

Locke in Halle: A chapter of the 18th-century German reception of John Locke

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Abstract: The paper focuses on Locke's presence in Germany in the central decades of the 18th century, i.e. in the period that goes from the rise to the fall of Wolff's philosophy. Halle, one of the most important centers of the *Aufklärung*, turns out to be the perfect venue of the early stage of his reception. Locke's ideas played a central role in Wolff's opposition to Thomasius, in his controversy with the Pietistic theologians and with the supporters of the Thomasian school, and in his later difficult relation to the cultural environment at the Academy of Sciences in Berlin. Wolff's opinion on Locke changes over the time, and exerts its influence on a relevant part of the German philosophical world. Locke is described as the inspiration for the degenerated form of Enlightenment promoted at the Prussian court, for atheists, deists, materialists, and skeptics. Short after the fall of Wolff's hegemony in Germany, Halle is once again the seat of an important reconsideration of Locke's image; Meier insists on aspects of his philosophy which will characterize his reception in the later decades, e.g. epistemic modesty, the suspicion about the omnipotence of reason, and a cautious attitude towards metaphysical claims. Certainly, the later and well-known image of Locke as the champion of empiricism, the physiologist of human mind, the refined connoisseur of human nature that can be found in Feder, in Tetens, and in Kant, is the outcome of the 'rediscovery' of Locke occurring after the posthumous publication of Leibniz' *Nouveaux Essais*, but it shows aspects that reveal the persistent influence of Meier's view. On this basis, the paper suggests a reconsideration of the still dominant image of 18th-century Germany and its relation to the cultural processes that were going on in the rest of Europe.

Keywords: Christian Wolff, Johann Franz Budde, Georg Friedrich Meier, Materialism, Skepticism, Empiricism.

The importance of John Locke in 18th-century German philosophy is widely recognized. Kant's project of a critical philosophy, in which the main issues of the long German Enlightenment come together, has notoriously one of its main sources of inspiration in Locke. This fact does not only concern

his celebrated attempt to reconcile empiricism and rationalism, that Kant himself presents as the real 'historical' meaning of his philosophical enterprise, but even more the concern about the boundaries of reason and the conditions of the validity of its use, that constitute the genuine starting-point of Kant's epoch-making 'Revolution in thinking'. Important representatives of *Kant-Forschung*, from Ernst Cassirer to Alois Riehl, insisted on the debt assumed by the founder of transcendental philosophy towards the author of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*¹. Beside the case of Kant, Locke played a central role even among less prominent figures of the *Aufklärung*, from Andreas Rüdiger to Johann Nicolaus Tetens, who soon earned the appellation of the 'German Locke', to the main representatives of the *Popularphilosophie*, from the empirical orientation of Johann Heinrich Feder's philosophical investigation, to the naturalism and materialism promoted by Christoph Meiners and Michael Hißmann in Göttingen during the two final decades of the 18th century². Beside that, the long-lasting influence of Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* on the deistic aspects of Johann Christoph Gottsched's and Lessing's investigations, and in general on the claims of the movement of the German neologians is an achievement on which the scholarship has been unanimous³.

Episodes like the ones we have just mentioned are well known to the philosophical chronicles and contribute to shape a persuasive image of the massive and stable presence of John Locke's philosophy in 18th-century

¹ See A. Riehl, *Der philosophische Kriticismus. Geschichte und System*, vol. 1, Kröner, Leipzig 1924 (reprint of the 1908² edition), pp. 19-99. The title of the chapter on Locke in this edition is "Der Kriticismus in Lockes Essay über den menschlichen Verstand", whereas in the first edition (1876) it was "Locke als Begründer des psychologischen Kriticismus" (pp. 19-63). See also E. Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, vol. 2, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1907, bk. 6, ch. 1; R. Brandt, "Locke und Kant", in M.P. Thompson (ed.), *John Locke und Immanuel Kant. Historische Rezeption und gegenwärtige Relevanz*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1991, pp. 87-108.

² Regarding the presence of Locke in Göttingen see L. Marino, *Praeceptores Germaniae. Göttingen 1770-1820*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1995. On Tetens see U. Thiel, "Zwischen empirischer Psychologie und rationaler Seelenlehre. Tetens über das Selbstgefühl", in G. Stiening and U. Thiel (eds.), *Johann Nikolaus Tetens (1736-1807). Philosophie in der Tradition des europäischen Empirismus*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2014, pp. 89-102; Id., "Experience and Inner Sense: Feder - Lossius - Kant", in T. Prunea-Bretonnet and K. de Boer (eds.), *Conceptions of Experience in the German Enlightenment*, Routledge, London (in print); Id., "Hißmann und der Materialismus", in H.F. Klemme, G. Stiening, and F. Wunderlich (eds.), *Michael Hißmann (1752-1784). Ein materialistischer Philosoph der deutschen Aufklärung*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2013, pp. 25-41.

³ See in particular G. Gawlick, "Der Deismus als Grundzug der Religionsphilosophie der Aufklärung", in AA.VV., *Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), ein "bekanntere Unbekanntere" der Aufklärung in Hamburg*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1973, pp. 15-43.

Germany⁴. A presence that was undoubtedly reinforced and somehow reshaped by the ‘rediscovery of Locke’ occasioned by the posthumous publication of Leibniz’s *Nouveaux Essais sur l’entendement humain* in 1765, which undoubtedly brought about a far-reaching upheaval in the philosophical scene of the time⁵.

Such well-established results of the philosophical-historical investigation notwithstanding, the present paper focusses on a less celebrated phase of the confrontation of the German world with Locke’s philosophy; in particular it takes into account Locke’s image and the role it assumed in the period from the early phase of the Enlightenment promoted by Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, to the establishment, during the 1720s, of a ‘national German philosophy’ thanks to Christian Wolff (1679-1754), whose influence was almost unchallenged until the end of the 1740s. The present paper aims at sketching, so to speak, the main but still uncertain lines of the prehistory of the well-known narrative we have mentioned above.

My guiding hypothesis is the following. Locke’s philosophy – which was consonant in its main concerns with the claims that had inspired the cultural ‘revolution’ carried on by the young Thomasius – played an important role both in the establishment of the new model of philosophy promoted by Wolff in Halle during the first decades of the new century, and even in the later affair with the Pietistic theologians and with the supporters of the Thomasian school Wolff was involved in. The clear echo of the image Wolff developed of Locke’s philosophy in those years will persist in the later defense of his own system that he took up as a reaction to the anti-Wolffian campaign at the Prussian court.

⁴ On the presence of Locke in Germany see K. Pollok, “Die Locke-Rezeption in der deutschen Aufklärung: frühe lateinische und deutsche Übersetzungen von Lockes Werken (1701-61)”, introduction to Id. (ed.), *Locke in Germany. Early German Translations of John Locke (1709-61)*, Thoemmes Continuum, Bristol 2004, pp. v-xxxiii; F.A. Brown, “German Interest in John Locke’s ‘Essay’, 1668-1800”, in *The Journal of English and German Philology* 50 (1951), pp. 466-82. More in general, it is still useful to refer to G. Zart, *Einfluss der englischen Philosophen seit Bacon auf die deutsche Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Dümmler, Berlin 1881. A different opinion may be found in K.P. Fischer, “John Locke in the German Enlightenment: An Interpretation”, in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36 (1975), pp. 431-46.

⁵ Regarding the effects of the publication of Leibniz’ *Nouveaux Essais* on the German world see the pioneering work by G. Tonelli, “Leibniz on innate ideas and the early reactions to the publication of the *Nouveaux essais*”, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 12 (1974), pp. 437-54.

The focus on the first half of the 18th century – a stage of the German Enlightenment in which Locke’s presence has not usually been considered especially relevant – allows us to shed light on the genesis of a ‘shadow’⁶ image of Locke as a skeptical supporter of deism and materialism, which will be very persistent at least until the publication of the *Nouveaux Essais*, when that image was replaced by the still nowadays more common one of Locke as the empiricist, the geographer and the physiologist of human understanding that one can find in authors like Tetens and Feder, but whose canonical formulation goes back to Kant⁷. Furthermore, the focus on the first decades of the century will allow a reconsideration of the still dominant image of 18th-century Germany, as a place where people were following from far away the cultural processes that were going on in the rest of Europe, being themselves engaged in their own battles in favor of a reformation of philosophy against the aridity and sophistries of the long tradition of scholastic philosophy⁸.

1. *An early stage*

When in 1690 Thomasius left Leipzig for Halle the name of Locke was far from being unknown to the German philosophical world. In 1688, the same year as the publication of Thomasius’ *Introductio ad philosophiam aulicam* (which was revolutionary in its own way), the Latin translation of the first book of Locke’s *Essay on human understanding* begun to circulate. This, together with the *Abrégé d’un ouvrage intitulé “Essai philosophique touchant l’Entendement”* that Le Clerc had published in the same year in his “Bibliothèque universelle” (Amsterdam), represented the only access to Locke’s ideas for all those who

⁶ I refer here to the idea of the presence of ‘shadow histories’ in philosophy, a kind of outline of historical figures that can play a pivotal role in the reception of a specific author; this very interesting phenomenon is accurately described in R.A. Watson, “Shadow History in Philosophy”, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31 (1993), pp. 95-109.

⁷ On Kant’s idea of Locke as physiologist of the understanding see P. Guyer, “Kant’s transcendental idealism and the limits of knowledge: Kant’s alternative to Locke’s physiology”, in D. Garber and B. Longuenesse (eds.), *Kant and the Early Moderns*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2008, pp. 79-99; C.T. Wolfe, “The ‘Physiology of the Understanding’ and the ‘Mechanics of the Soul’: Reflections on Some Phantom Philosophical Projects”, in E. Pasini and P. Rumore (eds.), *Another 18th-century German Philosophy? Rethinking German Enlightenment*, special issue of the yearbook *Quaestio* 16 (2016), pp. 3-26.

⁸ On the fortune and decline of the Aristotelian scholastic philosophy in Germany see P. Petersen, *Geschichte der aristotelischen Philosophie im protestantischen Deutschland*, Meiner, Leipzig 1921, esp. pp. 384-92.

could not read the original in English. But, if what J.G.A. Pocock claims about the history of reception is true, namely, that it “cannot really begin on the eighth day of creation, when a work leaves its author’s desk and begins to be received by others”⁹, it is also true that the announcement of the publication of the *Essay* in the issue of August 1690 of the “Acta eruditorum”, the main organ of cultural information of the time, was impressively well timed¹⁰.

Thomasius’ philosophical investigation has its heyday in the years he spent in Halle; starting from 1691 he published a series of works in which, in a fresh and accessible German, he offered a reform in philosophy grounded on the reformulation of logic and morals¹¹. In his writings Thomasius expresses questions and attitudes, which would have found a prolific convergence with Locke’s ideas. Thomasius promoted an anti-scholastic, anti-speculative, anti-deductive, and anti-foundational ideal of philosophy, whose clear empirical orientation reflected both his cautious attitude towards the traditional metaphysical claims, and his concern about the main practical, even pragmatist engagement of any philosophical investigation. In his pioneering 1969 work, Lewis White Beck summarized the main features of Thomasius’ philosophy by stressing a clear but never explicitly mentioned convergence with Locke’s ideas: “Nominalism, a sensationistic theory of the origin of ideas, a recognition of the importance of probability in life, and a belief in a healthy common sense as a substitute for speculation and subtlety were recommended in a vigorous, though often awkward, German: and again there was attack on pedantry, speculation, sophistry and superstition”¹².

Thomasius’ direct acquaintance with Locke’s work in those years cannot be confirmed. It is very unlikely that Locke was a direct source of inspiration at the time of the publication of the *Einleitung zur Vernunftlehre* (1691), and it is uncertain whether Thomasius knew the *Abrégé* by Le Clerc, or not¹³.

⁹ J.G.A. Pocock, “Negative and Positive Aspects of Locke’s Place in Eighteenth-Century Discourse”, in M.P. Thompson (ed.), *John Locke und Immanuel Kant*, cit., p. 48.

¹⁰ See *Acta eruditorum* 9 (Aug. 1690), p. 424.

¹¹ See Ch. Thomasius, *Einleitung zur Vernunftlehre*, Salfeld, Halle 1691; Id., *Ausübung der Vernunftlehre*, Salfeld, Halle 1691; Id., *Einleitung zur Sittenlehre*, Salfeld, Halle 1692; Id., *Ausübung der Sittenlehre*, Salfeld, Halle 1696 (reproduction: Olms, Hildesheim 1993-).

¹² L.W. Beck, *Early German Philosophy and his Predecessors*, Thoemmes, Bristol 1996 (1969¹), p. 249.

¹³ Regarding Thomasius’ direct acquaintance with Locke the opinions are divergent. According to Brown, “Thomasius himself acknowledged that Locke’s chapter on religious ‘enthusiasm’, which first appeared in the fourth edition of 1700 and in the French translation of the same year provided a powerful stimulus in turning him away from extreme Pietism”. See Brown, “German Interest in John Locke’s ‘Essay’”, cit., p. 468. Locke’s chapter will be translated into German by G.M. Preu as an appendix to his *Geist der wahren aber falsch befundenen Inspiration*, Ulm 1720. R. Widmaier remarks that the

While renouncing to answer such a well-debated question, which is probably destined to remain unsolved, it is undeniable that Thomasius had prepared in Germany, and especially in Halle, a fertile soil for the blossoming of Locke's ideas. The cultural atmosphere was marked by discontent; both the religious and the philosophical milieu were engaging in a protest against orthodoxy and sectarianism, against the formality of the cult as well as against the aridity of Scholasticism¹⁴. Thanks to Thomasius Halle would become a place where philosophy was understood and practiced in a way that had a natural affinity with that promoted by Locke¹⁵.

Nicolaus Hieronymus Gundling, Thomasius' beloved disciple, published in 1713 a treatise on logic with the title *Ars recte ratiocinandi*¹⁶, clearly inspired by Locke, whose presence is manifest in the criticism of innate ideas (where Gundling praises Locke explicitly), in the claim about the empirical origin of ideas (ch. i, §§ 15-16), in the rejection of syllogistic logic, in the conception of truth as agreement between ideas (ch. iii, § 17).

Actually, already a decade before the publication of the *Ars recte ratiocinandi* Johann Franz Budde – who was himself close to the Thomasian school during the years he spent in Halle, before he was appointed Professor of Theology in the University of Jena in 1705 – had introduced elements of indubitable Lockean origin in his *Institutiones philosophiae eclecticae* (1703)¹⁷. The general project of an

empiricist orientation of Thomasius' philosophy might be the outcome of his reading of Bacon: see R. Widmaier, "Alter und neuer Empirismus. Zur Erfahrungslehre von Locke und Thomasius", in W. Schneiders (ed.), *Christian Thomasius, 1655-1728. Interpretationen zu Werk und Wirkung*, Meiner, Hamburg 1989, pp. 95-114. Among those who suggest a direct influence of Locke on Thomasius see Zart, *Einfluss der englischen Philosophen*, cit., pp. 33-40.

¹⁴ Regarding Halle see W. Schrader, *Geschichte der Friedrichs-Universität zu Halle*, Dümmler, Berlin 1894, esp. vol. 1, bk. I, pp. 1-128. See also the essays collected in N. Hinske (ed.), *Zentren der Aufklärung I. Halle. Aufklärung und Pietismus*, Schneider, Heidelberg 1989.

¹⁵ See Brown, "German Interest in John Locke's 'Essay', 1668-1800", cit., p. 477; Pollok, "Die Locke-Rezeption in der deutschen Aufklärung", cit., § 1.

¹⁶ See N.H. Gundling, *Via ad veritatem*, vol. 1: *Ars recte ratiocinandi*, Renger, Halle 1713; reproduction: Olms, Hildesheim 2016. Gundling's work included the *Philosophia moralis*, vol. 2, Renger, Halle 1713, and the *Iurisprudentia naturalis*, vol. 3, Renger, Halle 1715. See also M. Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulphilosophie im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, Mohr, Tübingen 1945; reproduction: Olms, Hildesheim 1992, p. 62.

¹⁷ J.F. Budde, *Elementa philosophiae instrumentalis, seu institutionum philosophiae eclecticae*, Orphanotropheum, Halle 1703 (which contains a part devoted to logics, the *Elementa philosophiae instrumentalis*, and a part devoted to metaphysics or ontology, the *Elementa philosophiae theoreticae*). I quote from the 1706 edition, which is identical to the original. On Locke's influence on Budde see Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulphilosophie im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, cit., pp. 67-68. Regarding the attitude of the Thomasian circle towards metaphysics see C. Schwaiger, "Christian Wolffs Deutsche Metaphysik und die Thomasianer Nicolaus Hieronymus Gundling und Johann Franz Budde", in *Archivio di filosofia* 87 (2019), pp. 27-38.

‘eclectic’ philosophy he derived from Thomasius was the frame in which Budde placed a relevant number of considerations that are silent references to Locke, from the twofold empirical sources of ideas to the distinction between inner and outer sense (ch. i, § 8), to the classification of ideas as simple or complex, and of the latter as ideas of mode, substance and relation (ch. i, §§ 9-10).

Most importantly, Budde revealed his closeness to Locke’s philosophy in the full awareness of the problem of the limits of human reason and of the consequences the empirical origin of knowledge had for metaphysical claims. In Budde as in Locke this kind of consideration led to a ‘phenomenistic’ approach in to the theory of knowledge, namely to the claim that ideas are mere perceptions not of external things as such, but of the way they appear to us or, as Budde put it, of what of them penetrates into our mind (ch. i, § 7). Even Budde’s criticism of the knowability of substances clearly recalls Locke’s claim; as Budde remarked

if considered in a concrete sense, [substance] indicates the subject in which are grounded the properties we know of things; if someone believes that this subject can be conceived with clearness and distinctness, he makes a huge mistake, because for what concerns singular things we do not know anything clearly and perspicuously except for their accidents¹⁸.

In the second part of his *Institutiones*, the one that deals with metaphysical issues, Budde is even more explicit: “I am deeply persuaded that no mortal being can know with certainty the essences of things or the principles that act [in them]”; besides what is testified by our perceptions we can have nothing but “plausible conjectures [*conjecturae verosimiles*]” (ch. v, § 26); “real essences of things are unknown to us [*essentiae rerum nobis [sunt] incognitae*]” (ch. v, § 28).

By following his reasoning to its extreme consequences Budde came to face one of the most controversial items in Locke’s philosophy, namely the *vexata quaestio* of thinking matter. Even if Locke had discussed the problem of a *materia cogitans* in just a few lines in the fourth book of the *Essay*, the topic was destined to provoke one of the liveliest debates of 18th-century Europe¹⁹. Following Locke, Budde put forward an argument in favor of the hypothesis of thinking

¹⁸ Budde, *Elementa philosophiae instrumentalis*, cit., ch. v, § 2.

¹⁹ On the Lockean origin of the debate on the *materia cogitans* see J.W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter. Materialism in Eighteenth Century Britain*, Blackwell, Oxford 1982; A. Thomson, *Bodies of Thought. Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment*, Oxford University Press, New York 2008. On Locke’s alleged materialism see N. Jolley, *Locke’s Touchy Subjects. Materialism and Immortality*, Oxford University Press, New York 2015.

matter that was based on the conceivability (i.e. on the non-contradictoriness) of the idea that God might have created a matter that can think (“nullam tandem involv[it] contradictionem, quo minus Deus substantiam corpoream cogitantem producere possit”, ch. v, § 28). The real essence of things being unknowable, it is impossible to determine if the attributes of thought and extension cannot really coexist in the same essence; beside that, God’s omnipotence could have made possible what a finite intellect is inclined to consider as impossible. Therefore, the question concerning the material or immaterial nature of the soul cannot find a reliable answer by means of philosophical investigation, requiring instead the intervention of the Scripture (ch. v, § 28).

2. *Locke’s shadows in Wolff*

Just a few years later, precisely the kind of Lockean attitude towards the claims of metaphysics actively professed by Budde would attract the criticism of Wolff. In fact, once he entered the notorious dispute with the Pietists in Halle first and then with Budde on the fatalistic implications of his philosophical system, he recognized their closeness to Locke as the basis for their misunderstanding and the dangerous consequences of their philosophical claims²⁰.

However, that was not the first time Wolff addressed Locke’s philosophy. In January 1708 he had written in the “Acta eruditorum” a review of Locke’s posthumous works, that had been published in London two years before. Wolff devoted a significant part of the review to the writing *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, originally conceived as a further chapter of the *Essay*. Wolff appreciated in particular the fact that the “celeberrimus Lockius” praised the importance of mathematics in making humans reasonable creatures (*creaturae racionales*), i.e. in developing their rational capacities by acquiring the habit of observing the connection of ideas and following their series²¹. Locke’s concern

²⁰ On the notorious struggle between Wolff and the Pietists see the standard work by B. Bianco, “Libertà e fatalismo. Sulla polemica tra Joachim Lange e Christian Wolff”, in Id., *Fede e sapere. La parabola dell’“Aufklärung” tra pietismo e idealismo*, Morano, Napoli 1992, pp. 31-84. See also A. Beutel, “Causa Wolffiana. Die Vertreibung Christian Wolffs aus Preußen 1723 als Kulminationspunkt des theologisch-politischen Konflikts zwischen halleschem Pietismus und Aufklärungsphilosophie”, in Id., *Reflektierte Religion. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Protestantismus*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2007, pp. 125-69.

²¹ See Ch. Wolff’s review of Locke’s *Posthumous Works*, in *Acta eruditorum* 27 (Jan. 1708), p. 40. Wolff wrote also a review of Locke’s *Some familiar letters* (*Acta eruditorum* 30 (1711), pp. 474-80), and of *A collection of several pieces* (*Acta eruditorum* 40 (1721), pp. 376-81).

about the importance of mathematics as a useful way to train our minds to reason with thoroughness and method could not but receive Wolff's full approval because of its emphasizing the necessity of extending the mathematical way of reasoning onto further fields of knowledge, and of treating every kind of reasoning and every argument as a mathematical demonstration²². In his review Wolff almost literally quoted Locke's statements on the various advantages of solid knowledge in mathematics, especially in algebra:

Primo scilicet in eo versantem convinci, ut ratio sit bona, non sufficere dari multos, quibus satisfiat, quin facillime quenquam falli posse, nec omnium ubique momenta summa penetrare. Secundo per illud necessitatem manifestari, quae veris ratiociniis inest. Ostendit ulterius, quidnam peccetur per neglectum idearum abstractarum, quid praejudicia valeant adversus mentem²³.

Mathematics represented the most proper method of investigation in any realm of knowledge, ethics included²⁴, and the best antidote against prejudice and rash judgements since it accustomed the understanding to observe carefully the series and connections of ideas, to consider separately each passage of reasonings, and to follow the long chains of demonstrations.

Wolff's praise of Locke, the supporter of the mathematical method, reappeared some few years later, in 1713, in the preface to the first edition of the so-called *German Logic*. Wolff recognized the importance of Locke's work on the understanding, probably alluding to the *Essay* that he read in Burridge's Latin translation²⁵, but insisted once again on the instructions for a better use

²² Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. by P. Schuurman, Doctoral Dissertation, Keele University 2000, § 7 p. 167: "I have mentioned mathematicks as a way to settle in the minde an habit of reasoning closely and in train: not that I thinke it necessary that all men should be deep mathematicians, but that having got the way of reasoning which that study necessarily brings the minde to they might be able to transfer it to other parts of knowledge as they shall have occasion. For in all sorts of reasoning every single argument should be managed as a mathematical demonstration, the connection and dependence of Ideas should be followed till the minde is brought to the sourse on which it bottoms and observes the coherence all along, though in proofs of probability one such train is not enough to settle the judgment as in demonstrative knowledge".

²³ See Wolff's review of Locke's *Posthumous Works*, cit., p. 41.

²⁴ Wolff, *Vernünfftige Gedancken von den Kräfte[n] des menschlichen Verstandes und ihrem richtigen Gebrauche in Erkänntnis der Wahrheit*, Renger, Halle 1713 ("Deutsche Logik"), ch. viii, § 2; reproduction of the 1754 ed.: Olms, Hildesheim 1965.

²⁵ Locke, *De intellectu humano in quatuor libris editio quarta aucta et emendata, nunc primum latine reddita*, transl. by R. Burridge, Churchill, London 1701; this translation was also published in Leipzig in 1709 and reprinted in Pollock, *Locke in Germany*, cit., vol. 2. In 1741 G.H. Thiele published in Leipzig another Latin translation of Locke's *Essay*, entitled *Libri 4 De Intellectu Humano denuo*

of the intellect presented in the posthumous work: “But to what, pray, does Locke himself ascribe his ability of understanding, and what means does he recommend, in order to the attainment thereof? On consulting his book on *the Conduct of the Understanding* [...], it will be found, that he attributes all his penetration to mathematical knowledge, particularly the algebraical”²⁶. Locke’s method – definition of terms, clarity of ideas, demonstration of every assumption, careful order in the series of what precedes and what follows – and the idea to extend it to every realm of human knowledge did not only perfectly match the method Wolff adopted in his own system²⁷, but confirmed in his eyes Locke’s superiority over Descartes, who failed precisely there where he abandoned the purpose to follow the mathematical method, as it happened in the case of his demonstration of God’s existence²⁸.

Above all, Wolff saw in Locke an important supporter of the project of a renewal of the actual philosophical situation in Germany, a situation he did not feel at his ease in. Indeed, in his memoirs he confessed, that when he arrived in Halle to teach Mathematics towards the end of 1706, he found himself in “a situation that was different from the one he had hoped for”²⁹, given the spreading of “deep-rooted prejudices” against mathematics³⁰; in Halle then, “Mathematics was a completely unknown and unusual matter, there was no sense for thoroughness; for what concerned philosophy, Thomasius was dominant, but he practiced it with a *sentiment* and in a way that didn’t

ex novissima editione idiomatis Anglicani, longe accuratiori in puriorem stylum Latinum translati. Praefixae sunt huic editioni auctoris scripta et vita, nec non elenchus capitum, which was reviewed in the *Göttingische Zeitungen für gelehrte Sachen* (Sept 18, 1741), 75, p. 638. The German translation was published by H.E. Poley in Altenburg in 1757, with the title *Herrn Johann Lockens Versuch vom Menschlichen Verstande. Aus dem Englischen übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen versehen von Heinrich Engelhard Poley*, Richter, Altenburg 1757; Altenburg-Jena 1787. This included the translation of P. Coste, *Lettre à l’auteur de ces Nouvelles, à l’occasion de la mort de Monsieur Locke* (Amsterdam 1705), and of G. Gilbert, *An Abstract of the Essay on Human Understanding* (London 1709). It was reviewed in the *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* (Sept. 8, 1757), 108, pp. 1052-55. Only in 1795-97 W.G. Tennemann will publish a new translation of Locke’s *Essay*.

²⁶ Wolff, *Deutsche Logik*, cit., Vorrede (1713), p. 6*.

²⁷ See Wolff, *Discursus praeliminaris de philosophia in genere*, in Id., *Philosophia rationalis sive Logica, methodo scientifica pertractata et ad usum scientiarum atque vitae aptata*, Renger, Frankfurt-Leipzig 1728; reproduction of the 1740 ed.: Olms, Hildesheim 1983, ch. iv. The critical edition of the *Discursus* is ed. by G. Gawlick and L. Kreimendahl, frommann-holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1996.

²⁸ Wolff, *Deutsche Logik*, cit., Vorrede, pp. 6*-7*.

²⁹ H. Wuttke (ed.), *Christian Wolffs eigene Lebensbeschreibung*, Weidmann, Leipzig 1841; reproduced in Wolff, *Biographien*, cit., p. 146.

³⁰ Wolff recalls here the criticism he had raised in the Preface to his *Deutsche Logik*, cit., p. 8*.

match my own taste”³¹. During the first decade he spent in Halle, Wolff held Locke in high regard and considered him the promoter of an alternative path for philosophy instead of that indicated by Thomasius and his supporters. Locke was a respected ally in the campaign in favor of a new understanding of philosophy as a work of clarification of concepts and of their connections.

But if at this point Wolff was looking at Locke as at the advocate of the benefits of the mathematical method for philosophy, he didn’t devote a single word to the clear declaration of empiricism Locke made at the very beginning of his *Essay*. At a closer look, the *Conduct of the Understanding*, which seems to be the work by Locke Wolff had in mind at this point, leaves the discussion on the empirical origin of ideas in the background, emphasizing rather the importance of what could be labelled as ‘practical logic’, i.e. a correct guidance in the operations of the mind, and a list of practical remedies in order to prevent logical fallacies and prejudices.

Indeed, the image of Locke Wolff presented in the *German Logic*, but even in the later so-called *German Metaphysics* (1719) is not in the first place the image of an empiricist. Wolff himself introduced some peculiar ideas of Locke’s empirical philosophy in his own system – such as the importance of the inner sense as the primary source of the knowledge of the mind, the investigation of the role and usage of terms, the argument in favor of personal identity – but he rejected any basic statement of empiricism, namely the understanding of the mind as a “white Paper, void of all Characters, without any Ideas” (*Essay*, II.1.2), i.e. as a *tabula rasa* that comes to be furnished from experience, embracing instead a form of virtual innatism of Leibnizian origin³². In his *German Metaphysics* Wolff emphasized how important the two ways of obtaining knowledge, namely the senses and intellect, were (§ 372), and even more how necessary the cooperation of reason and experience was. If the latter provides reason with contents, reason itself allows a better degree of clarity and distinction in those

³¹ Wuttke (ed.), *Christian Wolffs eigene Lebensbeschreibung*, cit., p. 146.

³² Wolff, *Deutsche Logik*, cit., ch. i, § 6: “But whether our notions of external things are conveyed into the soul, as into an empty receptacle, or whether rather they lie not buried, as it were, in the essence of the soul, and are brought forth barely by her own power, on occasion of the changes produced in our bodies by external objects, is a question, at present, foreign to this place. In my *Thoughts on God and the Human Soul*, chap. v, I shall then only be able to shew, that the last opinion is more agreeable to truth”. See the explicit reference to Locke in Id., *Vernünfftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*, Renger, Halle 1719 (“Deutsche Metaphysik”); reproduction of the 1751 ed.: Olms, Hildesheim 1983, § 820. On this topic see H-W- Arndt, “Rationalismus und Empirismus in der Erkenntnislehre Christian Wolffs”, in W. Schneiders (ed.), *Christian Wolff 1679-1754. Interpretationen zu seiner Philosophie und deren Wirkung*, Meiner, Hamburg 1983, p. 38.

ideas and a better sight of the grounds of their connections (§ 371). In other words, reason allows the progress from a merely *historical knowledge*, based on observation and experiments, to a proper *philosophical knowledge*, based on the reasons (*Gründe*) in virtue of which things are as they are³³. Indeed, Wolff's philosophical or scientific method was based on the idea of an indispensable *connubium rationis et experientiae*, according to which experience is both the starting-point and the touchstone of any rational demonstrations³⁴.

In the preface of the second edition of the *German Logic*, which was published in 1719, the same year as the *German Metaphysics*, Wolff complained about the philosophical attitude of pure empiricists. There he claimed that even if it is true that "propositions are derived partly from experience and partly from definitions and from other already known propositions", science is built by means of *reason*; therefore, "if one aims at solid and thorough knowledge, he has to care first and foremost about distinct concepts and accurate demonstrations"; those who reject or despise those things, they move away from well-grounded knowledge and "are carried about with the wind of uncertainty, as it happens to those who want to follow their five senses instead of their intellect"³⁵.

Some years later Wolff would reaffirm his aversion against any form of empiricism, this time with an explicit reference to Locke, whose philosophy rests entirely on sensibility and is therefore "appreciated by those who depend exclusively on their senses and on their imagination, and have not trained sufficiently their intellect"³⁶. In Wolff's eyes, Locke seemed to suffer from an immature attitude in his investigations, as if he had stopped at a phase of philosophical 'childhood'; Wolff presented this opinion in a sort of autobiographical reflection: "during my youth, when I had trained my intellect only slightly and I didn't know if there was a Locke in the world, I ran into

³³ See Wolff, *Discursus praeliminaris*, cit., ch. i, §§ 3-7.

³⁴ See Wolff, *Psychologia empirica, methodo scientifica pertractata, qua ea, quae de anima humana indubia experientiae fide constant, continentur et ad solidam universae philosophiae practicae ac theologiae naturalis tractationem via stermitur*, Renger, Frankfurt-Leipzig 1732; reproduction of the 1738 ed.: Olms, Hildesheim 1968, § 497; see also Id., *Logica*, cit., § 1232.

³⁵ Wolff, *Deutsche Logik*, cit., Preface to the second edition ("Erinnerung wegen dieser neuen Auflage", 1719), p. 2*.

³⁶ Wolff, *Der vernünfftigen Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt, Anderer Theil, bestehend in ausführlichen Anmerckungen, und zu besserem Verstande und bequemerem Gebrauche derselben Herausgegeben*, Andreaischen Buchhandlung, Frankfurt 1724 ("Anmerkungen zur deutschen Metaphysik"); reproduction of the 1740 ed.: Olms, Hildesheim 1983, § 79. I quote from the 1740 edition.

the same concepts. Afterwards, once the intellect had matured, I purified them from what the imagination endows them with³⁷. The incapacity to distinguish in our concepts between what comes from sensation and what is introduced by imagination reveals an ‘immaturity’ of intellect, whose exercise has to be cultivated in order not to transform our ideas into mere subreptions. The criticism of Locke became at this point more and more explicit: “[in his posthumous work, Locke] leads back his capacity [of a clear investigation of the ideas] to the study of mathematics, and recommends this mean to other people too, but then he introduces limits such that in metaphysical issues by means of imagination he concedes more than he should”³⁸. The limits Wolff hinted at concerned Locke’s attempt to restrict knowledge to the realm of experience, i.e. what can be perceived by our senses, and thus to reject any attempt to push our knowledge to the metaphysical basis of things. And this is precisely the point of divergence between Wolff and Locke.

Not by chance, the image Wolff gave of Locke in the *German Metaphysics* appears mostly surrounded by a critical aura, that was absent in his previous logical work. Wolff’s criticism is now directed not only to Locke’s idea that the mind obtains the representation of outer things only by means of the body³⁹, or to Locke’s understanding of miracles as unusual natural events⁴⁰, but above all to the claim we have already mentioned that God could bestow matter with the capacity of thinking⁴¹. This disagreement deserves special attention.

For sure, the hypothesis of thinking matter had pernicious implications for Wolff, concerning the foundations of morals and religion; but it allowed Wolff to shed light on the deep divergence between his metaphysical system and the metaphysical implications of Locke’s modest attitude towards the speculative claims of reason. In particular, Wolff rejected the idea that the real essences of things fall out of the limits of human knowledge. Unlike Locke, Wolff thought that our capacity to reach a clear knowledge of essences represents the first condition of any complete knowledge, so that “who knows the essence of a thing knows at a time [what that thing is and] how it can be possible”⁴². According to him, essences being necessarily determined by the principle of sufficient reason, they contain the ground of the possibility for things to

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Wolff, *Deutsche Metaphysik*, cit., § 820.

⁴⁰ Ibid., § 634 and § 642; see also Wolff’s review of Locke’s *Posthumous Works*, cit., pp. 43–44.

⁴¹ Wolff, *Deutsche Metaphysik*, cit., § 741.

⁴² Ibid., §§ 34–35.

be what they are; in other terms, since everything that happens must have a reason, even the properties of beings must have their own specific 'reason' or 'ground', and this ground is rooted in the essence of each peculiar being. The main consequence of this assumption is that a thing cannot enjoy properties, that do not belong necessarily to its essence, i.e. whose sufficient reason is not included in the essence itself⁴³. It is then clear that a thing cannot be endowed with conflicting properties, since contradictory properties cannot be led back to the same sufficient reason, that is to say to the same essence. Therefore, Wolff affirmed that the real essence of a thing is *unchangeable*, unless the thing ceases to be what it is; that it is *necessary*, since it cannot be different from what it is, and that it is even *eternal*, since it is impossible for it not to be (anymore)⁴⁴. Far from being at the mercy of God's free will and discretion, the essences of things are "something necessary which determine that particular thing in its sort"⁴⁵, and "include the reason (*Grund*) of anything that a thing can enjoy"⁴⁶.

In Wolff's view, those who deny the knowability of essence and oppose the basic assumption of his metaphysics are guilty of the same mistake Locke made by failing to take account of the usage of the understanding in discerning sense and imagination: "Those who claim that it is impossible to get to know the essence of a being expect to find in the imagination an image by means of which they can represent it [essence], and claim to see what should not fall in front of our eyes. In fact, every general concept that is defined in metaphysics can be grasped solely by means of the intellect, and not by means of the senses"⁴⁷. In opposition to Locke's view, Wolff's theory of the necessity of essences rejects as a matter of principle the possibility of a being bestowed with conflicting properties, such as extension and thinking; therefore, it cancels out Locke's hypothesis of thinking matter.

In the first edition of the *German Metaphysics*, Wolff mentions Locke explicitly as the main source of such a philosophical absurdity: "It is well known that Locke together with someone else has the opinion that God could have communicated the power of thinking to the body, or as they improperly say to matter" (§ 741). Starting from the second edition of the work (1722) and in every further edition Wolff removed the direct reference to Locke, and used a vaguer formulation: "It is well known that someone has the opinion that God [...]". It is hard to guess with some degree of certainty what could be

⁴³ Ibid., § 43.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, §§ 39-42.

⁴⁵ Ibid., § 32.

⁴⁶ Ibid., § 33.

⁴⁷ Wolff, *Anmerkungen zur deutschen Metaphysik*, cit., § 16.

the reason for such a choice; a plausible explanation could be that even if at that point it was pretty clear that Locke was the source of inspiration of that opinion, Wolff's criticism did not concern Locke but the German promoters of his threatening belief. This is at least what emerges in a meaningful passage of the later *Annotations* (1724):

The opinion that God might have bestowed matter with the power of thinking [...] is dangerous since it damages the belief in the immateriality and immortality of the soul, and calls into question the idea that our soul is different from our body. Meanwhile, even in Germany it is promoted by a theologian, Budde, in a famous University; he shows his indignation about the theory of necessity of essence, because Locke's authority opened the way to such a bizarre claim that he considers so convincing that he assumes it without any demonstration and expects it to be taught as an evident truth. Moreover, following Locke he derives from it the impossibility to provide a rational demonstration of the immateriality and immortality of the soul⁴⁸.

According to Wolff, Locke represented the original source of such an aberration in philosophy, and Budde was his prophet on German soil. With this conviction Wolff entered the controversy that arose with Budde in the mid-1720s. At the time, Wolff had just arrived in Marburg, after King Frederick William I, persuaded by the Pietists, had banished him from Prussia in November 1723. Once in Marburg, Wolff had to deal with a new attack from the front of his opponents, this time launched by Budde himself who, siding with the Pietists, was reopening a controversy that Wolff thought had been concluded after his expulsion from Halle, and the prohibition to teach his philosophy in Prussian territories. First and foremost, Wolff thought he had provided in his *Annotations* abundant clarifications of his philosophical concern in order to secure his ideas from the accusations put forth by his opponents⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ Ibid., § 19. On this topic see M. Favaretti Camposampiero, "L'origine delle essenze. Wolff, Spinoza e i teologi", in F. Toto and A. Sangiacomo (eds.), *Essentia actuosa. Riletture dell'Ethica di Spinoza*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2016, pp. 93-116.

⁴⁹ See Wolff's remarks: "I would not have written anything else than the *Annotations* if a certain Mr. Budde from Jena had not entered the controversy, calling himself the judge or advocate of the opponents in Halle", and "repeating their hard accusations with a rush to judge, with great insistence [...], as if I [Wolff] purposely tried to mislead my readers with those mistakes that would put in danger any religion, morality, discipline and justice". *Ausführliche Nachricht von seinen eigenen Schriften die er in deutscher Sprache von den verschiedenen Theilen der Welt-Weißheit herausgegeben, auf Verlangen ans Licht gestellt*, Andreaischen Buchhandlung, Frankfurt 1726; reproduction of the 1733 ed.: Olms, Hildesheim 1973, § 120.

The controversy concerned the alleged fatalistic implications of Wolff's metaphysical system; according to his adversaries, it concealed a *nexus rerum fatalis*, i.e. a necessary connection of beings guided by a *fatum physico-mechanicum* that made the universe a pure machine, or an automaton, where everything happens according to purely mechanical laws of movement and to its mechanical structure. In such a system, there was no place for freedom. Wolff replied to the accusations by introducing at the origin of the *nexus rerum* a principle of supreme contingency, namely God's free decision to choose this precise connection of beings rather than another one⁵⁰. Nevertheless, Wolff's opponents didn't hesitate to point out the materialistic implications of such a mechanical idea of the universe, and found in the principle of pre-established harmony – that Wolff adopted as a hypothesis in the explanation of the *commercium psycho-physicum* – a confirmation of their suspicion⁵¹. The alleged independence of the series of modifications going on in the soul from those going on in the body, as well as the understanding of the soul as a *vis representativa universi*, as a 'mirror' of the mechanical connections of the physical world, reduced the soul to a mere "clockwork [*Uhrwerk*]"⁵², whose modifications are nothing but *movements* that occur *nexu mere mechanico*.

The charge of smuggling in a sort of 'psychological materialism' should sound pretty odd to Wolff, whose psychology rested on the very clear idea that the soul is a simple, immaterial, and immortal being⁵³. Such an idea

⁵⁰ See Wolff, *Commentatio de differentia nexus rerum sapientis et fatalis necessitatis, nec non systematis harmoniae praestabilitae et hypothesisum Spinosae luculenta commentatio*, Renger, Halle 1723; reproduction of the 1727 ed.: Olms, Hildesheim 1983.

⁵¹ On the topic see Favaretti Camposampiero, "La chaîne des causes naturelles. Matérialisme et fatalisme chez Leibniz, Wolff et leurs adversaires", in *Dix-Huitième Siècle* 46 (2014), pp. 131-48.

⁵² I quote Budde's *Bedencken* from Wolff, *Herrn D. Job. Francisci Buddei [...] Bedencken über die Wolffianische Philosophie mit Anmerkungen erläutert von Christian Wolff*, Andreaischen Buchhandlung, Frankfurt 1724; reproduced in Id., *Kleine Kontroversschriften mit Joachim Lange und Johann Franz Budde*, Olms, Hildesheim 1980, § 12, p. 102. For a detailed analysis of the controversy between Wolff and Budde see P. Rumore, "Between Spinozism and Materialism: Johann Franz Budde and the Early German Enlightenment", *Archivio di filosofia* 87 (2019), pp. 39-56.

⁵³ The definition goes back to A.G. Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, Hemmerde, Halle 1739; reproduction of the 1779 ed.: Olms, Hildesheim 1982; historical-critical edition by G. Gawlick and L. Kreimendahl, *frommann-holzboog*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 2011, § 757. The definition reappears in G.F. Meier, *Metaphysik. Zweyter Theil. Die Cosmologie*, Gebauer, Halle 1757; reproduction: Olms, Hildesheim 2007, § 361. For Wolff's reaction to Budde's criticism on this topic see Id., *Bedencken über die Wolffianische Philosophie mit Anmerkungen erläutert von Christian Wolff*, cit., pp. 86-101. On Wolff's arguments for the immortality of the soul, see Rumore, "Wolff on the immortality of the soul", *Aufklärung* 29 (2018), pp. 29-44.

should have dispelled any suspicion of materialism, since differently from Budde and from Locke, Wolff's ontology was based on the theory of the necessity, immutability, and eternity of real essences that ruled out any possibility of a thinking matter. On the contrary, by promoting a theory of the arbitrary nature of essence and of the arbitrary participation of the attributes Locke and Budde, his German counterpart, were in Wolff's eyes potential supporters of a materialistic theory of the soul, or at least accidental promoters of such a philosophical absurdity. In a detailed abridgment of his system from 1726, Wolff presented his opinion as follows: "It is well known that *Hobbes* promotes *materialism* in England, where it notoriously has its supporters. Some of them, like *Locke*, endorse it in a concealed way (*verdeckt*) and acknowledge that materialism is at least possible and that it is impossible to refute it by means of reason. Mr. *Budde* has the same opinion; he presents it in his philosophy, and in his *Theologia moralis* he reduces the soul to a mere slave of the body"⁵⁴. For having adopted the view of "those who think that materialism is at least possible and that it cannot be rejected by reason"⁵⁵, Budde "winks at materialists"⁵⁶, and "provides them with theoretical weapons", "promoting" and even "patronizing" the idea of "the materiality and the mortality of the human soul"⁵⁷.

Locke's idea that materialism is at least conceivable, i.e. *possible* from a logical point of view, and that reason cannot but fail in refuting it are the basis of what Wolff would have called "skeptical materialism" in the later *Theologia naturalis* (1737); it is not a clear declaration of materialism, but the attempt to provide it with a theoretical line of argument:

In England, *Hobbes* declared that he supported materialism, which still has many followers today, and *Locke* introduced skeptical materialism (*zweifelnde Materialisiererey*) in the *Essay on Human Understanding* by denying that we can be sure of the immateriality of the soul, because we do not know whether God has bestowed even matter with the power of thinking. So, in his opinion, there is no contradiction in the fact that a certain matter has

⁵⁴ Wolff, *Ausführliche Nachricht*, cit., § 208, p. 588. On Wolff's explicit accusation of Budde about his being a promoter of materialism see *ibid.*, § 129, p. 363.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, § 208, p. 588.

⁵⁶ Wolff, *Nöthige Zugabe zu den Anmerkungen über Herrn D. Buddens Bedencken von der Wolffischen Philosophie auf Veranlassung der Buddeischen Antwort herausgegeben*, Andreaischen Buchhandlung, Frankfurt 1724; reprinted in *Id.*, *Schutzschriften gegen Johann Franz Budde*, Olms, Hildesheim 1980, §§ 13-15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, § 15.

in itself thoughts or feelings similar to the ones we have in our soul, and consequently it is not contradictory to think that God himself is material. This skeptical materialism has been propagated by Le Clerc, and in Germany it was disseminated by Budde, who was driven to it by the prestige of Locke and Clerckens⁵⁸.

Wolff understood Locke's epistemic modesty – the attitude that led him to deny the possibility of grasping the metaphysical structure i.e. the real essence of things (*Essay*, IV.viii.9) – as a form of dangerous skepticism that offered a basis for materialism, and even for atheism⁵⁹. Wolff's praise of the "celeberrimus Lockius" in his early review of the *opera posthuma* had changed drastically. Locke being victim of an extreme, absurd form of empiricism, had not been capable to integrate the undeniable contribution of the intellect in the working of experience; hence, he believed real essences are beyond the boundaries of our understanding, and opened the way to a dramatic drift in philosophy. The image of a Locke as advocate of the mathematical method was then definitely replaced by the image of a Locke as promoter of a form of philosophical skepticism, and conniving with materialism. Wolff would never revise his judgement again.

Roughly fifteen years after the controversy with Budde, Wolff would reprise his view of Locke as the original source of the decline of German philosophy. But many things had changed in the meantime. Frederick the Great, who ascended the throne in 1740, was, to be sure, a sincere admirer of Wolff's philosophy, but also the promoter of a deep renewal in the German cultural scene. The Prussian court and the local Academy of Sciences became under his guidance a vital center of attraction of the leading figures of the scientific and philosophical debate, so that all at a sudden Berlin turned into a prolific international crossroad of the cultural world. The leading role and the hegemonic presence of Wolff's philosophy was destined to be drastically reduced.

An important source in order to look at this cultural and political process of marginalization of Wolff's influence from a privileged perspective is the extensive correspondence he had between 1738 and 1748 with his friend Ernst Christoph von Manteuffel (1676-1749), counselor at the Prussian court, former Saxon diplomat, and spy at the Habsburg Court. Manteuffel, surely the most prominent supporter of Wolffianism in the entourage of the

⁵⁸ Wolff, *Theologia naturalis: methodo scientifica pertractata. Pars posterior*, Renger, Frankfurt-Leipzig 1737; reproduction of the 1741 ed.: Olms, Hildesheim 1980, § 616.

⁵⁹ For Wolff's denounce of Locke's proximity to atheism see *Deutsche Metaphysik*, cit., § 642.

Prussian Crown Prince, was the one who mediated the contact between him and Wolff's philosophy, and who suggested that the sovereign should read the *German Metaphysics*, where he would find "all that a philosopher can say most convincingly about the most relevant topics in metaphysics"⁶⁰. Beside that, Manteuffel was also the most prominent member of the *Societas Alethophilorum* in Leipzig, the society of "friends of Wolffian philosophy" he had founded with the aim of promoting Wolff's ideas more broadly in Prussia⁶¹.

The decade in which his correspondence with Wolff took place was not an ordinary one. Despite Wolff's final triumph over the Pietists and his return to Halle firmly encouraged by Frederick the Great (1740), the decade marked the conclusive phase of the relentless decline of the supremacy of his philosophy in Germany. Under Voltaire's gentle but firm pressure, the sovereign promptly abandoned his original idea of assigning Wolff the presidency of the Prussian Academy of Sciences⁶², where the presence of anti-Wolffian tendencies became more and more powerful. Wolff himself looked with suspicion and indignation at the cultural drift almost unconsciously encouraged by Frederick's myopic attraction for everything coming from abroad.

The intense exchange between Wolff and Manteuffel is an incomparable source for grasping Wolff's reaction towards the increasing Franco-British contamination of German philosophy, his polemical response to the mixture of sensationist materialism, antimetaphysical Newtonianism, deism and atheism Frederick's friends were propagandizing for in Prussia. In Wolff's opinion, Locke was the leader of the *esprits forts*, who combining the weakness of their method in philosophy with a good dose of arrogance, provided a mixture of Pyrrhonism and deism which turned out to be a danger even for the natural religion they originally intended to safeguard. The Lockean-Newtonian philosophy was nothing but the disastrous attempt to translate Newton's mathematical genius in *philosophicis*:

⁶⁰ See Manteuffel's letter to Brühl, April 24 1736, quoted in H.-P. Neumann, "Der preußische Kronprinz Friedrich und die französische Übersetzung der Deutschen Metaphysik Christian Wolffs im Jahr 1736. Die Identifizierung der Krakauer Handschrift Ms. Gall. Fol. 140 in der Bibliotheka Jagiellonska und der Berliner Handschrift p. 38 in der Bibliothek des Schlosses Charlottenburg", in *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preussischen Geschichte* Neue Folge 24 (2014), footnote 44.

⁶¹ On the *Societas Alethophilorum* and on the role of Manteuffel in the circulation of Wolffianism see J. Bronisch, *Der Mäzen der Aufklärung. Ernst Christoph von Manteuffel und das Netzwerk des Wolffianismus*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2010.

⁶² See H.-P. Neumann, "Der preußische Kronprinz Friedrich und die französische Übersetzung der Deutschen Metaphysik", cit. On the vicissitudes between the King, Wolff, and Voltaire see the enjoyable booklet by Bronisch, *Der Kampf um Kronprinz Friedrich. Wolff gegen Voltaire*, Landt, Berlin 2011.

The British were wrong in confusing the *imaginaria*, which are very useful in mathematics, and *realia* of metaphysics and physics, which should instead be carefully distinguished from the first ones. [...] Those are again the outcomes of Hobbes and of Locke, who [Locke] inculcated materialism in a pleasant way (*unter einem angenehmen vehiculo*) in those who want to be successful taking advantage of others, avoiding the hard work of the proper use of their understanding, and putting their imagination and senses at a disadvantage⁶³.

So far, Locke's responsibility for the dissemination of materialism was beyond any doubt. In fact, it should be mentioned that the involvement of Locke's name in the lively debate on materialism that was going on in Germany in those years had been drastically reinforced by the publication of the German translation of an anonymous version of Voltaire's *Letter on Locke*, namely a *Copie d'un manuscrit ou l'on soutient que c'est la matière qui pense*. The translation was published as an appendix of a warm defense of Wolff's theory of the immortal soul produced by Johann Gustav Reinbeck, Berlin provost and himself a member of the *Societas Alethophilorum*⁶⁴. The anonymous preface was written by Manteuffel⁶⁵, with the clear attempt to suggest Voltaire's authorship of the letter; the publication clearly organized by the supporters of the Wolffian party was definitely intended to politically discredit Voltaire and his companions at the Prussian court, but entailed also an explicit denunciation of the dangerous implications of Locke's philosophy.

As a promoter of the skeptical attitude in metaphysics, Locke – significantly enough paired with Huet – was described by Wolff as a “master of irreligion”, the master of those who have lost the safe guide of the right method, and find themselves at the mercy of obscure concepts: “Huet with his opinion on the weakness of human understanding and Locke with his skepticism concerning

⁶³ Wolff's letter to Manteuffel, April 19 1739, in *Historisch-kritische Edition des Briefwechsels zwischen Christian Wolff und Ernst Christoph Graf von Manteuffel*, ed. by K. Middell and H.-P. Neumann, URL = <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:14-qucosa-106475>, letter no. 22, p. 45. Wolff insists repeatedly on this mistake at the basis of the Lockean-Newtonian philosophy: see Wolff's letters to Manteuffel: August 21 1746 (no. 250, p. 172), May 17 1747 (no. 325, p. 18), and September 26 1748 (no. 477, p. 246). On the presence of Newtonianism at Frederick's court, see P. Casini, “Newton in Prussia”, *Rivista di filosofia* 91 (2000), pp. 251-82.

⁶⁴ J.G. Reinbeck, *Philosophische Gedancken über die vernünftige Seele und derselben Unsterblichkeit. Nebst einigen Anmerckungen über ein Frantzösisches Schreiben, darin behauptet werden will, daß die Materie dencke*, Hauden, Berlin 1739; reproduction: Olms, Hildesheim 2002. On the debate on materialism in 18th-century Germany see Rumore, *Materia cogitans. L'Aufklärung di fronte al materialismo*, Olms, Hildesheim 2013.

⁶⁵ Bronisch, *Der Mäzen der Aufklärung*, cit., p. 95.

the most important issues in metaphysics and his superficial concepts derived from the imagination and from the senses”⁶⁶.

In any case, in the beginning was Locke. Then the British plague spread over the Continent: “England corrupted France”, and “that is why even in France philosophy is now in a very bad condition. Those who want to move some steps further stick to Descartes, whereas some others stay with Locke. In this way, skepticism and deism triumph among the learned people in Paris”⁶⁷. British philosophy crossed the Channel, infected France, and France infected Germany; freethinkers set up swiftly in Germany, especially in Prussia, where they found their most impudent bulwark⁶⁸.

3. *A new Locke*

About ten years after Wolff’s deprecation of the disastrous consequences of Locke’s metaphysical skepticism on German philosophy, Georg Friedrich Meier (1718-1777), also a Professor of Philosophy in Halle, announced the first class on Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in a German university. It was the summer semester of 1754 and Wolff had died just a few months before, on April 9 of that same year.

Meier had grown up in the most powerful center of Pietistic education, August Hermann Franke’s Waisenhaus, and had completed his education at the University of Halle under the guidance of the Baumgarten siblings, Siegmund Jakob and Alexander Gottlieb, in an atmosphere permeated by Wolffian philosophy – even though in those years Wolff had left Halle for Marburg. Thanks to the influence of Thomasius’s circle, Halle had been an important center of dissemination of Locke’s ideas, that Meier might have encountered during the years he spent at the local university. In 1720, Friedrich Gladow had published in Halle the German translation of Le Clerc’s *Eloge de feu Mr. Locke* with the title *Bericht von des Weltberühmten und Hochgelahrten Engelländers John Locke Leben und Schrifften*, with an interesting series of annotations and remarks that revealed his original Wolffian orientation in philosophy. The

⁶⁶ Wolff’s letter to Manteuffel, May 4 1745 (no. 221), p. 126.

⁶⁷ Wolff’s letter to Manteuffel, April 19 1739 (no. 22), pp. 45-46.

⁶⁸ On the German reception of the French Enlightenment see P.-E. Knabe, *Die Rezeption der französischen Aufklärung in den “Göttingischen Gelehrten Anzeigen” (1739-1779)*, Klostermann, Frankfurt 1978.

same work would be republished, again in Halle, in 1755 with the title *Leben und Schriften des Weltberühmten und Hochgelahrten Engelländers John Locke* in 1755, one year after Meier's class on the *Essay*.

Meier's decision to give a class on Locke's philosophical masterpiece was not spontaneous; it followed rather the suggestion by none other than the sovereign Frederick II himself, who thought it was convenient to acquaint German students with a figure that his advisor Voltaire considered one of the founding fathers of the *Lumières*⁶⁹. In any case, Meier's was not the first class on Locke in German universities, but the first one on the *Essay*; indeed, in 1713 Johann Jacob Syrbius had taught a class on the French translation of Locke's *Of the conduct* at the University of Jena⁷⁰, where Locke was a renowned presence also thanks to Budde, who had been there since 1705 and had published in 1709 the German translation of Le Clerc's *Eloge de feu Mr. Locke* in the *Allgemeines historisches Lexikon*⁷¹.

In the writing Meier prepared as an announcement of his class, he stressed the importance of Locke's work for those who had understood the difference between 'bread-and-butter' education (*Brotstudium*) and education as the "strain to free oneself from the prejudices and the mistakes of mankind"⁷². Locke's *Essay* was not "a mere logic, and even less a complete system of logic"; it was rather the instrument for a preliminary analysis of the limits of the understanding, which should teach to look at experience as the unique source of knowledge⁷³. In Meier's eyes Locke was "a thoroughly honest man (*ein grundehrlicher Mann*), who has left all prejudices to the side, in particular those that arise inadvertently from the philosophical systems; a man, who moved in the footsteps of mere experience, and tried to find a secure way in the reign of truths"⁷⁴. Far from Wolff's image of a Locke prisoner of his own confusion between sensations and imaginations, promoter of a metaphysical

⁶⁹ See S.G. Lange, *Georg Friedrich Meier's Leben*, Gebauer, Halle 1778, p. 92.

⁷⁰ See M. Wundt, *Die Philosophie an der Universität Jena*, Fischer, Jena 1932, p. 78; see Zart, *Einfluss der englischen Philosophen*, cit., p. 81-88.

⁷¹ See Budde, "Lock (Johann)", in *Allgemeines historisches Lexikon*, Fritsch, Leipzig 1709, vol. 4, app., pp. 18-24; a further translation was published some years later as "Lebens-Beschreibung Ioannis Lockii", *Acta philosophorum* 1 (1715-16), pp. 972-1031.

⁷² Meier, *Zuschrift an Seine Zuhörer, worin er Ihnen seinen Entschluß bekannt macht, ein Collegium über Locks Versuch vom menschlichen Verstand zu halten*, Hemmerde, Halle 1754, p. 5; ed. by D. Poggi in R. Pozzo et al. (eds.), *Philosophical academic programs of the German enlightenment: a literary genre recontextualized*, frommann-holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 2012, pp. 115-21.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

skepticism, of materialism and deism, Meier's Locke is the philosopher who managed to lead reason back into the boundaries of its own possibilities, and who with modesty and honesty kept himself stuck to experience in order to find an orientation in what he called the reign of *truths*. Meier's step backwards from Wolff's optimistic attitude towards the claims of reason and from the pursuit of the *single* truth couldn't be clearer.

Meier's distancing from Wolff had begun long before his official rendezvous with Locke, but moved in the same direction indicated by Locke's philosophy. Indeed, if it is true that in the *Vernunftlehre* published just a couple of years before the class on Locke, in 1752, Meier recommended to his reader the study of Locke⁷⁵, Lockean themes seem to emerge already in his writings from the 1740s. Somehow concealed, under the Wolffian surface of Meier's 'didactic' works, one can perceive traces of the lesson he was taught during the early years of his education in the Pietistic Waisenhaus and of the Thomasian firm conviction about the practical scope of philosophy. The aversion against any form of Scholasticism (*Schulphilosophie*), the pragmatic orientation of any philosophical investigation, the understanding of philosophy in the sense of a mundane wisdom (*Weltweisheit*), the moderate skepticism about the capacities of reason, and about the applicability of the mathematical method were all peculiar features of Meier's philosophical commitment⁷⁶. Just to mention some of the more significant expressions of his distancing from the Wolffian tradition, one should consider that in the mid-1740s, as soon as he was appointed extraordinary professor in Halle, Meier contested for instance Wolff's optimistic confidence in the potentiality of reason, and rejected the idea of a rational proof of the immortality of the soul⁷⁷; in the following decade Meier published a series of works on happiness, on virtue and vice, on the role of good and bad luck in ethics, where he showed the weakness of a

⁷⁵ Meier, *Vernunftlehre*, Gebauer, Halle 1752, Vorrede, p. 4.

⁷⁶ See Rumore, "Un wolffiano diffidente: Georg Friedrich Meier e la sua dottrina dei pregiudizi" preface to Meier, *Contributi alla dottrina dei pregiudizi del genere umano / Beyträge zu der Lehre von den Vorurtheilen des menschlichen Geschlechts* (Hemmerde, Halle 1766), critical edition ed. by H.P. Delfosse, N. Hinske, Rumore, ETS, Pisa 2005, pp. v-xxxvi.

⁷⁷ See Meier, *Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode*, Hemmerde, Halle 1746; reproduced in Id., *Über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, ed. by C.W. Dyck, Olms, Hildesheim 2018. Regarding this topic see Rumore, "Meiers Theorie der Unsterblichkeit der Seele im zeitgenössischen Kontext", in G. Stiening *et al.* (eds.), *Georg Friedrich Meier (1718-1777). Philosophie als "wahre Weltweisheit"*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2015, pp. 163-86, and Dyck, "G.F. Meier and Kant on the Belief in the Immortality of the Soul", in Dyck and F. Wunderlich (eds.), *Kant and his German contemporaries*, vol. I, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 76-93.

strong intellectualistic theory of morals such as Wolff's, and made important attempts to harmonize our human ambitions and our real capability to act morally in the concrete, often confusing dimension of our daily life⁷⁸; one year after the class on Locke, in 1755, Meier would publish his *Betrachtungen über die Schranken der menschlichen Erkenntnis*, whose title reveals a clear hint at Locke's work, and where he presented an idea of philosophy as a concrete guide for the understanding and the will in the concrete dimension of life.

Nevertheless, it is in the later *Beyträge zu der Lehre von den Vorurtheilen des menschlichen Geschlechts* (1766), that the presence of Locke reveals its powerful influence, representing an alternative path to Leibniz' and Wolff's rationalism. In this short writing Meier introduced, beside the long list of well-known prejudices (of childhood, of authority, of the sect, of the system etc.), two more fundamental prejudices, that concern both the empirical, and the rational knowledge. The first one leads us to "believe that the object of our sensations is made exactly as the effect we perceive immediately in our sensations" (§ 15), and convinces us that "in our sensations we grasp the intimate nature of things" (§ 20). On the other hand, the fundamental prejudice of rational knowledge makes us believe that "what conforms with the complex of our previous knowledge, that we consider true, or what we can derive from it is therefore itself true" (§ 21). In the formulation of the first prejudice resounds Locke's adagio on the phenomenal nature of human knowledge. Indeed, ideas represent nothing but the effects the external objects produce on our senses; those effects are, in Meier's terms, a kind of "dividing wall" (*Scheidewand*) between our sense and the external things, so that by means of our senses we cannot even presume that behind that wall there might be something different from what we perceive. Without the cooperation of reason and experience we cannot but be victim of such a prejudice (§ 29). In the case of the prejudice of rational knowledge it is once again the cooperation of reason and experience that allows us to avoid the fallacy; following Locke, Meier acknowledges that the mathematical method can help us in checking the correctness of the long deductive series of philosophical reasonings, but its 'a priori' nature does not consent any real increase in knowledge, revealing the unavoidable contribution of experience (§ 35).

⁷⁸ I refer to Meier, *Gedanken vom Glück und Unglück*, Hemmerde, Halle 1753 (1762²); Id., *Untersuchung einiger Ursachen warum die Tugendhaften in diesem Leben ofte unglücklicher sind, als die Lasterhaften*, Franck, Halle, 1756. But see also Id., *Betrachtung über die menschliche Glückseligkeit*, Hemmerde, Halle 1764. See Rumore, "Virtù e buona sorte: il caso di Meier", in Ead. (ed.), *Momenti di felicità*, il Mulino, Bologna 2018, pp. 47-64.

The distance between Locke's alternate glory in Wolff's eyes – the praise as defender of the mathematical method, then his rapid downfall as promoter of metaphysical skepticism, materialism, and deism – and his celebration in Meier's works – that praises him as the honest connoisseur of human nature, as the philosopher who far from being at the mercy of his 'five senses' recognizes that sensibility should be guided by reason in its pursuit of true and concrete knowledge – could not be more radical. The importance of Meier in the diffusion of this image of Locke can hardly be overestimated. Even the translator of one of Locke's most influential works in Germany, namely *Of the Conduct*, seems to have come to Locke via Meier. In 1755 Georg David Kypke – Kant's friend and nephew of Johann David Kypke, the professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the Albertina during Kant's university years – published in Königsberg the first German translation of Locke's posthumous work from the original English version, a translation that had been initiated but never completed by another prominent representative of the Prussian philosophical world, Martin Knutzen⁷⁹. According to Gottsched⁸⁰, Locke was well known in Königsberg; this notoriety had its origin in Halle, since the young Kypke, before becoming a student of Knutzen in Königsberg, had studied in Halle from 1743 to 1744 under the guidance of Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten. In Halle he might have met Meier, who at the time was the main celebrity in town, after Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten moved to Frankfurt an der Oder. Furthermore, Kypke's *Abhandlung von der Kürze und Weitläufigkeit im schriftliche Vorträge*, published in Königsberg in the same year of his translation of Locke, shows a clear Meierian taste in its topic and style. It is more than a likely hypothesis that Kypke attended Meier's class on Locke, and then followed his suggestion to translate *Of the conduct*⁸¹.

⁷⁹ The German translation by Kypke is *Johann Lockens Anleitung des menschlichen Verstandes zur Erkenntniß der Wahrheit nebst desselben Abhandlung von den Wunderwerken*, Hartung, Königsberg 1755; reproduced in Locke, *Anleitung des menschlichen Verstandes. Eine Abhandlung von den Wunderwerken. In der Übersetzung Königsberg 1755 von G.D. Kypke*, ed. by T. Boswell, R. Pozzo, and C. Schwaiger, frommann-holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1996. On the influence of Locke's writing on Kant see I. Petrocchi, *Lockes Nachlaßschrift Of the Conduct of the Understanding und ihr Einfluß auf Kant*, Lang, Frankfurt 2004. On Knutzen and his acquaintance with Locke, see B. Erdmann, *Martin Knutzen und seine Zeit*, Voss, Leipzig 1876, pp. 110-14.

⁸⁰ J.Ch. Gottsched, *Historische Lobschrift des weiland hoch- und wohlgebohrnen Herrn Herrn Christians, des H.R.R. Freyherrn von Wolff*, Renger, Halle 1755; reproduced in Wolff, *Biographien*, Olms, Hildesheim 1980, p. 75. See also A. Winter, "Selbstdenken – Antinomien – Schranken. Zum Einfluß des späten Locke auf die Philosophie Kants", in Hinske (ed.), *Eklektik, Selbstdenken, Mündigkeit*, Meiner, special issue of the yearbook *Aufklärung* 1 (1986), pp. 27-66.

⁸¹ See Meier, *Zuschrift an Seine Zuhörer*, cit., p. 13.

But this all happened after the mid-century, a decade before the publication of Leibniz' *Nouveaux Essais* (1765), that set the basis for the interpretation of Locke's philosophy in the sense of a clear form of empiricism. Leibniz' interpretation of Locke influenced the later reception of his work much more than any other. The image of Locke as the champion of empiricism, the physiologist of human understanding that is found in Tetens, in Feder, in Kant and in many other German philosophers of the time seems to come straight from Leibniz. But the image of Locke as the advocate of the modesty of reason, of the boundaries of the understanding, of the skepticism towards the claim of metaphysics that is also deeply rooted in the late German Enlightenment, seems to be rather the outcome of debates and controversies originated many decades before in the then-vital epicenter of the Prussian world.

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Notes

