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.

Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy, matteo.favaretti@unive.it, 0000-0002-7276-9244

Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

 DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0999-1.07, in Pasquale Terracciano, Francesco Valerio Tommasi (edited by), *Philosophical Reviews in German Territories (1668-1799). Volume 2*, pp. 81-102, 2026, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-0999-1, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0999-1

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-eight[4] 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 Léchot 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 "fist-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 *Anmerckungen*, 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 *citationes*:

> 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 Wissenschafften*], 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 Léchot 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 Wissenschafften*. 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 praeliminaris 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 intueri*] 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 Kräfften 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 *Gedancken 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.

References

A= Leibniz, G. W. 1923–. *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, hrsg. von Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften und Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

GW = Wolff, C. 1962–. *Gesammelte Werke*, hrsg. von J. École u. a. Hildesheim: Olms.

Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb. 1750. *Aesthetica*. Frankfurt (Oder): Kleyb.

Bissinger, Anton. 1970. *Die Struktur der Gotteserkenntnis: Studien zur Philosophie Christian Wolffs*. Bonn: Bouvier.

de Vleeschauwer, Herman Jan. 1952. "Christian Wolff et le 'Journal littéraire.' Contribution à la Controverse Leibniz–Newton au sujet du Calcul différentiel." *Philosophia naturalis. Archiv für Naturphilosophie und die philosophischen Grenzgebiete der exakten Wissenschaften und Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 2: 358–75.

Dyck, Corey W. 2024. *Wolff and the First Fifty Years of German Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Favaretti Camposampiero, Matteo. 2009. *Conoscenza simbolica: Pensiero e linguaggio in Christian Wolff e nella prima età moderna*. Hildesheim: Olms (GW III 119).

Favaretti Camposampiero, Matteo. 2016. "Counterfactual Hypotheses, Fictions, and the Laws of Nature: The Arguments for Contingency in Leibniz, Wolff, and Bilfinger." In *Theodicy and Reason: Logic, Metaphysics, and Theology in Leibniz's* Essais de Théodicée *(1710)*, edited by Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero, Mattia Geretto, and Luigi Perissinotto, 141–62. Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari.

Favaretti Camposampiero, Matteo. 2021. "Infinite Regress: Wolff's Cosmology and the Background of Kant's Antinomies." *Kant-Studien* 112, 2: 239–64.

Favaretti Camposampiero, Matteo. 2022. "Wolff, Spinoza, and the Interpretation of Scripture." In *The Philosophers and the Bible: The Debate on Sacred Scripture in Early Modern Thought*, edited by Antonella Del Prete, Anna Lisa Schino, and Pina Totaro, 262–77. Leiden: Brill.

Favaretti Camposampiero, Matteo. 2023. "Christian Wolff and the Science of All Possible Things." *Rivista di filosofia* 114, 3: 443–66.

Gantet, Claire. 2025. "Albrecht von Haller's Self-Reviews and Style of Reasoning." In *Philosophical Reviews in German Territories (1668-1799)*, vol. I, edited by Marco Sgarbi, 33–56. Firenze: Firenze University Press.

Gerhardt, Carl Immanuel, hrsg. von. 1860. *Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Christian Wolf*[f] *aus den Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Hannover*. Halle: Schmidt (repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1963).

Laeven, Augustinus Hubertus. 1990. *The 'Acta Eruditorum' Under the Editorship of Otto Mencke (1644-1707): The History of an International Learned Journal Between 1682 and 1707*, translated by Lynne Richards. Amsterdam and Maarssen: APA-Holland University Press.

Laeven, Augustinus Hubertus, and Lucy J. M. Laeven-Aretz. 2014. *The Authors and Reviewers of the* Acta Eruditorum *1682–1735*. Molenhoek: Electronic publication. http://hdl.handle.net/2066/125186

Léchot, Timothée. 2017. "L'extrait et ses fonctions dans la presse d'Ancien Régime." *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture* 8, 2. https://doi.org/10.7202/1039696ar

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. 1710. "Annotatio de quibusdam Ludis; inprimis de Ludo quodam Sinico, differentiaque Scachici et Latrunculorum, et novo genere Ludi Navalis." *Miscellanea Berolinensia* 1: 22–6.

Ludovici, Carl Günther. 1748. "Wolf, (Christian, Reichs-Frey-und Edler Herr von)." In *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschafften und Künste*, vol. LVIII, 549–677. Leipzig and Halle: Zedler.

Riebow, Georg Heinrich. 1726. *Fernere Erläuterung der vernünfftigen Gedancken des Herrn Hof-Rath Wolfens von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt, wie auch einiger Puncte aus der Sitten-Lehre*. Frankfurt and Leipzig: s.n. (repr. in GW III 70).

Sgarbi, Marco. 2025. "Introduction to Philosophical Reviews in German Territories (1668-1799)." In *Philosophical Reviews in German Territories (1668-1799)*, vol. I, edited by Marco Sgarbi, 7–14. Firenze: Firenze University Press.

Thümmig, Ludwig Philipp. 1727. *Meletemata varii et rarioris argumenti in unum volumen collecta*. Braunschweig and Leipzig: Renger.

Wallis, John. 1699. *Operum mathematicorum volumen tertium*. Oxford: Sheldonian Theatre.

Wolff, Christian. 1707. "Solutio nonnullarum difficultatum circa mentem humanam obviarum, ubi simul agitur de origine notionum et facultate ratiocinandi." *Acta Eruditorum* (November): 507–14 (repr. in Wolff 1755, Sect. I, 11–7).

Wolff, Christian. 1708. "Leges experientiarum fundamentales." *Acta Eruditorum* (April): 163–66 (repr. in Wolff 1755, Sect. I, 18–21).
Wolff, Christian. 1709a. *Aërometriae elementa, in quibus aliquot aëris vires ac proprietates juxta methodum geometrarum demonstrantur*. Leipzig: Lankis (repr. in GW II 37).
Wolff, Christian. 1709b. "[Review of] *Aërometriae elementa* […] *Autore Christiano Wolfio* […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (Januar): 24–31 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. I, 356–63).
Wolff, Christian. 1710a. *Anfangs-Gründe aller mathematischen Wissenschafften*. 4 vols. Halle: Renger (repr. of the 1750–57 ed. in GW I 12–5).
Wolff, Christian. 1710b. "[Review of] *Anfangs-Gründe aller mathematischen Wissenschafften* […] edita a Christiano Wolfio […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (November): 486–92 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. I, 497–503).
Wolff, Christian. 1713a. "[Review of] *Vernünfftige Gedancken von den Kräfften des menschlichen Verstandes* […] Autore Christiano Wolfio […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (March): 133–37 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. II, 687–91).
Wolff, Christian. 1713b. *Vernünfftige Gedancken von den Kräfften des menschlichen Verstandes und ihrem richtigen Gebrauche in Erkäntnis der Wahrheit* [= *German Logic*]. Halle: Renger.
Wolff, Christian. 1717. *Specimen physicae ad theologiam naturalem adplicatae, sistens notionem intellectus divini per opera naturae illustratam*. Halle: Zahn.
Wolff, Christian. 1718. *Ratio praelectionum wolfianarum in mathesin et philosophiam universam*. Halle: Renger (repr. of the 1735 ed. in GW II 36).
Wolff, Christian. 1719. "[Review of] *Ratio praelectionum wolfianarum in mathesin et philosophiam universam*." *Acta Eruditorum* (March): 118–26 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. III, 1039–47).
Wolff, Christian. 1720a. "[Review of] *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen* […] Autore Christiano Wolfio […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (August): 371–84 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. III, 1151–64).
Wolff, Christian. 1720b. *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt* [= *German Metaphysics*]. Halle: Renger (repr. of the 1751 ed. in GW I 2).
Wolff, Christian. 1721. "[Review of] *Vernünfftige Gedancken von der Menschen Thun und Lassen* […] editae a Christiano Wolfio […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (Januar): 36–46 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. III, 1185–95).
Wolff, Christian. 1722. "[Review of] *Allerhand nützliche Versuche* […] Autore Christiano Wolfio […] Tomus I." *Acta Eruditorum* (Januar): 31–6 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. III, 1263–68).
Wolff, Christian. 1723a. "[Review of] *De differentia nexus rerum sapientis et fatalis necessitatis* […] *luculenta commentatio* […] Autore Christiano Wolfio […]. *Monitum ad commentationem istam* […] Autore eodem […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (November): 510–18 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. III: 1414–22).
Wolff, Christian. 1723b. "[Review of] *Vernünfftige Gedancken von den Würckungen der Natur* […] Autore Christiano Wolfio […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (October): 468–72 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. III, 1409–13).
Wolff, Christian. 1724a. *Anmerckungen über die vernünfftigen Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*. Frankfurt: Andreä (repr. of the 1740 ed. in GW I 3).
Wolff, Christian. 1724b. "[Review of] *Anmerckungen über die vernünfftigen Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen* […] Autore Christiano Wolfio […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (July): 310–20 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. III, 1478–88).

Wolff, Christian. 1728a. *Philosophia rationalis sive Logica, methodo scientifica pertractata*. Frankfurt and Leipzig: Renger (repr. of the 1740 ed. in GW II 1.1–1.3).
Wolff, Christian. 1728b. "[Review of] Ludovici Philippi Thummigii […], *Meletemata varii et rarioris argumenti in unum volumen collecta* […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (March): 129–33 (repr. in Wolff 2001, 1780–84).
Wolff, Christian. 1728c. "[Review of] *Philosophia rationalis, sive logica, methodo scientifica pertractata* […] Autore Christiano Wolfio […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (October): 455–68 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. IV, 1791–1804).
Wolff, Christian. 1730a. *Cogitationes rationales de viribus intellectus humani earumque usu legitimo in veritatis cognitione*. Frankfurt and Leipzig: Renger (repr. of the 1740 ed. in GW II 2).
Wolff, Christian. 1730b. *Philosophia prima, sive ontologia, methodo scientifica pertractata*. Frankfurt and Leipzig: Renger (repr. of the 1736 ed. in GW II 3).
Wolff, Christian. 1730c. "[Review of] Hieronymi Rorarii, *Quod animalia bruta saepe ratione utantur melius homine, libri duo*: quos recensuit, Dissertatione de anima brutorum, annotationibusque auxit Georg. Heinr. Ribovius." *Acta Eruditorum* (April): 173–77 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. IV, 1927–31).
Wolff, Christian. 1730d. "[Review of] *Philosophia prima, sive ontologia, methodo scientifica pertractata* […] Autore Christiano Wolfio […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (February): 73–86 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. IV, 1903–16).
Wolff, Christian. 1731a. *Cosmologia generalis methodo scientifica pertractata*. Frankfurt and Leipzig: Renger (repr. of the 1737 ed. in GW II 4).
Wolff, Christian. 1731b. "[Review of] *Jura de pacto hereditario renunciativo filiae nobilis a dissensu Doctorum liberata, et methodo demonstrativa in concordiam reducta a Johanne Ulrico Cramero* […] cum Praefatione Christiani Wolfii […]." *Acta Eruditorum* (September): 411–15 (repr. in Wolff 2001, vol. IV, 2037–41).
Wolff, Christian. 1732. *Psychologia empirica methodo scientifica pertractata*. Frankfurt and Leipzig: Renger (repr. of the 1738 ed. in GW II 5).
Wolff, Christian. 1734. *Psychologia rationalis methodo scientifica pertractata*. Frankfurt and Leipzig: Renger (repr. of the 1740 ed. in GW II 6).
Wolff, Christian. 1755. *Meletemata mathematico-philosophica*. Halle: Renger (repr. in GW II 35).
Wolff, Christian. 2001. *Sämtliche Rezensionen in den Acta Eruditorum (1705–1731)*, hrsg. von H. A. Laeven und L. J. M. Laeven-Aretz, 5 vols. Hildesheim: Olms (GW II 38.1–38.5).