

Georg Friedrich Meier and the promotion of the philosopher in the German civic Enlightenment

ANDREAS RYDBERG*

In recent decades historians of philosophy have used the concept of persona to analyse socially recognizable types or offices in historically specific contexts.¹ In an anthology on the philosopher in early modern Europe the editors thus argue that philosophical problems are integral to the practices through which philosophers are formed; “For this reason, disputes over philosophical problems quickly become disputes over what is to count as philosophy and what it is to be a philosopher.”² Against this background a number of influential early modern philosophers have been depicted as engaged in a battle over the meaning of philosophy and what it meant to be and live as a philosopher. Francis Bacon thus played a vital role in launching the natural philosopher as a new kind of sage, René Descartes pitted the technocrat as a controlling manipulator of nature against the scholastic, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz challenged the confessional theologian through his account of the self-purifying metaphysical sage.³

This article contributes to this strand of research by focusing on the influential but surprisingly unknown eighteenth-century German philosopher Georg Friedrich Meier and his portrait of the true and the fashionable philosopher.⁴ The article makes three principal points. First, it argues that when Meier published his writings on the true and the fashionable philosopher in 1745, he did so in relation to a decades-long debate concerning philosophy and the philosopher that is sometimes referred to as the Wolff affair. As a result, the philosopher and philosophical identity

*PhD in History of Science and Ideas, Department of History of Science and Ideas, Uppsala University, Sweden, andreas.rydberg@idehist.uu.se

formation were very much in the air. Second, it shows that Meier's sometimes humorous and mocking account of the philosopher reflects his place within a new generation of intellectuals who in the wake of the Wolff affair used what we might think of as the infotainment genres of the emerging public sphere to communicate ideals, norms and patterns of behaviour. To use comical and exaggerated types was a successful strategy for reaching a broader spectrum of reading middle-class men and women. Third, it makes the case that underlying the comical accounts of the philosopher was a serious moral message regarding philosophy as an exercise-oriented culture of the soul or *cultura animi*. While this view of philosophy also permeated Wolffian thought, the case of Meier provides important clues as to how it fed into and became part of a new middle-class identity.

The true philosopher in the wake of the Wolff affair

Meier's ideal of the true philosopher took form in the wake of the so-called Wolff affair.⁵ The philosopher Christian Wolff became professor in mathematics at the newly founded Halle University in 1706.⁶ After a modest start he became something of a public intellectual when he began the publication of a series of textbooks referred to as the *German Philosophy* in the 1710s.⁷ The *German Philosophy* united all disciplines under the umbrella of a universal philosophical method. Grand in scope and ambition, this approach soon put Wolff on a conflict course with the university theologians. In 1720 the situation became acute, as Wolff published major treatises on metaphysics and ethics in which he made bold and potentially challenging claims. In the following year he further provoked the theologians by claiming in a prorektor speech that the Chinese were fully capable of leading moral lives quite independently of revelation. The speech became the last straw, and after having pursued a successful campaign against Wolff, the theologians convinced King Friedrich Wilhelm I to expel him from Prussia in November 1723.⁸ Contrary to expectations, however, the expulsion made Wolff into something of a cause célèbre, and the Wolffian philosophy became an attractive option for many young students. In response to this development the theologians continued their efforts, which eventually bore fruit when the king banned the teaching and selling of Wolff's ethics and metaphysics in 1727.⁹ The ban effectively suppressed the open teaching of the Wolffian philosophy while giving it an allure that contributed to its further growth as a more-or-less underground movement. While this continued to be the case into the early 1730s, the winds gradually changed in favour of the Wolffians. In 1734 the ban was lifted, and in 1736 a royal commission undertook an examination of Wolff's writings with the result that he was cleared of all

charges and the Wolffian philosophy reinstated at the university. When Frederick the Great, who actively supported the early German Enlightenment, acceded to the throne in 1740, one of his first actions was to recall and reinstall Wolff as professor at Halle University.¹⁰

While it can be debated whether history is always written by the winners, the Wolffians certainly managed to establish what became the standard narrative of the affair for the next two centuries, as a struggle of reason against religious superstition.¹¹ Without delving further into the many complex aspects and reversals of the Wolff affair, it here suffices to say that it spotlighted and promoted the figure of the Wolffian philosopher. Given that Meier, who was himself a Wolffian philosopher, wrote *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen* (Portrait of a true philosopher, 1745) at a time when Wolff had come out as the victor, one might have expected him to sail with the wind. Instead, however, he raised a warning finger:

Our present times can rightfully be called philosophical times. Philosophy is starting to become a fashion. The external society of philosophers is already spread far and wide. And, which is unfortunate, most people learn philosophy in such a way that they content themselves with unimportant and merely illusory parts of philosophers, without adopting the nature and essence of a true philosopher. They do not stop at this, which would be endurable. Instead, they commit wrongs and follies and believe that they have the right to do so as philosophers.¹²

It was against the background of a philosophy that had outgrown itself and become proud and corrupted that Meier deemed it necessary to provide a template that would both show “how the true philosophers differ from their apes” and “provide a pattern that one must follow if one wants to become a righteous philosopher.”¹³ While the *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen* provided the road map, the more specific character of the “apes” was the subject of Meier’s anonymously published *Gründliche Anweisung wie jemand ein neumodischer Weltweiser werden könne* (Thorough instruction on how to become a fashionable philosopher, 1745).¹⁴

I say, a fashionable philosopher is a philosophical snob. A snob is a man who performs none of the actions that are imposed on him by nature. Instead, he prefers to perform actions, to embrace a way of living, expressions, gestures, words, and to order his whole behaviour in such a way that it goes against nature. Put concisely, he is an ass to the lyre.¹⁵

To become such a person Meier encouraged his readers to follow a number of rules. The fashionable philosopher should thus speak and write Latin, preferably introducing, and claiming the superiority of, new Latin

words. He should conceive of himself as a most brilliant person and always make sure to smile, showing a good face quite independent of his actual mood.

Peter is an excellent example of this rule. Mr. Peter shows everywhere great courage and determination through his expressions, gestures, and words, even if his mood is rather different. He gives all people the impression that he is about to carry out the most important things. He wants to reform the sciences, to discover new truths, to write books, and so on. But when it comes to it, he either lacks inspiration, or very important obstacles have come in the way.¹⁶

It is worth noticing at this point that Meier's satiric style was foreign to Wolff and the orthodox Wolffians, whose accounts of the philosopher were typically deadly serious, with strokes of personal attacks and biting criticism but rarely with entertaining irony. That Meier used this style was neither an expression of an eccentric personality nor a pure matter of genre, but reflected a larger shift connected to a new generation of intellectuals who spearheaded new ways of writing and communicating, often by using the new media forms of the emerging public sphere. To understand this crucial aspect of Meier's account of the philosopher it is necessary to take a closer look at the more immediate context of Meier and his circle.

The true and the fashionable philosopher in the German civic Enlightenment

Meier was born in March 1718 in Ammendorf, close to Halle.¹⁷ In the late 1720s he was sent to Halle to receive his basic education at August Hermann Francke's orphanage. Founded by Francke in the second half of the 1690s, the orphanage developed into a key institution that in 1727 engaged thousands of people and included numerous institutions and facilities.¹⁸ While the orphanage has traditionally been considered a Pietist stronghold with little room for philosophy and science, recent scholars have shown that practices in mathematics, natural philosophy and craft were vital and well incorporated in the curriculum.¹⁹ One of the things that Francke did in order to implement science in the orphanage's pedagogical program was to engage the leading mathematician Christoph Semler.²⁰ Semler established a cabinet of curiosity where students could observe and engage with natural objects as well as with concrete models and devices used to teach mathematics and natural philosophy. In addition, Semler turned his own house into a school and workshop filled with equipment. It was in this setting that Meier would find his home when he came to Halle as a boy. He studied with Semler from the late 1720s and

would eventually be taken in more permanently in 1730.²¹ It was through Semler's teaching that Meier first came into contact with Wolff's writings on mathematics, which were not included in the ban. "So, I developed very early a love of the scientific way of thinking, and in my thirteenth year I could demonstrate all the propositions in Wolff's excerpt of the mathematical sciences, which regarded arithmetic, geometry, and trigonometry."²² Having first discovered Wolff's mathematics, Meier's interest gradually came to include metaphysics and ethics as well. In 1735 Meier started his academic studies, which included, among other subjects, logic, metaphysics, ethics, natural law and theology. At this time, he also started following the lectures of the Baumgarten brothers, whom he knew from his time at the orphanage. Together with the Baumgartens and a handful of other intellectuals, Meier would form a new generation of highly eclectic Hallean philosophers.²³

Characteristic for the new generation was that the members had all absorbed both the Pietist culture around Francke and the Wolffian philosophy. Rather than taking sides, however, the members combined features of both to fuel the exploration of the beautiful and sensible. In the dissertation *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (Reflections on poetry, 1735), Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten thus broke with the dominant epistemology of Wolff and many others by arguing that sensual knowledge, rather than being of value only as a stepping stone to higher forms of knowledge, possessed a unique richness or extensive clearness that qualified it as the basis of aesthetics or the science of perception.²⁴ In the second half of the 1730s this reassessment became the epistemological basis of literary reform.²⁵ While poets and writers such as Meier's close friend Samuel Gotthold Lange and Immanuel Jakob Pyra had first gravitated towards pious expressions of God's presence, the Pietist bent was gradually replaced by considerably lighter topics of the happy Epicurean life.²⁶ Rather than capturing God's presence, the aim of the Epicurean "carpe diem" poetry was to celebrate the present moment in all its sensible richness. In the 1740s the originally literary ideal became part of a broader attempt—communicated in published collections of edited letters, moral weeklies, journals and other key media of the emerging public sphere—to explore, shape and communicate the new ideal to reading middle-class men and women.²⁷ As a consequence, the focal point shifted from specialized questions of aesthetic and literary style to broader topics of middle-class sociability, friendship and selfhood.

As a key figure in this development Meier adopted the new literary style, addressed relevant topics and advanced some of the genres of the emerging public sphere. Most notably, together with his close friend Lange, he edited no fewer than four moral weeklies published continuously from

1748 to 1768.²⁸ A typical feature of the moral weekly was the treatment of serious topics of middle-class morality, identity and selfhood in a humorous tone, often accentuated through the use of character types.²⁹ In a contribution in the weekly *Der Gesellige* (The sociable), on how minor events impact our daily life, Meier and Lange used characters to illustrate the role of small details in storytelling:

Cajus has a special gift for lively story telling; He knows how to convey a minor and indifferent event to the whole society with gestures and the raising of his voice in such a way that everyone takes a special part in it. The young Curius not only imitates the expressions, but also the voice and tone of everyone; and he does this so naturally that when I was last time standing outside a room to visit some friends, I did not open the door because he imitated a man whose presence I had not suspected; a loud laugh relieved me of my mistake.³⁰

In another related part on jesting Meier and Lange stressed that “the gift of fiery and happy jokes is indisputably one of the shimmering decorations of a good companion.”³¹ The authors further argued that a good sociable joke must be “fiery” and made without “malice, enmity, pride or ambition.”³² The short piece on jesting in *Der Gesellige* reflects Meier’s *Gedancken von Schertzen* (Thoughts on jesting, 1744). In a manner typical of the infotainment project, Meier stressed that it had been composed to improve the otherwise rowdy taste that dominated German society.³³ In the treatise Meier emphasized that humour is intimately connected to the ability to correctly represent things and the relations between them.³⁴ A joke thus becomes laughable when it takes a well-known phenomenon and either changes a detail or establishes an unexpected likeness with another radically different phenomenon.³⁵ When made successfully it gives rise to a sudden drastic change in imagination that we experience as enjoyable.

Meier’s analysis of jesting provides an important background especially to his account of the fashionable philosopher.³⁶ What Meier did was to heavily exaggerate the current situation of the triumphant Wolffian philosophy by painting the ironic picture of a city ruled by mad philosophers. His rules for how to become such a philosopher were not taken out of the blue but were the opposites of the rules that the true philosopher should follow. Hence, the fashionable philosopher should speak gladly and often about himself, and never admit a mistake. To improve his chances of winning the quarrels that this would inevitably give rise to, he should make sure to learn fashionable key terms such as “monad, sufficient reason, preestablished harmony, best world and so on.”³⁷ In addition to sharpening his verbal arsenal, he should also be a fierce writer who does not hesitate to steal ideas from others and present them as his own. He marks

those who are of other opinions as heretics, although he himself uses his knowledge mainly to point out alleged but sophistic contradictions and to make fun of these.³⁸

Meier further escalates the farcical account by painting the picture of how he himself once lived downstairs from two fashionable philosophers who “struck the table so violently that I could not hold my thoughts together. I often feared for my life, as the stamping of their feet caused large pieces of lime to fall off the walls.”³⁹ When he confronted his tormentors, they reacted in a way typical to fashionable philosophers: “They yelled straight in my face so that I could better smell what these gentlemen had eaten than I could understand what they said.”⁴⁰ In order to avoid situations like these, Meier suggests that “in every considerable city in Germany should be selected a territory or a street that could be called the Quarter of the Snobs or Snob Street.”⁴¹ Having their own quarter or street, the fashionable philosophers would be free to live out their passions as they wish. “In this street they may make noise, yell, scream, and offend as they like, that would not concern anyone else [...]. The words absurd, stupid, foolish, however, listen up, definition, demonstration would be heard endlessly with a crushing emphasis.”⁴²

Taken out of its context Meier’s portrait of the fashionable philosopher may appear as merely entertaining fiction. Situated in the context of his theory of jesting, however, it comes into view as an application of its principles. Hence, what made the account effective was precisely its way of connecting to but tweaking the real state of affairs. That is, only by tapping into people’s experience and conceptions of the Wolffian philosopher would the text cause the desired end: an enjoyable contrast effect in readers’ minds.

To summarize so far, Meier’s account of the philosopher did not constitute an extension of the Wolff affair, but in style and topic it rather reflected the new generation of writers to which Meier belonged. Working in the intersection between philosophy and aesthetics, academic writing and literature, they explored and communicated topics of identity and selfhood to the reading middle class, often by using the infotainment genres of the emerging public sphere. Meier was a key figure in this development, whose success was also reflected through his popularity at the university. Having defended his dissertation in 1739, Meier started teaching on a broad range of philosophical subjects, sometimes attracting an audience of around three hundred persons.⁴³ That the now aged Wolff, who occupied a chair in natural law, reportedly remarked that “the aesthete [Meier] will ruin everything in philosophy” is indicative of the generational change.⁴⁴

Philosophical *cultura animi* in the age of infotainment

Taken out of its contexts Meier's discourse on the philosopher may appear as mere entertainment without any deeper message or underlying ambition whatsoever. As scholars have pointed out, however, the jesting and sometimes farcical appeal was a rather brilliant strategy to reach out and morally educate the reading middle class.⁴⁵ This tendency is particularly striking in the case of Meier, whose production included several multi-volume treatises on metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics and theology. As Meier worked in parallel on lighter texts such as those published in the moral weeklies, he typically picked out and popularized aspects of the heavier academic works.⁴⁶

If Meier and his colleagues used infotainment to morally educate the middle class, what message were they communicating and what was the overall context? In Meier's case a central context is that of philosophy as a culture of the soul or *cultura animi*. Drawing on the French historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot's reading of ancient philosophy as a way of life organized around spiritual exercise, recent historians have argued that this view also applies to much early modern philosophy.⁴⁷ The *cultura animi* approach to philosophy as a regimen of a soul perceived as diseased and perturbed by the passions thus constituted the immediate contexts of Bacon's discussion of the idols of the mind and of the new natural philosophy more broadly.⁴⁸ In a similar vein, Descartes arguably developed his epistemology in direct relation to the Christian spiritual exercises that he had been trained in during his time as a child and student at the Jesuit school in La Flèche.⁴⁹ A third, and in this context particularly relevant, case is Leibniz.⁵⁰ According to Leibniz, man is obliged to contribute to the fulfilment of God's great plan for a perfect universe. By perfecting the self through philosophy and science, the philosopher contributed to this vision in a double sense: first, by making himself more perfect (thereby increasing the perfection of the world), and second, by making the knowledge of the world more perfect and complete (by adding new and more perfect knowledge).⁵¹ Leibniz's metaphysics of perfection constitutes the immediate context for Wolff's philosophy. In the *Vernünfftige Gedancken von der Menschen Thun und Lassen* (German ethics, 1720) Wolff thus argued that "nature obliges us to do what makes us and our state more perfect and to avoid that which makes us and our state imperfect."⁵² To follow this precept the philosopher shall systematically cultivate and perfect especially the higher cognitive faculties, for instance by training and refining the ability to form clear and distinct concepts and definitions and to conduct scientific demonstrations.⁵³ He should also maintain a regimen

of systematic daily self-examinations through which he maintains a systematic plan and evaluates progress and failures.⁵⁴

Although Baumgarten and Meier were reformers rather than orthodox Wolffians, the overall project was nevertheless that of philosophy as the systematic, exercise-oriented perfection of the self. What Baumgarten did when he made sensual knowledge into a basis for aesthetics as the science of sensual knowledge was not to break with the idea of perfection but rather to open up philosophical and aesthetic or sensual knowledge as two distinct realms of perfection.⁵⁵ Whereas the philosopher focused on the higher cognitive faculties, the aesthetician or poet perfected the sensual and partly also the affectual faculties. While the traditional *cultura animi* typically conceptualized the senses and the passions as obstacles to knowledge and often as the very roots of evil, the poet must learn how to embrace and channel the passions into poetic creativity. In the monumental *Aesthetica* (Aesthetics, 1750/1758), Baumgarten thus stressed that “The general character of the happy aesthetician... requires... AESTHETIC ENTHUSIASM (the wonderful excitement and ignition of the soul, the inner force, ecstasy, rage, enthusiasm and divine inspiration).”⁵⁶

In the case of Meier, it is strikingly clear that he contributed to both endeavours. In the preface to *Theoretische Lehre von den Gemüthsbewegungen überhaupt* (Theoretical doctrine of the emotions in general, 1744) Meier thus stated that his ambition was to provide a systematic scientific account of the role of the emotions in aesthetics.⁵⁷ He stressed that the practical part of this doctrine “teaches us when we need to awaken a passion, to nourish, to increase, to decrease, to still and to prevent.”⁵⁸ In his later three-volume work *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften* (Basic premises of all the fine arts and sciences, 1748–1750), which was essentially a popularization of Baumgarten’s aesthetics, he stressed the ethical function of aesthetics:

It is one of the most noble duties that we have to observe towards our soul that we must improve all our sensual powers of the soul. But now it is a wretched morality which tells us what to do, but not how we can accomplish it. If, then, the philosophical moral doctrine is to be complete, one must know how to improve the sensual part of the soul. This, however, is what aesthetics do.⁵⁹

The perfection of the sensual soul was, furthermore, also the immediate context of both *Gedancken von Schertzen* and *Abbildung eines Kunstrichters* (Portrait of an art critic, 1745).⁶⁰ That the latter was published parallel to the *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen* is indicative of the way in which the perfection of the intellectual and the sensual soul corresponded to the cultivation of two different personae.

While Meier's aesthetical writings focused on the sensual soul, the perfection of the higher cognitive faculties was at the core of his philosophical writings. This is striking in terms of both the negative mirror image provided in the *Gründliche Anweisung* and the positive account of the *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen*. As for the latter, the message was that the Wolffian philosophy had now become a fashion that attracted poseurs. To remedy this negative development Meier attempted to show "what belongs to the true and well-developed sons of philosophy" or, as he also put it, "how to distinguish the true philosophers from their apes."⁶¹ Second, although it was important to separate the wheat from the chaff in a time when philosophy had become a "fashion," it was equally important to provide a road map for those who were serious in their aspirations to become true philosophers: "I will take on the task of providing a road map that they must use when they educate themselves if they wish to become righteous philosophers. They will be able to deduce from it the rules that they must exercise if they want to [...] belong to the society of philosophers."⁶² The bulk of the book was devoted to the presentation and discussion of eight such rules, to be observed by those who wish to become true philosophers:

A true and righteous philosopher is the one who seeks to know 1) as many, 2) as noble, and 3) as fruitful philosophical truths as is possible for him, and who knows them 4) in the clearest way, 5) in the right way, 6) with the most certainty, and 7) in the most living way, as is possible. These efforts of his will be so strongly and diligently made as it is possible for him, and through all these efforts he will let himself be 8) moved to imitate the will of God and to honour him.⁶³

In the preface Meier states that the work draws on Baumgarten's *Ethica philosophica* (Philosophical ethics, 1740) as well as the shorter *De vitiis quasiphilosophorum ethicis* (On the ethical vices of the quasiphilosophers, 1742).⁶⁴ The latter contains a passage so similar to the one quoted above that it may have constituted the model for Meier's own phrasing:

He who studies philosophy and the philosopher, as such, §. I. should, in order to befit a man, devote himself, as much as possible, to 1) the truer 2) clearer 3) more certain 4) more living knowledge 5) about more 6) greater or fruitful and noble qualities 7) in many 8) larger things 9) without confidence to gain knowledge of these, i.e., properties through 10) more 11) and more certain reasons.⁶⁵

The duty to cultivate the soul with regard to these epistemic virtues reflects the metaphysics and ethics of perfection as well as the larger context of philosophy as continuous work on the self.⁶⁶ To be a philosopher was to devote oneself to this work, which as Meier pointed out, included insights

into both perfections and imperfections. When rightly conducted, it provided an effective bulwark against the lurking passions. “Through this usage it is possible to reach a lasting state of vigilance through which a philosopher will be protected from all pride, thereby remaining a modest and humble philosopher.”⁶⁷ Again we see how Meier’s account of the true philosopher reflects the *cultura animi* framework of philosophy as an exercise-oriented regimen of a tormented mind.

In the previous section we saw how Meier’s account of the philosopher reflected the German civic Enlightenment project of communicating new ideals of sociability and selfhood to the reading middle class by using the infotainment genres connected to the emerging public sphere. Typical stylistic strategies were to use humour and irony and to illustrate various norms and patterns of behaviour by using personifications and types. In this section we have seen how a considerable part of Meier’s production reflects the *cultura animi* conception of philosophy as a moral-psychological therapy. Although Meier was more open to embracing and channelling the passions than the traditional *cultura animi* was, the notion of philosophy and aesthetics as practical regimens of the mind constituted the underlying message of his sometimes humorous presentations.

While Meier’s early work, from the 1740s, was dominated mainly by aesthetics, the topic of philosophy as spiritual exercise would be much more pronounced in the following decade. In the monumental five-volume *Philosophische Sittenlehre* (Philosophical ethics, 1753–1761) more than a thousand pages were devoted to the duties towards the self. “Self-knowledge,” Meier remarked, “requires time, and we must strive to advance it daily and bit by bit.”⁶⁸ For this reason a person must “suspend certain times in which he gathers his mind from all distraction, sets aside all other doings, knocks all other things out of his mind, and then occupies himself with the contemplation of himself in order to know himself better.”⁶⁹ In a manner resembling both ancient philosophical and Christian spiritual exercises, Meier further suggested that one should make “a reasonable and virtuous plan for the whole day,” taking time to reflect on “one’s present state” and “compare it with the plan that was made early in the morning, and examine if one has conducted oneself accordingly.”⁷⁰ In the evening one should finally “consider one’s past life, especially the past day in order to examine how one has spent the time and, what good one has done, where one has failed, how one could have done better, so that one becomes wiser and is better able to plan the next day and act accordingly.”⁷¹ Meier also advised his readers to further structure the examination of the self by keeping a diary. Such “reasonable and pragmatic history of [one’s] own heart and life” should compose “an orderly, coherent and true account of our moral attitude.”⁷²

Two points are particularly worth noticing here. First, Meier's account of the cultivation of the self provides an important key to understanding his conception of philosophy and the philosopher: to follow the kind of road map depicted already in the *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen* was a matter of subordinating oneself to a regimen of regular spiritual exercises. Second, for Meier there was no strict dividing line between the duties pertaining to the philosopher and those pertaining to moral life more generally. Although the philosopher must make them the guiding principles of life, the regimen of the mind that Meier presented was also broadly applicable to reading middle-class men and women.⁷³ Rather than advocating a state of philosopher-kings, Meier's message thus seems to be that everyone should be a little more like philosophers. That Meier actually communicated his ethics to a broader audience of readers becomes clear in the moral weeklies and particularly in those parts where the duties towards the self were discussed. In volume three of *Der Gesellige* (1749), he thus addressed this view of philosophy in a piece on self-knowledge: "It is not possible for someone to socialize well with others if he cannot socialize well with himself."⁷⁴ In a mode characteristic of the infotainment genre he also illustrated this way of life by using character types: "The excellent Mr. Prudentius has his passions and desires in such order that his mind and face resemble a smooth and level sea, over which the winds shy away from storming, and in which the sun and the blue sky are reflected."⁷⁵

Another case in point is a contribution in volume four of the moral weekly *Der Mensch* (Man, 1752) in which the author addressed the necessity of keeping a moral journal. The metaphor was that of life as travel and persons as travellers or wanderers who are in need of a map. "A person who lives carelessly and at best considers his actions only after they have occurred: he acts very foolishly. Without consideration he plunges into a ruin he could easily have avoided and only notices this when he is already there."⁷⁶ To avoid this, Meier and Lange recommended the systematic keeping of a moral journal: "If only a person got used to writing down his or her moral life every day; then he would be urged to behave from morning to evening in such a way that he could go about this work with pleasure in the evening, and that he had no reason to be ashamed of himself at the description of his life story."⁷⁷ That the philosophical exercise and examination of the soul appeared in the moral weeklies is indicative of the way in which Meier transformed the culture of the soul from a relatively restricted philosophical matter to a fundamental part of a civic morality. In doing this he played down the more repressive features of the classical philosophical and Christian *cultura animi* in favour of a more life-affirming approach that embraced the happy Epicurean life.

Conclusions

At the core of the social constructivist account of persona as an office is the assumption that philosophical identities are indistinguishable from the philosophical practices and the philosophical problems produced through these. John Cottingham captures this meaning of persona when stressing that “we are moving to a richer and more positive sense of the term *persona*: one that takes us away from masks and acting towards something more ‘personal’, something connected not just with a ‘career’, but with the full moral and psychological dimensions of someone’s chosen form of life.”⁷⁸ One consequence of this usage of persona has been that conflicts over philosophical problems have come into view as conflicts over philosophy and what it means to be a philosopher. Following this analytical strand, recent scholars have highlighted how, by advancing certain philosophies, early modern philosophers such as Bacon, Descartes, Leibniz and many others also advanced and defended certain views of the philosopher.

On the one hand, Meier’s account of the philosopher provides an additional example of how this dynamic plays out in specific historical contexts. In the wake of the Wolff affair his account of the philosopher emerges as a reformed version of the Wolffian exemplar, engaged in the cognitive and moral perfection of the self. The larger context was that of the early modern *cultura animi* conception of the soul in need of a therapeutic regimen to remove diseases or obstacles to knowledge. In this respect, Meier’s approach to philosophy was shared by many of the most prominent philosophers.

On the other hand, Meier’s project is also significantly different from those of many of his predecessors. Both Pietism and Wolffian philosophy fed into his project of the beautiful and sensible. By blending philosophy with aesthetics and poetry, he found a way of cultivating and perfecting the higher cognitive faculties in tandem with the lower. In the 1740s what had been a fairly narrow intellectual project developed into a broad moral educational one. Rather than promoting an exclusively philosophical persona, the vision was that of a society where people are just a bit more like philosophers. To communicate this message Meier adopted and further explored the styles and genres of the infotainment of the emerging public sphere. He became a master of wrapping philosophical and particularly aesthetic and ethical ideals in entertaining, humorous and often farcical accounts. While this was the case already in his writings on the philosopher from the 1740s, attempts to launch a civic culture of the soul became more pronounced in his later ethical works and in the moral weeklies. This tendency makes Meier highly interesting and relevant in relation to other

cases as it offers us a glimpse of how the early modern approach to philosophy as *cultura animi* tapped into and impacted the formation of a broader middle-class identity.

Notes

Funding: This work was supported by Helge Ax:son Johnsons Foundation (grant number F18-0360), Åke Wibergs Foundation (grant number H17-0116), Birgit & Gad Rausing's Foundation (grant number 2018), Längmanska Kulturfonden (grant number BA19-0723). I declare no conflict of interest.

1. Conal Condren: "The persona of the philosopher and the rhetorics of office in early modern England" in Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger & Ian Hunter (eds.): *The philosopher in early modern Europe. The nature of a contested identity* (Cambridge, 2006), 66–89; John Cottingham: "Descartes as sage. Spiritual askesis in Cartesian philosophy" in Condren, Gaukroger & Hunter (eds.): *The philosopher in early modern Europe*, 182–201; Stephen Gaukroger: "The persona of the natural philosopher" in Condren, Gaukroger & Hunter (eds.): *The philosopher in early modern Europe*, 17–34; Stephen Gaukroger: *Francis Bacon and the transformation of early-modern philosophy* (Cambridge, 2001); Ian Hunter: "The university philosopher in early modern Germany" in Condren, Gaukroger & Hunter (eds.): *The philosopher in early modern Europe*, 35–65; Ian Hunter: "The history of philosophy and the persona of the philosopher" in *Modern Intellectual History* 4:3 (2007), 571–600; Ian Hunter, *Rival enlightenments. Civil and metaphysical philosophy in early modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2001). For the scholarly discussion of persona as a tool for historical analysis see Lorraine Daston & Otto H. Sibum: "Introduction. Scientific personae and their histories" in *Science in Context* 16:1–2 (2003), 1–8; Herman Paul: "Introduction. Scholarly personae. Repertoires and performances of academic identity" in *Low Countries Historical Review* 131:4 (2016), 3–7; David P. Marshall & Kim Barbour: "Making intellectual room for persona studies. A new consciousness and a shifted perspective" in *Persona Studies* 1:1 (2015), 1–12.

2. Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger & Ian Hunter: "Introduction" in Condren, Gaukroger & Hunter (eds.): *The philosopher in early modern Europe*, 8.

3. Gaukroger: "The persona of the natural philosopher"; Cottingham: "Descartes as sage"; Hunter: *Rival enlightenments*.

4. For the two main texts see Georg Friedrich Meier: *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen*, Christian Wolff Gesammelte Werke, Abt. 3, Materialien und Dokumente Bd. 100 (Hildesheim, 2007); Georg Friedrich Meier: *Gründliche Anweisung wie jemand ein neumodischer Weltweiser werden könne in einem Sendschreiben an einen jungen Menschen*, Christian Wolff Gesammelte Werke, Abt. 3, Materialien und Dokumente Bd. 100 (Hildesheim, 2007). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Given Meier's influence and extensive production, he has caught surprisingly little scholarly attention. As a result, existing research is still limited and almost exclusively in German. See for instance: Gideon Stiening & Frank Grunert (eds.): *Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–1777). Philosophie als "Wahre Weltweisheit"* (Berlin, 2015); Riccardo Pozzo: *Georg Friedrich Meiers "Vernunftlehre"* (Stuttgart, 2000); Günter Schenk: *Leben und Werk des halleischen Aufklärers Georg Friedrich Meier*, Hallesche Gelehrtenbiographien (Halle, 1994).

5. While it is well known that Meier developed his conception of the philosopher

in the wake of the Wolff affair, the present study highlights the broader social context of the German civic Enlightenment as well as the *cultura animi* as an overall conceptual framework. Taking this stance, the study draws on earlier research at the same time as it highlights hitherto neglected contexts. For previous studies see Mirjam Reischert: “Einführung” in *Abbildung eines Wahren Weltweisen*, Christian Wolff Gesammelte Werke, Abt. 3, Materialien und Dokumente Bd. 100 (Hildesheim, 2007), 5–57; Günter Gawlick, “G. F. Meiers Stellung in der Religionsphilosophie der deutschen Aufklärung” in Norbert Hinske (ed.): *Zentren der Aufklärung I Halle Aufklärung und Pietismus*, Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung 15 (Heidelberg, 1989), 157–176; Werner Schneiders: “Philosophie und Philosoph. Zur Selbstdeutung des Philosophierens im 18. Jahrhundert,” in Jürgen Klein, Edgar Mass & Jürgen Ritte (eds.): *Aufklärung und Modernität. Eine Freundesgabe für Peter-Eckhard Knabe* (Tübingen, 2006), 231–247; Werner Schneiders: “Concepts of Philosophy” in Knud Haakonssen (ed.): *The Cambridge history of eighteenth-century philosophy* (Cambridge, 2006), 26–44; Werner Schneiders: “Der Philosophiebegriff des philosophischen Zeitalters. Wandlungen im Selbstverständnis der Philosophie von Leibniz bis Kant” in Rudolf Vierhaus (ed.): *Wissenschaften im Zeitalter der Aufklärung. Aus Anlass des 250jährigen Bestehens des Verlages Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht* (Göttingen, 1985).

6. For the principal sources on Wolff’s life see Hans Werner Arndt (ed.): *Christian Wolff Biographie*, Christian Wolff Gesammelte Werke, part 1, Deutsche Schriften, vol. 10 (Hildesheim, 1980). For a recent biography, see Hans-Joachim Kertscher: “*Er brachte Licht und Ordnung in die Welt*”. *Christian Wolff – eine Biographie* (Halle, 2018). For a modern account of the Wolff affair see especially: Johannes Bronisch: *Der Mäzen der Aufklärung. Ernst Christoph von Manteuffel und das Netzwerk des Wolffianismus* (Berlin, 2010); Albrecht Beutel: “Causa Wolffiana. Die Vertreibung Christian Wolffs aus Preußen 1723 als Kulminationspunkt des theologisch-politischen Konflikts zwischen halleschen Pietismus und Aufklärungsphilosophie” in Ulrich Köpf & Rolf Schäfer (eds.): *Wissenschaftliche Theologie und Kirchenleitung. Beiträge zur Geschichte einer spannungsreichen Beziehung für Rolf Schäfer zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen, 2001), 159–202; John Holloran: “Wolff in Halle – banishment and return” in Jürgen Stolzenberg & Oliver-Pierre Rudolph (eds.): *Christian Wolff und die europäische Aufklärung: Akten des 1. Internationalen Christian-Wolff-Kongresses, Halle (Saale), 4.–8. April 2004, Teil 5: Wolff und seine Schule, Wirkungen Wolffs, Wolff in Halle – Vertreibung und Rückkehr*, Christian Wolff Gesammelte Werke, Abt. 3, Materialien und Dokumente, Bd. 105 (Hildesheim, 2007), 365–375; Carl Hinrichs: *Preußentum und Pietismus. Die Pietismus in Brandenburg-Preußen als religiös-soziale Reformbewegung* (Göttingen, 1971); Max Wundt: *Die deutsche Schulphilosophie im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Hildesheim, 1964).

7. The *German philosophy* series was published in the 1710s and 1720s and covered most philosophical disciplines including logic, metaphysics, ethics, politics, natural law, natural theology, and natural philosophy.

8. Beutel: “Causa Wolffiana”; Hinrichs: *Preußentum und Pietismus*, 388–441. For the correspondence leading to and following the expulsion, see the appendix to Arndt: *Christian Wolff Biographie*.

9. Hinrichs: *Preußentum und Pietismus*, 430. See also Georg Volkmar Hartmann: *Anleitung zur Historie der Leibnizisch-Wolffischen Philosophie*, ed. Jean Ecole, Christian Wolff Gesammelte Werke, part 3, Materialien und Dokumente, vol. 4 (Hildesheim, 1973), 819–821.

10. In contrast to his father, Frederick the Great actively promoted the Enlighten-

ment. As scholars have made clear this directly impacted the lives of Wolff and many other philosophers. See Carl Hinrichs: *Preußentum und Pietismus. Die Pietismus in Brandenburg-Preußen als religiös-soziale Reformbewegung* (Göttingen, 1971), 434–441; Christopher M. Clark: *Iron kingdom. The rise and downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (Cambridge MA, 2006), 115–144, 247–283.

11. Eduard Zeller: *Vorträge und Abhandlungen geschichtlichen Inhalts* (Leipzig, 1865), 108–139; Wilhelm Schrader: *Geschichte der Friedrich-Universität zu Halle* (Berlin, 1894), 211–219; Ferdinand Joseph Schneider: “Das geistige Leben von Halle im Zeichen des Endkampfes zwischen Pietismus und Rationalismus” *Sachsen und Anhalt* 14 (1938), 137–166; Beutel: “Causa Wolffiana.”

12. Georg Friedrich Meier: *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen*, 7–8, §. 3. “Unsere gegenwärtigen Zeiten können mit Recht philosophische Zeiten heißen. Die Weltweisheit fängt an, zu einer Mode zu werden. Die äusserliche Gesellschaft der Weltweisen ist schon weit und breit ausgebreitet. Und, welches eben das Unglück ist, die meisten, so die Weltweisheit erlernen, begnügen sich mit den ausserwesentlichen und bloß scheinbaren Unterscheidungs-Stücken der Weltweisen, ohne die Natur und das Wesen eines wahren Weltweisen anzunehmen. Sie bleiben dabey nicht stehen, denn das wäre noch erträglich. Sondern sie begehen Fehler und Narrheiten, und glauben, daß sie als Weltweise dazu ein Recht haben.”

13. Meier: *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen*, 6–7, §. 2. “wie die wahren Weltweisen von ihren Affen unterschieden sind.” “ein Muster vorzustellen, wonach sie sich bilden müssen, wenn sie rechtschaffene Weltweise werden wollen.”

14. Meier: *Gründliche Anweisung*.

15. Meier: *Gründliche Anweisung*, 19–20. “Ich sage, ein neumodischer Weltweiser ist ein philosophischer Geck. Ein Geck ist ein Mensch, der keine solche Handlungen vornimmt, wozu er durch die Natur aufgelegt ist; sondern der lauter Handlungen vornimmt, eine Lebensart ergreift, Minen, Geberden, Worte und sein ganzes Betragen so einrichtet, daß es wider seine Natur ist, kurtz, der ein *Asinus ad lyram* ist.”

16. Meier: *Gründliche Anweisung*, 24–25. “Peter ist ein vortreffliches Muster dieser Regel. Herr Peter läßt einen überaus grossen Muth und Hertzhaftigkeit, durch seine Minen, Geberden und Worte, blicken, obgleich ihm ganz anders zu Muthe ist. Er gibt bey aller Gelegenheit vor, daß er Willens sey, die wichtigsten Geschäfte zu unternehmen. Er will Wissenschaften reformiren, neue Wahrheiten erfinden, Bücher schreiben, u. s. w. Wenn es aber zum Treffen kommt, so fehlt es ihm entweder an Lust, oder es sind sehr wichtige Hindernisse in den Weg gekommen.”

17. Meier had come to an agreement with his friend Samuel Gotthold Lange that the one who survived should write the other’s biography. Hence Lange wrote and published a biography of Meier in 1778. Longer passages from an autobiographical text written by Meier were integrated into this work. I follow previous scholars in treating these passages as parts of Meier’s own autobiography. Samuel Gotthold Lange: *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers* (Halle, 1778). For a modern biography of Meier, see Schenk: *Leben und Werk des halleischen Aufklärers Georg Friedrich Meier*. See also Reischert: “Einführung”; Gawlick: “G. F. Meiers Stellung in der Religionsphilosophie der deutschen Aufklärung.”

18. Helmut Obst: *August Hermann Francke und sein Werk* (Halle, 2013), 97.

19. For a recent account of the orphanage as a scientific community, see Kelly Joan Whitmer: *The Halle orphanage as scientific community. Observation, eclecticism, and pietism in the early Enlightenment* (Chicago IL, 2015).

20. Schenk: *Leben und Werk des halleschen Aufklärers Georg Friedrich Meier*, 14–15.
21. Lange: *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers*, 26–27.
22. Lange: *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers*, 27. “So bekam ich sehr frühzeitig eine Liebe zu der scientisischen Art zu denken, und in meinem 13ten Jahre konnte ich alle Sätze in Wolfs Auszuge aus den mathematischen Wissenschaften, was die Arithmetick, Geometrie und Trigonometrie betrifft, demonstrieren.”
23. See particularly Schenk: *Leben und Werk des halleschen Aufklärers Georg Friedrich Meier*, 19–32; Hans-Joachim Kertscher: “Georg Friedrich Meiers Platz im geistig-kulturellen Leben der Stadt Halle” in Stiening & Grunert (eds.): *Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–1777)*, 25–41.
24. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten: *Reflections on Poetry. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s Meditationes Philosophicae de Nonnullis Ad Poema Pertinentibus*, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holter (Berkeley CA, 1954), 78, 39.
25. The reaserch on this development is extensive. See for instance Ernst von Borries & Erika von Borries (eds.): *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte Band 2: Aufklärung und Empfindsamkeit Sturm und Drang* (München, 1991); Manfred Beetz: “Anakreontik und Rokoko im Bezugsfeld der Aufklärung – Eine Forschungsbilanz” in Manfred Beetz & Hans-Joachim Kertscher (eds.): *Anakreontische Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 2005), 1–17; Joachim Jacob: *Heilige Poesie. Zu einem literarischen Modell bei Pyra, Klopstock und Wieland* (Tübingen, 1997); Hans-Joachim Kertscher (ed.): *Anakreontik. Zweiter Hallescher Dichterkreis; Glim, Götz, Rudnick, Uz*, 1. Aufl, Schriftenreihe zur Geistes- und Kulturgeschichte Texte und Dokumente (Halle/Saale, 1994); Hans-Georg Kemper: *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit. Band 6/1 Empfindsamkeit* (Tübingen, 1991); Alfred Anger: “Deutsche Rokoko-Dichtung. Ein Forschungsbericht” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 36:3–4 (1962), 430–479, 614–648.
26. Borries & Borries: *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte Band 2. Aufklärung und Empfindsamkeit Sturm und Drang*, 63–65; Kemper: *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit. Band 6/1 Empfindsamkeit*, 96–148.
27. For the public sphere and the infotainment genres see Jürgen Habermas: *The structural transformation of the public sphere. An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (Cambridge MA, 1989); Wolfgang Martens: *Die Botschaft der Tugend* (Stuttgart, 1968); Elke Maar: *Bildung durch Unterhaltung. Die Entdeckung des Infotainment in der Aufklärung. Hallenser und Wiener Moralische Wochenschriften in der Blütezeit des Moraljournalismus, 1748–1782* (Pfaffenweiler, 1995); Helga Brandes: “Moralische Wochenschriften” in Ernst Fischer, Wilhelm Haefs & York-Gothart Mix (eds.): *Von Almanach bis Zeitung. Ein Handbuch der Medien in Deutschland, 1700–1800* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999). For the context of the new middle class or *Bürgerlichkeit* see Borries and Borries: *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte Band 2: Aufklärung und Empfindsamkeit Sturm und Drang*; Kemper: *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit. Band 6/1 Empfindsamkeit*; Achim Aurnhammer, Dieter Martin & Robert Seidel (eds.): *Gefühlskultur in Der Bürgerlichen Aufklärung, Frühe Neuzeit*, Bd. 98 (Tübingen, 2004); Wolfdietrich Rasch: *Freundschaftskult und Freundschaftsdichtung im Deutschen Schrifttum des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Halle, 1936); Klaus Manger & Ute Pott (eds.): *Rituale der Freundschaft* (Heidelberg, 2006); Wolfram Mauser & Barbara Becker-Cantarino (eds.): *Frauenfreundschaft, Männerfreundschaft. Literarische Diskurse im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1991).
28. Wolfgang Martens: “Zur Thematisierung von ‘schöner Literatur’ in Samuel Gotthold Langes und Georg Friedrich Meiers Moralischen Wochenschriften Der Gesellige und Der Mensch” in Theodor Verwey & Hans-Joachim Kertscher (eds.):

Dichtungstheorien der deutschen Frühaufklärung (Tübingen, 1995), 133–145. Although the moral weeklies were composed to give the readers the impression that numerous writers were involved, contributions were typically written by one or a few authors contracted by a publisher. For the question of authorship see Martens: *Die Botschaft der Tugend*, 123–141.

29. For a thorough analysis of the content and structure of the moral weeklies see Martens: *Die Botschaft der Tugend*.

30. Samuel Gotthold Lange & Georg Friedrich Meier: *Der Gesellige, eine moralische Wochenschrift. Erster Theil* (Halle, 1748), 126, part 15. “Cajus hat eine besondere Gabe, eine Sache lebhaft zu erzehlen; er weiß mit Geberden und der Erhebung der Stimme eine geringe und gleichgültige Begebenheit der ganzen Gesellschaft so vorzutragen, daß jeder besonders Theil daran nimmt. Der junge muntere Curius ahmet nicht nur die Minen, sondern auch die Stimme und den Ton eines jeden nach; und er thut dieses so natürlich, daß als ich letzt vor einem Zimmer stand, um einige Freunde zu besuchen, ich die Thüre nicht aufmachte, weil er einen Mann nachahmte, dessen Gegenwart ich nicht vermuthet hatte; ein lautes Lachen benahm mir meinen Irrthum.”

31. Lange & Meier: *Der Gesellige*, 177, part 21. “Die Gabe, feurig und glücklich zu scherzen, gehört unstreitig unter die schimmernden Verzierungen eines guten Gesellschafters.”

32. Lange and Meier: *Der Gesellige*, 183–184. “feuriger”, “Bosheit, Feindschaft, Neid, Hochmuth oder Ehrgeiz”.

33. Georg Friedrich Meier: *Gedancken von Schertzen* (Halle, 1744), preface.

34. Meier: *Gedancken von Schertzen*, 19–20, §§ 14–15.

35. Meier: *Gedancken von Schertzen*, 31, 33–34, 36–37, 75, 81, §§ 25, 27, 29, 56, 62.

36. In stressing this context I partly deviate from the view that the work expressed real bitterness and resentment. See Reischert: “Einführung.”

37. Meier: *Gründliche Anweisung*, 30. “Monade, zureichender Grund, prästabilirte Harmonie, beste Welt u. s. w.”.

38. Meier: *Gründliche Anweisung*, 43.

39. Meier: *Gründliche Anweisung*, 55. “schlugen so gewaltig auf den Tisch, daß ich meine Gedancken nicht zusammenhalten konnte. Oftmals bin ich in Lebensgefahr gerathen, wenn von dem Stampfen ihrer Füße grosse Stücken Kalck von den Wänden abfielen.”

40. Meier: *Gründliche Anweisung*, 56. “Sie reden mir so nahe ins Gesicht, daß ich mehr rieche, was diese Herrn gegessen haben, als daß ich verstehen sollte was sie sagen.”

41. Meier: *Gründliche Anweisung*, 53. “in einer jeden ansehnlichen Stadt in Deutschland ein Revier oder eine Strasse erwählt würde, so man das Quartier der Gecken, oder des Geckengätzschen nennen könnte.”

42. Meier: *Gründliche Anweisung*, 56–57. “In dieser Strasse nun möchten sie toben, lermen, schreyen und schimpfen wie sie wolten, das gienge keinem andern Menschen was an [...]. Die Wörter absurd, dum, einfältig, atqui, hören sie doch, definitio, demonstratio, würden unendliche mal, mit einem zerschmetterndern Nachdrucke, gehört werden.”

43. Schenk: *Leben und Werk des halleischen Aufklärers Georg Friedrich Meier*, 19.

44. Johann Christoph Schwab, Karl Leonhard Reinhold & Johann Heinrich Abicht: *Preisschriften über die Frage: Welche Fortschritte hat die Metaphysik seit Leibnizens und Wolffs Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht?* (Berlin, 1796), 24. “die Schöndenker werden alles in der Philosophie verderben.”

45. Maar: *Bildung durch Unterhaltung*.
46. Sometimes accounts in the moral weeklis are similar to those in his other works to the point of being almost copy pasted.
47. Pierre Hadot: *Philosophy as a way of life. Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Malden, 1995). For recent reading of early modern philosophy as spiritual exercise see Sorana Corneanu. *Regimens of the mind. Boyle, Locke, and the early modern cultura animi tradition* (Chicago IL, 2011); Matthew L. Jones: *The good life in the scientific revolution. Descartes, Pascal, Leibniz, and the cultivation of virtue* (Chicago IL, 2006); Gaukroger: *Francis Bacon and the transformation of early-modern philosophy*; Hunter: *Rival enlightenments*.
48. Corneanu: *Regimens of the Mind*.
49. Jones: *The good life in the scientific revolution*; Bradley Rubidge: “Descartes’s Meditations and devotional meditations” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51:1 (1990), 27–49; Gary Hatfield: “The senses and the fleshless eye. The Meditations as cognitive exercises” in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.): *Essays on Descartes’ Meditations* (Berkeley CA, 1986), 45–79; Walter John Stohrer: “Descartes and Ignatius Loyola. La Flèche and Manresa revisited” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 17:1 (1979), 11–27; Arthur Thomson: “Ignace de Loyola et Descartes. L’influence des exercices spirituels sur les oeuvres philosophiques de Descartes” in *Archives de philosophie* 35 (1972), 61–85.
50. Hunter: *Rival enlightenments*.
51. Hunter: *Rival enlightenments*, 102–104.
52. Christian Wolff: *Vernünfftige Gedancken von der Menschen Thun und Lassen, zu Beförderung ihrer Glückseligkeit, den Liebhabern der Wahrheit mitgetheilet*, ed. Hans Werner Arndt, Christian Wolff Gesammelte Werke, Abt. 1, Deutsche Schriften, Bd. 4 (Hildesheim, 2006), 16, §. 19. “uns die Natur verbindet zu thun, was uns und unseren Zustand vollkommener machet, und zu unterlassen, was uns und unseren Zustand unvollkommener machet.”
53. The perhaps best example is here the *German Logic* in which the practical exercise of philosophy is constantly emphasised. See Christian Wolff: *Vernünfftige Gedancken von den Kräften des menschlichen Verstandes und ihrem richtigen Gebrauche in Erkenntnis der Wahrheit*, ed. Hans Werner Arndt, Christian Wolff Gesammelte Werke, Abt. 1, Deutsche Schriften, Bd. 1 (Hildesheim, 1978).
54. Wolff: *German ethics*, 105–106, §. 173.
55. While Baumgarten’s aesthetics has long been approached mainly from an epistemological perspective, recent scholars have acknowledge its anthropological side, sometimes even highlighting the context of philosophy as spiritual exercise: Gabriel Trop: *Poetry as a way of life. Aesthetics and Askesis in the German eighteenth century* (Evanston IL, 2015); Simon Grote: *Moral philosophy and the origins of modern aesthetic theory in Scotland and Germany*, PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley (Berkeley CA, 2010); Steffen Gross: *Felix Aestheticus. Die Ästhetik als Lehre vom Menschen* (Würzburg, 2001).
56. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten: *Ästhetik* I, trans. Dagmar Mirbach (Hamburg, 2007), 62–63, § 78. “Ad characterem felicitatis aethetici generalem... requiritur... IMPETUS AESTHETICUS (pulcra mentis incitatio, inflammatioque, ὄρμη, ecstasis, furor, ἐνθουσιασμός, πνεῦμα θεοῦ)...”
57. Georg Friedrich Meier: *Theoretische Lehre von den gemüthsbewegungen überhaupt* (Halle, 1744).
58. Meier: *Theoretische Lehre*, 6, § 5. “Sie belehret uns, wenn wir verbunden sind,

eine Leidenschaft zu erwecken, zu ernähren, zu verstärken, zu vermindern, zu stillen und zu verhindern. Kurz, die practische Lehre von den Gemüthsbewegungen, unterwirft die Leidenschaften der Vernunft, und zeigt den rechtmäßigen Gebrauch derselben.”

59. Georg Friedrich Meier: *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften* (Halle, 1748), 30, §. 18. “Es ist eine von den vornehmsten Pflichten, die wir gegen unsere Seele zu beobachten haben, daß wir alle unsere sinnlichen Kräfte der Seele ausbessern müssen. Nun ist es aber eine elende Moral, welche uns zwar sagt, was wir thun sollen, nicht aber wie wir dasselbe bewerkstelligen können. Wenn also die philosophische Sittenlehre vollständig seyn sol, so mus man wissen, wie man den sinnlichen Theil der Seele verbessern soll, dieses aber lehrt uns die Aestheticck.”

60. Georg Friedrich Meier: *Abbildung eines Kunstrichters* (Halle, 1745).

61. Meier: *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen*, 6, §.2. “was zu einem ächten und wohlgerathenen Sohne der Weltweisheit gehört”, “wie die wahren Weltweisen von ihren Affen unterschieden sind.”

62. Meier: *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen*, 7, § 3. “Ich werde mir angelegen seyn lassen, allen angehenden Weltweisen ein Muster vorzustellen, wonach sie sich bilden müssen, wenn sie rechtschaffene Weltweise werden wollen. Sie werden daraus die Regeln herleiten können, die sie ausüben müssen, wenn sie zu der Gesellschaft der wahren Weltweisen... gerechnet werden wollen.”

63. Meier: *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen*, 21–22, §.14. “Ein wahrer und rechtschaffener Weltweiser ist derjenige, der 1) so viele, 2) so edele, und 3) so fruchtbare philosophische Wahrheiten zu erkennen sucht als ihm möglich ist, und das 4) in der grösten Klarheit, 5) auf die richtigste Art, 6) mit der grösten Gewissheit, und 7) auf die lebendigste Weise, als möglich ist. Diese seine Bemühungen insgesamt werden so starck und emsig von ihm fortgesetzt, als es ihm möglich ist, und zu allen diesem Bemühungen läßt er sich hauptsächlich 8) bewegen, durch das Bestreben Gott nachzuahmen und die Ehre desselben zu befördern.”

64. Meier: *Abbildung eines Wahren Weltweisen*, preface; Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten: *Ethica philosophica* (Halle, 1740); Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten: *De vitiis quasiphilosophorum ethicis* (1742). For Baumgarten’s epistemic virtues see Alessandro Nanini: “The six faces of beauty. Baumgarten on the perfections of knowledge in the context of the German Enlightenment” in *Archiv Für Geschichte Der Philosophie* 102:3 (2020), 477–512; Toshiro Osawa: *Perfection and morality. A commentary on Baumgarten’s Ethica philosophica and its relevance to Kantian ethics*, PhD diss., Macquarie University (Sydney, 2014), 98–101; Reischert: “Einführung.”

65. Baumgarten: *De vitiis quasiphilosophorum ethicis*, 9, § 3. “Philosophiae studiosus et philosophus, qua talis, §. I. pro virili et, quantum ipsi possibile, studere tenetur 1) veriori 2) clariori 3) certiori 4) ardentiori cognitioni 5) plurium 6) maiorum s. foecundiorum et nobiliorum qualitatum 7) in pluribus 8) maioribusque rebus 9) sine fide cognoscendarum ex 10) pluribus 11) certioribusque rationibus.”

66. For Meier’s ethics of perfection see also Reischert: “Einführung”; Schneiders: “Philosophie und Philosoph.”

67. Meier: *Abbildung eines Wahren Weltweisen*, 11, §. 5. “Durch deisen Nutzen kan der beständige Wachsthum eines Weltweisen erhalten werden, dadurch wird ein Weltweiser für allen philosophischen Hochmuth bewahrt, und er bleibt ein bescheidener und demüthiger Weltweiser.”

68. Georg Friedrich Meier: *Philosophische Sittenlehre. Anderer Theil* (Halle, 1754), 361,

§ 394. “Selbsterkenntniß erfordert Zeit, und wir müssen nach und nach täglich in derselben weiter fortzukommen suchen.”

69. Meier: *Philosophische Sittenlehre*, 390, § 407. “gewisse Zeiten aussetzen, in welchen er sein Gemüth von aller Zerstreung samlet, alle andere Geschäfte beyseite setzt, alle anderer Dinge aus den Gedancken schlägt, und sich alsdenn mit der Betrachtung seiner Selbst beschäftigt, um sich selbst besser kennen zu lernen.”

70. Meier: *Philosophische Sittenlehre*, 391. “einen vernünftigen und tugendhaften Entwurf, zum ganzen Tage”, “ofte des Tages über an seinen gegenwärtigen Zustand denken solle”, “das gegenwärtige Verhalten mit dem Frühmorgens gemachten Entwürffe vergleichen, und untersuchen, ob man sich plichtmäßig verhalte”. See also Wolff: *German ethics*, 105–106, § 173.

71. Meier: *Philosophische Sittenlehre*, 391–392. “sein vergangenes Leben, sonderlich des vergangenen Tages, denken soll, um zu untersuchen, wie man denselben zurückgelegt, was man guts gethan, wo man gefehlt, wo man es besser hätte machen können, um aufs künftige dadurch klüger zu werden, und die Entwürffe des folgenden Tages besser einzurichten und auszuführen.”

72. Meier: *Philosophische Sittenlehre*, 408. “Kleinigkeiten”, “Lappalien”, “vernünftigen und pragmatischen Historie seines eigenen Herzens und Lebens”, “eine ordentliche, zusammenhängende und treue, Erzählung unseres moralischen Verhaltens seyn”.

73. For Meier’s appeal to a broader audience see also Gawlick’s analysis of Meier’s conception of freedom of thought and speech. Gawlick: “G. F. Meiers Stellung in der Religionsphilosophie der deutschen Aufklärung”, 163–164.

74. Samuel Gotthold Lange & Georg Friedrich Meier: *Der Gesellige. Eine Moralische Wochenschrift herausgegeben von Samuel Gotthold Lange und Georg Friedrich Meier. Teil 3 und 4 (1749)*, ed. Wolfgang Martens (Hildesheim, 1987), 89, part 107. “Es ist nicht möglich, daß jemand mit andern wohl umgehen könne, wenn er mit sich selbst nicht wohl umgehet.”

75. Lange & Meier: *Der Gesellige*, 91, part 107. “Der vortrefliche Herr Prudentius hat seine Leidenschaften und Begierden in solcher Ordnung, daß sein Gemüth und Gesicht einer glatten und ebenen See gleicht, über die die Winde zu stürmen sich scheuen, und in welcher die Sonne und der blaue Himmel sich spiegeln.”

76. Samuel Gotthold Lange & Georg Friedrich Meier: *Der Mensch, eine moralische Wochenschrift. Vierter Theil* (Halle, 1752), 322, part 168. “Ein Mensch, welcher unbedachtsam in den Tag hinein lebt, und seine Handlungen höchstens etwa erst beurtheilt, wenn sie schon geschehen sind: der handelt sehr thörich. Er stürzt sich ohne Ueberlegung in ein Verderben, welches er leicht hätte verhüten können, und wenn er schon in demselben liegt, so merkt ers erst.”

77. Lange & Meier: *Der Mensch*, 326, part 168. “Wenn ein Mensch sich es nur erst angewöhnt hätte, täglich seinen moralischen Lebenslauf aufzuschreiben; so würde er dadurch angetrieben werden, sich von Morgen bis auf den Abend so zu verhalten, daß er des Abends mit Freuden an diese Arbeit gehen könnte, und daß er keine Ursache habe, sich selbst vor der Beschreibung seines Lebenslaufes zu schämen.”

78. Cottingham: “Descartes as sage”, 184.

Abstract

Georg Friedrich Meier and the promotion of the philosopher in the German civic Enlightenment.
Andreas Rydberg, PhD in History of Science and Ideas, Department of History of Science and Ideas, Uppsala University, Sweden, andreas.rydberg@idehist.uu.se

This article contributes to the analysis of the persona of the early modern philosopher by focusing on the eighteenth-century German philosopher Georg Friedrich Meier. The article pursues three lines of argument. First, it argues that Meier's work took form in relation to the decades-long early Enlightenment debate regarding philosophy and the philosopher that is sometimes referred to as the Wolff affair. Second, it shows that Meier belonged to a new generation of intellectuals, poets and writers, who steered philosophy towards the exploration of identity and selfhood. As this happened the figure of the philosopher and of philosophy became part of a broader moral-educational project, where norms and patterns of behaviour were communicated in a light-hearted literary style, often by using the infotainment genres of the emerging public sphere. Third, underlying Meier's sometimes humorous and satiric account of the philosopher was a serious message regarding philosophy as a methodological and partly therapeutic regimen for a soul perturbed by passion and desire. While this aspect of early modern philosophy has received increasing scholarly interest, the case of Meier offers a glimpse of how it fed into and became part of a broader middle-class identity.

Keywords: persona, identity, cultura animi, early German Enlightenment, Georg Friedrich Meier, Christian Wolff, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten