a fundamental reconfiguration of the concept of freedom. In contrast to the more flexible, class-based distributive framework articulated in the *Naturrecht*, the *Closed Commercial State* introduces a markedly more rigid and prescriptive socio-economic order. Moreover, the principle of state closure entails the establishment of an elaborate system of internal and external controls, including a complex passport regime that severely restricts the free movement of individuals across national boundaries, an exception being granted solely to intellectuals.

In addition, in order to implement economic closure, the state would necessarily have to expand to or retract within what Fichte designates as its *natural boundaries*. According to the philosophy of history underpinning Fichte's model, the principal cause of war among nations is the unregulated pursuit of free trade. Consequently, the establishment of economically self-sufficient states confined within their natural borders is envisioned as a prerequisite for the realization of genuine and lasting peace. Importantly, this model of closure is not intended to impede the moral or intellectual progress of humanity. Rather—as just anticipated—such progress would be sustained through the transnational

¹⁹ On this respect, allow me to refer to Gristina 2025a, 829.

²⁰ On Fichte's theory of money, see Nance 2024.

circulation of intellectuals, who facilitate the exchange of ideas and scientific advancements independently of economic exchange.

Thus, what emerges from Fichte's model is a conception of freedom that is distinctly non-liberal—a point that constituted a major stumbling block for many of his contemporaries. This form of freedom exposes the internal tensions within what is conventionally understood as democratic theory become particularly salient. In fact, on the one hand, Fichte envisions a comprehensive welfare system, which guarantees material equality and freedom, alongside a principle of inclusion for those who seek to become members of the state. Yet, on the other hand, individual freedom is subject to significant constraints, both in terms of the internal socio-economic organization of the state and in relation to external interaction, particularly the regulation of communication and exchange with other states. This dialectic exposes the friction between collective order and individual freedom, offering a glimpse of a form of social freedom, founded on radical and constant equality.

4. The Part about the Critics

Let us now turn to the part about the critics. In this section we shall examine the reviews published in the three years following the publication of the *Closed Commercial State*,²¹ which reveal how Fichte's theories of property and—above all—of freedom disrupted the traditional political framework upheld by his conservative interlocutors. According to Erich Fuchs' detailed reconstruction, eleven such reviews were produced, spanning a spectrum of responses: some were overtly negative, others cautiously positive or neutral.²² Many contain extensive descriptive summaries of the work's content, while several alternate between appreciative observations and expressions of astonishment at certain aspects of the text. Moreover, the reviews were all published anonymously, except for one—Adam Heinrich Müller's—and it is to Fuchs's credit that he reconstructed the authorship of Møller, Rehberg, and Nicolai in the other three reviews whose authors are known

What is particularly noteworthy, however, is the structure and tone of the negative reviews, in which the political-polemical character of the critiques becomes most pronounced. These can be broadly categorized into three main ideological currents. Indeed, Fichte's proposals are challenged by thinkers from liberal-conservative and reactionary camps, as well as by an older generation of Enlightenment progressives such as Nicolai—though by this point, Nicolai's position had already begun to shift toward a more conservative orientation.

²¹ On the history of the early reception of the *Closed Commercial State*, see Lauth and Gliwitzky 1988, 14–36.

²² All the eleven reviews that will be analyzed are collected in the third volume of *J. G. Fichte in zeitgenössischen Rezensionen* (see Fuchs, Jacobs and Schieche 1995, 175–290).

On one side, critics such as Malthe Christian Møller—publishing on Gentz’s journal—and August Wilhelm Rehberg directly or indirectly revive earlier polemics with Fichte’s *Beitrag*, deploying Burkean arguments against the rationalist foundation of politics and warning against grounding political structures “just upon a theory”. On the other, figures such as Adam Müller—whom Carl Schmitt later classifies as a representative of “political romanticism”—extend these critiques in a more explicitly reactionary direction, while still overlapping with liberal-conservative concerns. Meanwhile, Nicolai articulates a critique like the liberal position, though in some respects more refined and theoretically nuanced.

Across these divergent ideological positions, four central lines of criticism emerge, appearing, albeit with variations—in nearly all the reviews:

- 1) *The abstractness of speculative politics*: Critics argue that Fichte’s reliance on purely theoretical constructs risks imposing abstract principles on the complexity of empirical political life, potentially leading to catastrophic authoritarian outcomes.
- 2) *The problem of individual freedom*: Several reviewers contend that the *Closed Commercial State* entails an unacceptable limitation of personal liberty. Rehberg, for instance, describes the model as “a vast penitentiary,” while Nicolai condemns it as a form of “tyrannical despotism.”
- 3) *The conception of property and the theory of money*: Fichte’s redefinition of property as exclusive access to spheres of activity—rather than possession of material goods—was widely rejected by critics. At the same time, Fichte’s proposals regarding a state-controlled monetary system were often ridiculed as utopian or fantastical.
- 4) *The theory of natural boundaries*: Fichte’s invocation of “natural boundaries” as a basis for determining the territorial limits of the state, which many deemed fictitious or arbitrary.²³

At a deeper level, these criticisms reflect political positions intent on discrediting Fichte’s intervention for various ideological reasons. Indeed, *The Closed Commercial State* articulates a vision that runs counter to the dominant Burkean-Smithian²⁴

²³ The credit for having reorganized the critique into four general profiles goes to Sabbatini, whose approach makes the analysis clearer and more focused, see Sabbatini 2020, 39–41.

²⁴ The convergence between Burke and Smith in political economy, though shaped by different intellectual trajectories, reveals a shared commitment to liberal principles. Both opposed mercantilist constraints and emphasized the importance of free trade and voluntary economic relations. Burke, while arriving at these positions independently, recognized the significance of *The Wealth of Nations* and endorsed key aspects of Smith’s analysis—particularly the critique of protectionism and the role of economic freedom in fostering individual development. For Burke, as for Smith, economic liberty was not solely a question of policy but was tied to broader anthropological and political considerations—namely, the cultivation of human autonomy and the conditions of social progress. This shared foundation would go on to inform several strands of later liberal thought, especially—as we have seen—in opposition to nationalist or interventionist models of economic organization.

paradigm of political and economic liberalism.²⁵ Moreover, many of the practical measures Fichte proposes—such as property redistribution, price regulation, and the elimination of entrenched class privileges—were perceived by his critics as dangerously reminiscent of Jacobin policies during the French Revolution.²⁶ This section will briefly examine the positions of Møller and Rehberg, and Müller, as well as others less relevant positions. The conclusion shifts to Nicolai’s perspective, providing an opportunity to revisit and synthesize the key themes explored throughout, particularly highlighting the tensions underpinning the development of Fichte’s political thought.

4.1 Møller-(Gentz)’s Review

Danish theologian Malthe Christian Møller’s review²⁷ was published anonymously in the *Historisches Journal*, edited by Gentz, and was unsurprisingly mistaken for a contribution by Gentz himself.²⁸ The text adopts a critical stance rooted in a liberal-conservative tradition and, as Nakhimovsky demonstrates, is part of a broader debate on international trade inaugurated by Alexandre-Maurice Blanc de Lanauette comte d’Hauterive, according to which, peace could not be achieved without the suppression of free international trade and the containment of British hegemony, which he believed rested on jealousy rather than on the principle of reciprocity. Gentz, among the German intellectuals who supported the English model as articulated by Burke, responds by attacking

²⁵ For a detailed reconstruction of the elements of economic thought in Fichte’s *Closed Commercial State* and the reasons for its contrasts with the economic theories of the time, see Spalletti 2017; Sabbatini 2018; Sabbatini 2020; Sabbatini and Spalletti 2020.

²⁶ On these aspects, please consider the following words by Arrese Igor: “Christian Gottfried Körner among others can be mentioned, who in a letter to Schiller dated 29th December 1800 wrote that *The Closed Commercial State* has tried to conduct ‘political witchcraft’ (*politische Ketzerei*), which only Robespierre would have dared to carry through in his ‘system of terror’ (*Schreckenssystem*); this would transform Fichte into a ‘philosophical Attila’. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in the same sense, wrote in the back cover of his exemplar of the text that ‘Fichte would have been a much more pernicious and despicable tyrant than Caligula or Elagabalus’ (Nakhimovsky 2011, 4)” (Arrese Igor 2018, 217).

²⁷ In *Historisches Journal*. Herausgegeben von Friedrich Gentz. Jg. 2 Bd. 3 Berlin, Dezember 1800. S. 711–51 (see Fuchs, Jacobs and Schieche 1995, 175–81).

²⁸ Nakhimovsky devotes a brief section to the alleged review by Gentz (see Nakhimovsky 2011, 63–659), but in my view he reiterates a mistaken attribution originating with Buhr and Dietzsch (see Buhr and Dietzsch 1984), to whom he explicitly refers. Erich Fuchs, who should be regarded as the most authoritative voice in this field, attributes the review to Møller, who in 1796 had also translated Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* in Danish (see Kant 1796 and Duichin 2017, 53). In this case, the order of the elements changes, but not the outcome: the *Historisches Journal* was edited by Gentz, and it is likely that he commissioned Møller to write a review that would revisit the debate on perpetual peace, including a political reference to Fichte’s text: in any case, it is a polemical review, written from a conservative standpoint, in which Møller’s voice merely conveys the conservative critique that Gentz himself would have expressed in much the same way.

d'Hauterive's theory, which exhibits striking affinities with Fichte's analysis of international commerce. Following Burke and Thomas Brooke Clarke, Gentz invokes Smith's claim that a free international market is compatible with a constitutional federation of Europe.²⁹

Turning to the review itself, Møller authored a text entitled *On Perpetual Peace*, in which he examines Fichte's notion of "closed commercial state", interpreting it as an attempt—albeit implicit—to establish perpetual peace. According to Møller,

In order to prevent once and for all that the nations inhabiting a certain part of the Earth come into conflict with one another, there are three different means—under which all proposals thus far made for the promotion of eternal peace are included and must necessarily be included. The *first* is the absolute *unification* of these nations into one and the same state, thereby eliminating all conflicts that arise from the separation of their governments. The *second* is their absolute *separation*, or a constitution of states in which any interest one might have in violating the rights of another would cease to exist. The *third*, finally, is an organization of the social whole formed by these nations, by virtue of which their disputes would have to be settled by peaceful means—and could be settled in no other way (Møller 1800, 175).

Thus, according to the author, there are three conceivable paths toward achieving peace: 1) the formation of a single state uniting all nations; 2) the absolute separation of states; 3) a confederation of states, that would be Gentz's preferred solution. On this regard, Møller writes that

the second means of establishing lasting peace between states [...] would not need further discussion if a famous German philosopher had not recently explained it in detail in one of his books and seriously recommended it (Møller 1800, 176)

and he cites Fichte's work in a footnote, adding that although peace is not Fichte's explicit objective, it is nonetheless presented as a necessary consequence of his system (see Møller 1800, 176n). Møller then reconstructs Fichte's main arguments regarding the closure of trade, the creation of a national currency, the guarantee of subsistence for all, price control, police enforcement, and the establishment of natural borders.

On the latter point, the Danish thinker offers a particularly pointed critique: in another footnote, he dismisses the idea of natural borders as both "ridiculous" and "unsustainable," stating that "whoever descends, even for a moment, from the phantoms of the imagination to the nature of things will soon realize that there are no natural or necessary limits" (Møller 1800, 177) and asserting that no border is capable of halting international relations (see Møller 1800, 177–78n).

²⁹ On this debate, see Nakhimovsky 2011, 65, 84–94 and Forsyth 1980.

In principle, Møller concedes that Fichte's system, if feasible, might indeed reduce the frequency of war. However, he raises the question "whether this would be too high a price to pay for eternal peace" (Møller 1800, 178–79). For Møller, the impracticability of Fichte's project is self-evident; it is not even defensible as a "philosophical dream" (Møller 1800, 179).

Trade and exchange, he argues, have historically driven human progress. Without them, there would be no culture; humanity would be reduced to the mere preservation of physical existence, devoid of ambition, enjoyment, or the capacity for great undertakings. In such a condition, inertia and obscurity would prevail. This would also entail the loss of absolute freedom. In a footnote, Møller underscores that Fichte's proposal runs counter to the spirit of the age and to the cosmopolitan ideals espoused by many contemporary philosophers.³⁰

Indeed, he writes:

The system is a very strange phenomenon for these times. The imagination of a spoiled despot could not easily conceive of a tyranny so complete, so regular, and so profoundly organized as that preached here in the name of reason (Møller 1800, 180n).

And he then closes the footnote with a warning: "Such reckless experiments as the *Closed Commercial State*, however ingeniously conceived, must *not* be handed over to us as an appendix to legal theory or as an introduction to future politics" (Møller 1800, 180n).

Thus, for Møller, the impulse toward freedom that unites all nations must be allowed to flourish, since it is the most human of all impulses and the principal engine of progress. Anything that hinders it must be regarded as a moral evil. As he writes:

We hate war; but if it is unfortunately eternally bound up with the great community of nations, we must bear it as one bears a heavy tax, in order to enjoy the infinitely superior advantages of a civilized constitution. [...] If peace can only be achieved through the eternal separation of nations, then the decision has already been made: we will remain as we are and renounce eternal peace (Møller 1800, 181).

4.2 An Anonymous Review and Rehberg's Review

If Møller's review was directly polemical, the second review in chronological order is mostly descriptive and not overtly negative. However, it raises the same issue as Møller, though in the form of a question. More importantly, it emphasizes the problem of individual freedom—a theme that will resurface in the harshest of the criticisms. The review was published anonymously in the *Neueste*

³⁰ On the problem of cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan rights in Fichte, see Picardi 2022.

Critische Nachrichten in January 1801³¹ and begins by acknowledging Fichte's clear intent to highlight the problems of unrestricted free trade, but immediately questions whether the analysis is one-sided:

It is clear that the authors particular intention is to demonstrate the many disadvantages of completely free trade. But shouldn't its advantages in terms of industry, enlightenment, and refinement also be taken into account and weighed against each other (Anonym 1801a, 182).

Despite the overall positive tone—where the author is described as “sharp,” and the text as “very clear and well written”—a more serious concern is raised at the end of the review. Here, the anonymous critic questions the broader implications of the proposed reforms, particularly in terms of their impact on personal and political freedoms:

The author [of the review] can only ask whether, with these arrangements, even if they were possible, the freedom of the citizen might not be too greatly restricted; whether cosmopolitanism and general benevolence might not be excessively suppressed [...] whether national pride might not be too strongly promoted and, finally, whether too much arbitrary power might not be granted to the government (Anonym 1801a, 184).

It is interesting to note that this final concern—regarding the excessive power granted to the state and the loss of citizens' individual freedom—is at the heart of the critical review by Rehberg, the so-called “German Burke”. This is another characteristically conservative review, and it is published anonymously in the *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* in February 1801.³²

As is well known, Rehberg had previously been the polemical target of Fichte's *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die Französische Revolution*, where he was portrayed as embodying the classical conservative opposition to the French Revolution.

Adopting a position akin to that of Edmund Burke, Rehberg criticizes Fichte's *Closed Commercial State* for being derived solely from abstract rational concepts, independent of any empirical observation of the world, of human beings, or of their needs. He thus directs his critique at those he describes as “metaphysical politicians” (Rehberg 1801, 214), remarking that “in speculative sciences, it is much more useful to abstain completely from any consideration of reality” (Rehberg 1801, 215), since one possible outcome of such abstract theorizing could be the “great penitentiary, which [Fichte] defines as a *closed commercial state*” (Rehberg 1801, 216).

³¹ In *Neueste Critische Nachrichten*. St. 3. Greifswald, 17. Januar 1801. S. 17–9 (see Fuchs, Jacobs and Schieche 1995, 181–84).

³² In *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*. St. 32 vom 23 Februar 1801. S. 313–19 (Fuchs, Jacobs and Schieche 1995, 214–18).

Moreover, Rehberg highlights Fichte's failure to consider the volatility of rulers' interests. In this sense, he writes:

Just as little consideration has been given to the natural inclinations and impulses of citizens, so too has the author considered little that rulers are human beings. For him, the sovereign of the state of reason is pure reason (Rehberg 1801, 216).

Here, Rehberg clearly underscores what he sees as the excessive idealization underlying Fichte's conception of sovereignty, in which the empirical limitations of political agents are disregarded in favor of abstract rationalism.

Furthermore, Rehberg accuses Fichte of presupposing the closure of the state, thereby undermining the coherence of his own argument. He argues that "the first step has been taken to return, through a cycle of fruitless speculations and chimerical projects, to the starting point" (Rehberg 1801, 217). Following earlier accusations of abstraction and demagoguery—tendencies he claims threaten to corrupt the minds of the young generations—Rehberg further charges that Fichte possesses no real knowledge of monetary theory or political economy (see Rehberg 1801, 218) and concludes by suggesting that it would be more appropriate for such "metaphysical reformers" to consult genuine experts in these domains before venturing into such speculative territory.

4.3 Müller's Review

The final explicitly conservative review is that of the economist and politician Adam Heinrich Müller,³³ published in the *Neue Berlinische Monatschrift* (edited by Friedrich Nicolai's ally, Johann Erich Biester—himself a known critic of Fichte) in December 1801.³⁴ As mentioned, Müller's review is the only one that

³³ Adam H. Müller was encouraged by his close friend Friedrich von Gentz to pursue political science and formed a deep intellectual and personal bond with him—an influence that shaped Müller's development and political path. Through Gentz, he was introduced to Klemens von Metternich and contributed to drafting state documents, solidifying his place in conservative political circles. A committed conservative, Müller opposed liberal thinkers like Montesquieu and Rousseau, advocating instead for a state based on absolute authority. Alongside figures such as Burke, Gentz, de Maistre, and von Haller, he stood as a key critic of revolutionary ideals in the post-Enlightenment era. Despite his closeness to Gentz, Müller rejected Adam Smith's materialist and individualist view of society, which he saw as narrowly English. In contrast, he emphasized the ethical and religious foundations of political economy and the state's moral duties to its citizens. Nevertheless, at this stage and in his review of Fichte, Müller appears aligned with certain liberal positions of Smithian inspiration. Müller's pro-Smithian stance in this piece is likely to be attributed to the influence of Friedrich Gentz. On this last point, see Spalletti 2017, 4. In any case, though his reactionary and religious views limited his reception during his lifetime, Müller's work remains a distinctive and significant contribution to the tradition of post-revolutionary conservatism.

³⁴ In *Neue Berlinische Monatschrift*. Herausgegeben von Biester. Bd. 6. Berlin und Stettin, Dezember 1801. S. 436–58 (see Fuchs, Jacobs and Schieche 1995, 248–60).

bears the author's signature on the last page.³⁵ This is one of the most detailed and critical reviews, in which many themes from earlier reviews are revisited, often with more complex and precise arguments. In the first pages, Müller writes:

In the political literature of Germany, a writer who had previously shown himself in this field—mask, and not exactly with great brilliance—and whose practical calling had made many other literary utterances suspect, now appears with open visor, not as a philosophical author of the general state of reason, but as the politicizing founder of a “closed commercial state”, [which] despite the faithful earnestness of its founder, remains one of the most wanton games the century of enthusiasm has seen (Müller 1801, 249–50).

Thus, Müller somehow accuses Fichte of playing at being a politician or an economist and of having abandoned his logical vocation, alleging that the text wanders from one contradiction to the next. From Müller's perspective, Fichte's proposals for internal economic administration are to be considered *Träumerei* (Müller 1801, 250) and appear to be based on nothing more than “hearsay on short journeys, on German country roads; observations in his own small domestic economy” (Müller 1801, 254).

As an economist, Müller directly tackles the issue of the practical viability of Fichte's economic theory and, although from an ideologically positioned standpoint, in the main body of the review he at least pretends to take Fichte's perspective seriously, showing the real effects that the closure of the state could provoke in terms of a general impoverishment of the population. In fact, he writes:

Mr. Fichte wants to destroy world trade at all costs [...]. Mr. Fichte says: “All possibility of world trade rests on the possession of the means of exchange valid throughout the world. Gold and silver are valid throughout the world; I abolish them, create national money, and world trade is impossible; my state is closed”. “Not too quickly! The economist replies: It is precisely in world trade that the medium of exchange is most dispensable; for where one trades in large, uniform quantities, exchange is very easy. And then, your ingenious experiment is supposed to be possible only with a rich state; its balance of trade is therefore supposed to have been little disadvantageous, perhaps even advantageous, before the closure [...]. Yet another instrument of destruction lives, unknown to yourself in your ignorance, in your commercial state: the all-ruling, all-killing principle of stagnation and poverty” (Müller 1801, 249–50).

At this point, before reaching his conclusions, Müller presents a kind of counter-history of humanity—a conservative philosophy of history in which his ideological position clearly emerges, echoing the classic Burkean-Gentzian line of argument. He maintains that both human and animal life begin with basic physical needs, but humans, endowed with greater sensitivity and adapt-

³⁵ For a study specifically devoted to Müller's review of Fichte's *Closed commercial state*, see Marquardt 1991.

ability, are destined to extend their influence across the earth. Though limited by space and time, humans transcend these constraints through society, which enables language, self-awareness, and meaningful engagement with the world.

According to Müller, as human communities spread and adapt to different environments, they develop distinct cultures and skills. Struggles with nature and with one another reveal individual capacities and social functions. Gradually, reason emerges within society, replacing violence with exchange as the foundation of peaceful coexistence. Agriculture binds humans to the land, giving rise to permanent settlements. From here, laws of property and inheritance emerge, forming the basis of the state, which secures order, facilitates the division of labor, and fosters commerce. As needs multiply, so does interdependence—even those once engaged in violence are drawn into systems of trade.

From this historical vision, Müller draws his conclusions: wealth and culture are built upon the sacrifices of earlier generations. Social inequality—between rich and poor, rulers and subjects—is not a flaw but a necessary stage in the path toward collective well-being. In time, reason leads society back toward an ideal of equality—not natural, but rational—realized slowly and lawfully, with each step grounded in the achievements of the past, ensuring stable and lasting progress for all (see Müller 1801, 257–59).

Indeed, Müller concludes and signs his review, by saying that:

Whether this goal [equality] can be attained or not, it is certain that it will only be attained by the shortest path, *so that no step forward is made without the guarantee of the previous step by law and by the nature of the thing*. In this spirit speaks the system of *Adam Smith*, the great founder of political economy, with whose memory every writing on the subject ought to conclude, and to whom one rightly asks forgiveness for every hour spent on a work of political economy [...] which gains whatever significance it has only through the unfortunate constellations of the time—only through the grandeur and impudence of the presumption with which such ignorance dares to present itself (Müller 1801, 260).

4.4 Other anonymous reviews

This final section of the “part about the critics” is devoted to a brief chronological overview of the remaining anonymous reviews, which are shorter and less dense than the others. While the focus so far has been on critical and negative reviews—more relevant to understand the political tensions sparked by Fichte’s work—this last account considers mostly positive responses, except for one brief negative note.

The first³⁶ of these last reviews is a brief, but positive comment to Fichte’s work. It focuses on the *new theory of property*, which the reviewer considers gen-

³⁶ In *Eunomia. Eine Zeitschrift des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts. Von einer Gesellschaft von Gelehrten*. Herausgegeben von Feßler und Rhode. Bd.1. Berlin, Januar 1801. S. 14–7 (see Fuchs, Jacobs and Schieche 1995, 211–14).

uinely innovative. He or she declares his or her appreciation of Fichte's conceptual shift: property is not framed as a *right to a thing*, but rather as a *right to an activity*. This reinterpretation is seen as a valuable contribution to legal theory, casting a "beneficial light on a still obscure object of the theory of right" (Anonymous 1801b, 211). The reviewer emphasizes the clarity and practical applicability of the theory, by saying that "the clarity and comprehensibility that this theory can bring to all claims about property, as well as its universal applicability to real life, are clear evidence of its correctness" (Anonymous 1801b, 213). Overall, then, the review is very concise, affirming the merits of Fichte's *Closed Commercial State* without further elaboration.

The second review³⁷ of this group is another positive comment, that describes Fichte's work as highly relevant to the current political and intellectual climate. According to the reviewer, rather than presenting idealistic or impractical fantasies, Fichte offers concrete proposals aimed at alleviating the suffering of citizens and encouraging a deeper moral orientation. In this sense, one of the review's most striking features is its meta-critical perspective: it anticipates, and lays bare a common rhetorical tactic among ideological opponents, i.e., criticizing a political proposal on the grounds of formal inconsistency or logical weakness, while concealing the deeper, actual resistance to its concretely political aims.

The reviewer confronts this strategy head-on, insisting that any serious critique must address the *Closed Commercial State's* fundamental moral and political commitments, clearly admitting that the real issue, is not the alleged irrationality or contradiction of Fichte's arguments, but rather the opposition to the specific political outcomes he envisions. Indeed, the reviewer claims that

if one wished to attack it, the critique would have to be directed against the principles and aims for the State—[namely,] to value each person for what theirs is rightfully, to help each individual attain what is due to them as a member of humanity (Anonymous 1801c, 219).

In short, then, the reviewer suggests that this kind of political theory would be unintelligible only to a superficial "empiricist" mind, lacking depth in philosophical understanding, and—we might add—to political opponents, i. e., those who seek to protect the status quo by perpetuating and reproducing its power structures and the inequality they produce.

The third review is probably the most positive.³⁸ The *Closed Commercial State* is praised as "rich in truth," and Fichte is hailed as an "outstanding teacher." Moreover, the reviewer asserts that the book surpasses all of Fichte's previous writings in both rigor and execution, declaring:

³⁷ In *Litteratur-Zeitung*. Nr. 86/87. Erlangen, 4./5. Mai 1801. Sp. 681–96 (see Fuchs, Jacobs and Schieche 1995, 219–38).

³⁸ In *Literaturzeitung von Salzburg*. St. 133/134 vom 14. August 1801. S. 193–97. Rubrik: *Philosophische Wissenschaften* (see Fuchs, Jacobs and Schieche 1995, 238–41).

I can confidently state that the author has never produced a work of such perfection, and, in general—except for Schelling’s system of transcendental idealism—hardly any other work in our literature could match it in terms of consistent and complete derivation from principles, precision of expression, and luminous presentation (Anonymous 1801d, 241).

The fourth review³⁹ is particularly interesting. After providing a detailed account of *The Closed Commercial State’s* content, the reviewer concludes that, although certain aspects of the book may raise questions and doubts about the applicability of Fichte’s ideas, the work remains valuable in its own right—if only for the depth of reflection it provokes (see Anonymous 1801e, 247–48). Its philosophical rigor and systematic structure are seen as major contributions to contemporary thought, as they compel politicians and economists to confront core issues related to war and economic inequality.

The fifth review⁴⁰ is an openly polemical review, but one that highlights a crucial point: it shows that *The Closed Commercial State* is ultimately an attempt to transform a condition that is already tyrannical and despotic, proposing a different, maybe more consistent and problematic, kind of tyranny. In this perspective, in the last pages of the text, the reviewer writes:

Mr. Fichte demands nothing less than a general and deeply oppressive form of slavery, entirely in the spirit of Lycurgus—whom, astonishingly, many still admire. Yet he proceeds in a more honorable way: not only more consistently than those who cry out “Crucify him!” with such loudness and frenzy, but also with the self-awareness to admit that his plan will ultimately remain *a mere academic exercise, without any real-world success*. Whether Mr. Fichte one day awakens from his philosophical dreams or not, he can at least leave this world with the great consolation that his political fantasies and follies have done no actual harm. This is a consolation many of our celebrated political writers cannot claim—those who, unlike Mr. Fichte, did not stop at the immediate consequences of their principles. Had they gone further, as he did, they might have revealed—to themselves or at least to their audience—that their ideas lead not to justice, but to screaming injustices and a tyranny that destroys all that is good and noble (Anonymous 1802, 278–79).

Thus, the author of the review dismisses the Fichte’s project as grounded in ignorance of monetary theory and describes its content as no more than “philosophical dreams”; he or she criticizes the political vision laid out by Fichte, interpreting not as a utopia, but as a form of dystopian authoritarianism. In a

³⁹ In *Gelehrte Anzeigen*. St. 80/81. Tübingen, 5./8. Oktober 1801. S. 633–40; 643–45 (see Fuchs, Jacobs and Schieche 1995, 241–48).

⁴⁰ In *Revision der Literatur in den drey letzten Quinquennien des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts in Ergänzungsblättern zur Allgemeinen Literatur-Zeitung dieses Zeitraums*. Jg. 2, Bd. 2, Nr. 146/147/148. Jena u. Leipzig 1802. Sp. 537–44; 545–52; 553–55. Rubrik: *Staatswissenschaften* (see Fuchs, Jacobs and Schieche 1995, 261–79).

sense, the reviewer claims that Fichte's proposed remedies to injustice are deeply tyrannical, replacing one form of domination with another, but at least—as we have read—the program is stated clearly and as an abstract proposal, unlike current rulers, who govern in tyrannical manner while ideologically concealing their true intentions.

The last⁴¹ of these anonymous reviews adopts a more analytical tone than the previous one. While the reviewer remains skeptical of Fichte's proposal, he or she does not dismiss it outright. Unlike earlier critics who declared Fichte's ideas "irrational" or "impossible," this author acknowledges that they are both logically and practically possible but argues that they are nevertheless undesirable for the history of humanity (see Anonymous 1803, 290). The approach is relatively fair: the reviewer presents the content accurately and offers counterarguments without resorting to polemic. The tone is neutral to negative but avoids hostility. It reflects a willingness to engage with the work on its own terms, even while ultimately disagreeing with its conclusions.

The overall impression is that the anonymous reviews represent a wide spectrum of responses to Fichte's political theory. While some viewed it as a groundbreaking and morally driven reimagining of justice and ownership, others saw it as authoritarian or dangerously utopian. Notably, even the more critical reviews recognized the work's ambition and systematic structure, suggesting that, regardless of ideological stance, it could not be easily dismissed.

5. Conclusion. Nicolai's Review as Revelatory Moment. Fichte Between Freedom and Order

In approaching the conclusion, other interpreters influenced by Smithian economic principles might also be considered, such as Ludwig Hestermann, with his *The Open Commercial State*⁴² (1802), and Caspar von Hagens, with his *Phil-*

⁴¹ In *Leipziger Literaturzeitung*. St. 234/235 vom 29./30. März. 1803. Sp. 597–600; 601–60. Rubrik: *Staatswissenschaft*.

⁴² Starting from the title, which clearly stands in opposition to *The Closed Commercial State*, in *The Open Commercial State* (see Hestermann 1802), Ludwig Hestermann presents an ideal critical response to Fichte, aiming not merely to reject his ideas but to move beyond them. While he shares Fichte's concern for protecting the right to life through property, Hestermann insists that this can only be achieved through the preservation of absolute freedom of exchange. At the heart of his argument is a commitment to epistemological clarity: for Hestermann, political economy should not remain in the realm of abstract moral theory, as it often does in Fichte, but must become a practical science grounded in observable dynamics. Drawing heavily on Adam Smith, Hestermann proposes a value theory rooted in classical economics. He critiques Fichte's reduction of all value to labor compensated by wages, noting that this approach ignores other key economic categories such as capital profit, rent, and the role of market prices. In contrast, Hestermann sees value as emerging from a more complex system, where market mechanisms—including competition—play a central role. He shares Smith's belief in a spontaneous tendency toward market equilibrium, where individual interests can, under the right conditions, align with the public good. Rather than striving for enforced equality, Hestermann accepts a degree of stratification

*osophical and Political Inquiry into the Legitimacy of Corporations and Controlled Prices*⁴³ (1804).⁴⁴ However, it is fitting to conclude with Nicolai, because—as anticipated—his critique allows for a return to the question of democracy and the consciously maintained aporia at the heart of the Fichte’s political thought.

Nicolai’s critical assessment of *The Closed Commercial State* appeared in 1801 in the *Neue allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*.⁴⁵ By this time, Nicolai had gravitated toward a position aligned with liberal-conservative critiques, particularly in the final decade of the eighteenth century.

In his review, Nicolai echoes the objections raised by Rehberg and Müller, asserting that Fichte is navigating entirely unfamiliar terrain. He accuses Fichte of a fundamental ignorance of political economy, particularly with respect to the concepts of production, consumption, and the monetary system. According to Nicolai, Fichte believed that having invented the *Wissenschaftslehre*, a “miracle of the first order” (Nicolai 1801, 185–86), could lead him to comprehend everything through its philosophical principles. Yet, Nicolai argues, in the first attempt at practical application, Fichte fundamentally fails to hit the mark. As one of the first consequences of this failure, as Møller had already observed, the *Closed Commercial State* would not promote progress but rather bring about a state of stagnation and intellectual atrophy. Indeed, Fichte’s treatise—in Nicolai’s estimation—is merely the product of a “speculative armchair philosopher” (Nicolai 1801, 189), filled with “subtle sophistry, [...] strange ideas, and [...] in-

in labor, capital, and culture as both inevitable and, to some extent, desirable. From this perspective, Fichte’s egalitarianism appears not only unrealistic but potentially unjust, as it ignores natural differences and suppresses the competitive dynamics that allow society to balance success and failure. For Hestermann, it is precisely this competition—between individuals, enterprises, and ideas—that ensures justice and efficiency in the long run.

⁴³ In his *Philosophical and Political Inquiry into the Legitimacy of Guilds and Price Controls* (see Hagens 1804), Caspar von Hagens offers a liberal critique of state intervention in economic life, with a special focus on Fichte’s *Closed Commercial State* case. He challenges the legitimacy of institutions such as guilds and systems of price regulation, arguing that they impose artificial constraints on the natural freedom of civil society. For von Hagens, such controls disrupt the organic development of the market and hinder the autonomy of individuals in choosing and exercising their professions. The book sets its tone from the outset with an epigraph drawn from Adam Smith, clearly aligning itself with a classical liberal economic model. This model envisions the market as the primary mechanism for determining the balance between trades and professions, without the need for corporatist structures or state-imposed price ceilings. Von Hagens maintains that, left to operate freely, competition naturally improves the quality of goods and services while responding more effectively to the needs of society. Rather than protecting consumers, he argues, interventions such as guild restrictions and price controls tend to entrench privilege, suppress innovation, and ultimately serve narrow interests at the expense of the public good.

⁴⁴ For a detailed and exhaustive reconstruction of these polemic books against Fichte’s position, see Sabbatini 2020.

⁴⁵ In *Neue allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*. Bd. 67. St. 2. H. 8. Berlin u. Stettin 1801. S. 521–48. Rubrik: *Handlungswissenschaft*.

consistencies that border on the ridiculous” (Nicolai 1801, 1929) or, again, with “sophists’ tricks” (Nicolai 1801, 193).

Furthermore, Nicolai not only criticizes the economic plan of enclosure and the proposed expropriation of wealth but also mocks Fichte’s theory of money. On this respect, he writes with biting irony:

What is the substance of national money? [...] this can only be grasped through the intellectual intuition with which Fichte and his disciples, contemplating their pure self, produce everything outside of themselves (Nicolai 1801, 203).

This sarcasm underscores and takes up once again the now familiar theme, shared by Fichte’s critics, that the system entails a systematic denial of personal liberty.

In fact, Nicolai describes the *Closed Commercial State* as a

tyrannical despotism, [...] the government not only takes away from its subjects all the silver and gold down to the last farthing [...] but determines for each individual how much he can produce and work [...] it keeps everyone under constant tutelage and dependence in every kind of activity, whatever it may be. In short, according to this Fichtean plan, the subjects are not much better than prisoners in a closed fortress who are constantly watched, assigned work, and whose subsistence quota is measured. They can do nothing of their own initiative, must constantly let themselves be guided, commanded, criticized and controlled by others and can therefore only become boring machines which never act autonomously and can cultivate neither themselves nor others (Nicolai 1801, 205).

Nicolai, then, reinforces this analysis with a direct comparison between Fichte’s model and the operations of an inquisitorial regime, noting the system’s requirement for passports and the inability of citizens to move freely between countries. For Nicolai, the crux of the problem lies in Fichte’s disregard for empirical realities: the same critique underpins his accusations of abstraction and despotism, connecting the two issues. In a sense, the more abstract a system is, the greater will be the despotic impact of its postulates. Indeed, Nicolai writes:

Into what infantile perversions do theoretical philosophers fall when they despise all verified experience, thus becoming completely alien to the real world and yet believe that they can make the real world better through their pure imagination [...] but the tyranny of such senseless police regulations and the tyrannical nature of state government must fill with contempt every reader who knows how to appreciate human dignity (Nicolai 1801, 207).

Here, Nicolai explicitly links what he terms the “despotism of reason” with Fichte’s “political fantasy”. And, in the end, he further underscores this point by—here the most interesting insight—drawing attention to a perceived contradiction between the *Closed Commercial State* and other of Fichte’s “political daydreams”, i.e. his earlier political writings, particularly the *Beitrag*. That earlier work had scandalized conservative critics such as Gentz and Rehberg for the

opposite reason—namely, its valorization of radical liberty, leading to a potential political instability. In this sense, Nicolai highlights:

Mr. Fichte is not even consistent in his political daydreams. In his *Contribution to the correction of the judgments on the French Revolution*, with which he began his chimerical political career about eight years ago, there are a number of sentences that contradict those by which he now wants to create a *closed commercial state*; despite the fact that then he judged everything just as negatively as he does now. Back then, every person had very great rights against the state; back then, everyone was still allowed to *speak and act for themselves*. What would the government of the *closed commercial state* say if every dissatisfied citizen, deprived by the state of his natural freedom to conduct his own business and degraded to a mindless machine that in all things can only act under the control of the state, addressed him with the words of *Fichte* [the one from the *Beitrag*]: ‘So you have formed me with the sole final purpose of being useful to you, for your purposes, and not useful to me, for my purposes? You have treated me like a piece of raw material, which should have been useful to you in some way!’” (Nicolai 1801, 207–8).

For Nicolai, such a contradiction points to a “senseless violation of human rights” and a deliberate obstruction of the “most essential freedom of every citizen” (Nicolai 1801, 208). He concludes his review by returning to a common motif in these critiques: the folly of presumptuous philosophers who, detached from empirical reality, believe they can reshape the world through speculative thought alone. In a final satirical flourish, Nicolai quotes Fichte on the idea that each person should remain within the “sphere of action” assigned by nature, only to add:

Mr. Fichte’s sphere is in reality the supersensible, where he himself assures us that he is at home; but from the supersensible nothing true comes, about trade, politics and other matters of the sensible world. Let him remain in the supersensible, his true sphere, where he has room up to seventh heaven! He is simply not at home anywhere in the sensible world! He will always regard windmills as giants (Nicolai 1801, 211).

Beyond the ironic tenor of Nicolai’s final criticisms, his reference to the *Beitrag* offers a crucial insight that once again brings to light the internal tensions inherent in the modern political concepts mobilized by Fichte. In the *Beitrag*, Fichte could be described as a radical democrat; however, his theory of the free rescindability of the social contract introduces a profound difficulty concerning the stabilization of any enduring political body. The constitutionalizing of the right to resistance—reminiscent of the never-implemented French Constitution of June 1793—ultimately undermines the very foundations of the modern state (see Gristina 2024, 164–71; 2025b).

As we have seen, the *Naturrecht* represents Fichte’s attempt to provide a logical foundation for the state by stabilizing individual liberties within a representative framework. In the *Closed Commercial State*, however, the role of the state is markedly intensified, aiming to realize freedom through the radical enforcement

of socio-economic equality. If this project contradicts the premises of the *Beitrag*, it may not be due to a simple rupture or contradiction in Fichte's thought, but rather to his attempt to constrain the potentially individualistic and liberal excesses of his earlier model, confirming the dialectic between freedom and order that—according to Cesa—characterizes Fichte's thought.

However, rather than focusing on the question of whether Fichte's trajectory moves from radical democratism, to a model of representative democracy, and then on toward a negation or "death" of democracy, it is more productive to emphasize that these contradictory formulations—as emphasized by his critical reviewers—testify to Fichte's sustained engagement with the aporetic nature of democracy itself.

As we have seen, the *Closed commercial state* is attacked from various perspectives because it attempts to find a radical solution to the problem of internal stabilization within civil society and external stabilization between states, scaring models of state and politics founded on trust in liberal freedom and the invisible hand of free trade. In this sense, Fichte's political writings register the unresolved tension at the heart of democracy and popular sovereignty in general—a problem inherited from Hobbes, Rousseau,⁴⁶ and the broader tradition of modern political philosophy, which finds both its political realization and the theoretical intensification of its internal tensions in the experience of the French Revolution.

To conclude, the reception of Fichte's *Closed Commercial State* in his times and especially in his conservative Smithean-Burkean opponents, illustrates the complexity of this intellectual context. Among his critics, we find at least three principal tendencies: liberal-conservatives influenced by Smithian political economy, more reactionary conservative figures, and Enlightenment critics such as Nicolai. A smaller number of interpreters offered more sympathetic readings. Although many critiques of Fichte's project employed similar arguments—particularly around the themes of economic closure and individual liberty—their underlying motivations and theoretical frameworks varied considerably.

Some critics, aligned with Smith and Burke, focused on Fichte's departure from principles of free trade and personal freedom. Others, such as Müller, criticized Fichte while also distancing themselves from liberal economics, identifying in *The Closed Commercial State* both theoretical limitations and practical risks, albeit from a different perspective.

More broadly, counter-revolutionary thinkers often sought to defuse the political implications of Fichte's proposals by portraying them as overly abstract or speculative. As Cesa has observed, this text may be understood as Fichte's most explicitly Jacobin work—an intervention shaped by the crisis of the Revolutionary period and the uncertainties of the early 19th century. This viewpoint offers a better understanding of the reason why the reviews of Fichte's *Closed Commercial State* functioned not merely as scholarly assessments but

⁴⁶ On the reception of Rousseau in Fichte's political thought, see Rampazzo Bazzan 2017.

as political instruments: they were deployed to oppose Fichte's project both institutionally and within the broader sphere of the Republic of Letters. This eccentric and provocative text thus exposes the critical tensions of a *Kampfplatz*—a conceptual battlefield—at the threshold of modernity, where Fichte's political theory engages directly with the upheavals of his time.

Thus, the debate surrounding *The Closed Commercial State* reflects a moment of significant transition in European political thought. What emerges from it is not merely a clash of ideas, but a confrontation between competing visions of modernity. The debate coincides with emergence of the sciences of government, the development of political economy, the consolidation of state administrative practices, and early efforts to engage with what would later be called the “social question.” At stake were not only technical disagreements about trade policy or economic organization, but deeper questions about the relationship between liberty and order, individual autonomy and collective regulation.

What emerges from this episode is then an intellectual landscape marked by tensions, where philosophical discourse is closely intertwined with political commitments and historical circumstance. The critical reviews of Fichte's work—whether grounded in liberal, conservative, or Enlightenment frameworks—reveal the contested nature of political economy at the threshold of modernity. In this context, political economy itself becomes a site of struggle, as both its stabilization and its potential critique are bound up with the reconfiguration of key modern concepts and their corresponding political implications.

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This volume—arising from the PRIN project “Philosophical Reviews in German Territories (1668–1799)”—explores the philosophical review as a central practice in early modern and Enlightenment German intellectual culture. Drawing on the *Gelehrte Journale*, the essays show that reviews were not secondary summaries but active sites of debate, canon formation, and knowledge production. Through case studies from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the contributions highlight how reviews shaped reception, mediated controversies, and linked philosophy to its social and political contexts. Reviews thus emerge as a conceptual battlefield where modern philosophy was constructed.

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