**Amalia Holst on the Education of the Human Race**

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In 1802, Amalia Holst (1758–1829) published a text entitled *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höhern Geistesbildung* (*On Woman’s Vocation to a higher Education of the Mind*). In this lengthy and meticulously argued treatise, Holst engages in a vigorous rebuttal of Rousseau-inspired justifications for obstructing women’s access to education and, positively, connects women’s right to education to the traditional conception of woman’s vocation. While the text was, unsurprisingly, the object of a hostile reception in its own time,[[1]](#footnote-1) there are features of Holst’s argument that continue to complicate its reception within the history of philosophical feminism today. First, Holst’s text appeared after a couple of influential treatments of similar topics, namely, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as well as Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel’s *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber* (both of 1792). Given that, in making her case for women’s entitlement to education, Holst in at least one instance draws directly on the language of rights employed by Wollstonecraft,[[2]](#footnote-2) and Hippel is explicitly mentioned and recommended by Holst to her readers in a number of places,[[3]](#footnote-3) this raises questions about Holst’s originality.[[4]](#footnote-4) Making matters worse, where Holst clearly departs from these thinkers is precisely where she is the least interesting or defensible. Her case for women’s right to education is premised on her claim that an education is not only compatible with but necessary for women’s fulfillment of their traditional role as spouses, mothers, and housewives, and she demurs from promoting wider institutional changes.[[5]](#footnote-5) In addition to this evident conservatism, in calling for women to be educated Holst displays an unfortunate elitist tendency in explicitly (and apparently needlessly) limiting the scope of her appeal to middle- and upper-class women, claiming that “to demand such an education of the wife of a day-labourer or craftsman would be ridiculous.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Accordingly, it might be readily understandable why Holst might be less attended to among historians of feminism than Wollstonecraft or even Hippel.

As I will contend in this chapter, however, part of what accounts for this problematic reception of Holst is a failure to consider her works in the appropriate context. While there is no doubt that she is engaging with, and borrowing from, the feminist literature of her time, her primary interest is in pedagogy. While one might worry that considering Holst’s texts in the context of the narrow debates relating to pedagogical theory in her own time would have the effect of (further) marginalizing her work, I will show that this is not the case, as not only were pedagogical debates in Germany thoroughly engaged with philosophical, theological, and religious perspectives, but (in at least one notable instance) pedagogical theory informed views about philosophy, theology, and religion. Indeed, considering Holst’s *Über die Bestimmung* in this light reveals a highly original thinker with an ambitious, if highly controversial, educational program—one that serves to set her project apart from those of her contemporaries even as its radical vision of reform is moderated by Holst’s insistence on a gradualist mode of implementation. The following discussion is divided into three sections. In the first, I present an overview of the few known details relating to Holst’s life, which I will supplement with new details from a couple of previously unaccounted-for letters by (and to) Holst herself. In the second, I turn to a consideration of Holst’s first publication, a pedagogical text in which she criticizes the “Philanthropinist”movement (about which more below), where as we will see, her criticism echoes one previously made by her illustrious contemporary G. E. Lessing. Finally, in the third section, I turn to Holst’s *Über die Bestimmung* and, taking up the intellectual affinities between her and Lessing, especially in her suggestive characterization of women as the “erste Erzieherinnen des Menschengeschlechts [first educators of the human race].” Here, I consider the positive educational program she outlines there in light of Lessing’s views about the pedagogy of revelation by way of trying to uncover Holst’s own distinctive radical commitments.

1. Holst’s Life

The details of Holst’s life are unfortunately rather sparse. We might in any case distinguish three periods in her life: a first period covering the time from her birth in 1758 until 1790; a second period covering the decade or so from 1791 through to (mid-)1802 during which Holst published her two known books; and a third period from (late-)1802 until her death in 1829. Much of what is known about the first period of Holst’s life is in connection with the trials of her itinerant father, the famous Prussian cameralist Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717–71).[[7]](#footnote-7) Justi’s intellectual interests were wide-ranging, as evidenced by his publications on a variety of topics, including metallurgy, economics, politics, and finance. He also had an interest in philosophical topics, at least early in his career, as an essay he wrote that was critical of the Leibnizian-Wolffian monadology was awarded the prize in a contentious decision by the Prussian Academy in 1747.[[8]](#footnote-8) Notably, Justi was something of a freethinker as among his publications are a treatise (with Amsterdam listed as the place of publication) advocating for a women’s academy as well as a pacifist text aimed against the Seven Years War.[[9]](#footnote-9) Moreover, as can be gleaned from his treatise *Geschichte des Erd-Cörpers* (*History of the Earth*), he held some unorthodox metaphysical views as well, endorsing what he identifies as the Newtonian claim that God and space are identical.[[10]](#footnote-10) Justi had held a couple of academic positions (in Vienna and then in Göttingen), in addition to managing a variety of economic projects for monarchs in Austria, Denmark, and Prussia, and his final position was in the service of Friedrich II as chief inspector of Prussian mines (*Berghauptmann*) in 1765.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Johanna Paulina Amalia Holst (*née* von Justi) was born on February 10 in 1758,[[12]](#footnote-12) a product of her father’s second marriage (the first had ended in a messy and protracted divorce). Little is known about her childhood, but it can be surmised that, given her father’s documented interest in women’s education, the Justi daughters were given a decent education. The central event of her young life was, in any case, the events following the well-publicized accusation against her father of embezzlement in the context of his position as chief inspector. After the charge was formally lodged in 1768, Justi was confined to house arrest but, because he could not bear the expense of paying for those tasked with enforcing it, he opted for imprisonment while the courts considered the charge. From Küstrin prison, Justi launched a vigorous case for his innocence, and his youngest daughter from his first marriage, then 14, was sent to help care for him after he was struck blind following a cataract operation.[[13]](#footnote-13) In spite of the chaotic circumstances, Holst seemed to have maintained a close connection with her father during his imprisonment, as she later considered writing a biography of him using letters they exchanged, but deferred the project out of consideration for her mother.[[14]](#footnote-14) In any case, Justi died of a stroke in prison on July 21, 1771 and his death had the effect of breaking up the family entirely. According to Holst’s own later account (communicated to a biographer of her father), her mother moved in with her brother, a pastor in Braunschweig, her brother went to a “*Cadettenhaus*,” and her sisters went to an educational institute for young women in Potsdam.[[15]](#footnote-15) It is not clear what came of Holst herself during this time; indeed, after 1771, there is nothing known of Holst’s activities for 20 years.

The period of 1791 to 1802 is better documented as it encompasses all of Holst’s (known) literary activity. In 1791, Holst moved to Hamburg and published her first treatise, *Bemerkungen über die Fehler unserer modernen Erziehung* (*Remarks on the Errors of our Modern Education*). Published anonymously,[[16]](#footnote-16) with the author identified only as a “praktische Erzieherinn” (suggesting that Holst had been working in an educational capacity in the meantime),[[17]](#footnote-17) the text offers a strident critique of the educational methods developed by the Philanthropinist pedagogical movement. In 1792, at the age of 33, she married the jurist Johann Ludolf Holst (1756–1825),[[18]](#footnote-18) with whom she had three children: two daughters (Emilia and Mariane) and a son (Eduard), and together they were involved in an educational institute in Hamburg (with Amalia Holst working in the *Vorschule*).[[19]](#footnote-19) *Bemerkungen* was followed in 1799 by a series of critical responses to Wilhelmine Karoline von Wobeser’s (anonymously published) novel, *Elisa, oder das Weib wie es seyn sollte* (*Elisa, or Woman as She Should Be*)in which Holst takes issue with the “enlightened” model of female education endorsed in the book.[[20]](#footnote-20) Holst’s next and most ambitious book, *Über die Bestimmung*, of 1802, unites the pedagogical and feminist themes of her previous works and advocates for women’s right to an education, albeit, as mentioned, under the assumption of women’s continued occupation of traditional gender roles. Holst’s literary activity seems to have brought her some attention: *Über die Bestimmung* was reviewed at least three times,[[21]](#footnote-21) and Holst herself seems to have been a known quantity in the vibrant intellectual life in Hamburg as Elise Reimarus was evidently all-too familiar with her opinions.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Despite this attention, Holst once again fades into relative obscurity after 1802. There are a variety of documents and reports that do not paint an altogether coherent picture of Holst’s life during this time. It has been claimed, for instance, that Holst opened a “*Mädchen-Institut*” in Hamburg in 1802;[[23]](#footnote-23) however, as Kleinau notes, there is no record of the existence of such an institute. In fact it is not clear that the Holsts even lived in Hamburg after 1802 since, again according to Kleinau, the city registry indicates that they sold their home there, and Johann Ludolf Holst only reappears in official records in Hamburg in 1810.[[24]](#footnote-24) Relating to Holst herself, an obituary for her published shortly after her death notes that she went on to lead an educational institution in Boizenburg for a number of years, after which she returned to Hamburg and then went to Parchim,[[25]](#footnote-25) and in a baptismal record for her granddaughter she is identified as leading an educational institution in Parchim in 1819.[[26]](#footnote-26) As Johann Ludolf remained in Hamburg from 1810 until his death in 1825, the Holsts seemed to have lived separately for a considerable time, and in fact Amalia Holst lived with her son in Timckenberg from 1823 until her death on Jan. 6, 1829.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Fortunately, some recently located documents shed new light on Holst’s activities and circumstances from 1802 onwards. These include two letters written by Holst, in 1802 and in 1824 (as well as a response to the former).[[28]](#footnote-28) The first letter, written to the enthusiastic enlightener, and close friend of Elise Reimarus, August Hennings, is in reaction to a piece published in his journal, *Der* *Genius des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, entitled “Geistesbildung des schönen Geschlechts [The Formation of the Mind of the Fair Sex]” in which the author (Holst suggests it is Hennings himself) comes to the defense of woman’s learnedness and the compatibility of authorship with woman’s vocation.[[29]](#footnote-29) After expressing her approval of the text, and of Hennings’ own efforts against “the prevalent spirit of *Schwärmerei*,” Holst comes to the matter at hand as she requests Hennings’ assistance in supporting her plans to open an educational establishment for young girls in Hamburg. She notes that while her husband had previously not consented to her wishes to open such an institute, his ill-health, which now prevents him from serving in his administrative position, has led him to change his mind.[[30]](#footnote-30) Holst notes that she has been invited to Berlin and Mecklenburg, presumably to start such an institute there, but claims that she would prefer to remain in Hamburg, at least in part because of financial considerations.[[31]](#footnote-31) Holst includes an announcement of her plans for the institute in the letter (which is not preserved), and asks for Hennings’ endorsement, presumably in the pages of *Genius*, for her project, noting that she has been engaged in education “since her 15th year” and, appealing to the theme of her own *Über die Bestimmung* as well as the original article in Hennings’ journal, she expresses her own inner conviction “that it is only through the higher education of women that the ennoblement of humanity as a whole is to be effected.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

Holst’s letter offers some clarification on a number of points. First, it provides some confirmation that she had been involved in education in some capacity since at least 1773 (but perhaps 1772, which would have marked her 15th year). It also confirms that Holst had indeed planned to open a *Mädchen-Institut* in Hamburg in 1802. That there is no record of the existence of such an institute, however, is probably due to the fact that Holst did not find sufficient local interest in it, and indeed, Hennings himself ultimately declined to support the project.[[33]](#footnote-33) That the Holsts were left little choice but to sell their home in Hamburg in 1802 and pursue opportunities elsewhere would also be consistent with this. Lastly, there is no indication, at this point at any rate, of any arrangements in the Holsts’ marital situation that would be atypical of the period, or indeed contrary to Holst’s published views on marriage and woman’s vocation.[[34]](#footnote-34) Holst is explicit in deferring to Johann Ludolf in pursuit of her project, and his awareness of her solicitation of Hennings is clear as Holst indicates that her “high estimation of you is shared by my husband” and closes by noting that her “husband recommends himself respectfully to you and would be proud to have your approval.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

Things are noticeably different in a letter Holst writes October 31, 1824 to the Hamburg publisher and bookseller Franz August Gottlob Campe.[[36]](#footnote-36) This letter is written after returning from a visit to her daughter, Emilia, in Buckow, who was recovering after giving birth to her second child.[[37]](#footnote-37) Consistent with the claim that the Holsts lived apart during this time, the letter is addressed from Timckenberg (presumably from her son’s estate) and there is no mention made of Johann Ludolf Holst. What is mentioned is, in any case, of far more interest, as Holst refers to a manuscript she has written and sent to Campe, but which he has declined to publish; thus, she writes, “that you do not want to accept my manuscript has upset me greatly,” and she claims that she knows no other way in which she can gain access to the public for her “*Geisteskind*.” [[38]](#footnote-38) Holst in any case remained hopeful that, if Campe was not willing to publish the work himself, he could at least help to facilitate its publication as he apparently did for her *Über die Bestimmung* years earlier:

I recall that at one point, on account of certain delicate considerations, you did not publish my *Bestimmung des Weibes* yourself, but had it published in Leipzig; if you would do the same with this manuscript, and recommend it to some other bookseller, then the matter would be very much helped along[[39]](#footnote-39)

Unfortunately, Holst’s manuscript appears to have been lost and there is no indication that it was ever published. And while Holst herself does not disclose anything relating to the content of the new work in the letter itself, the fact that she compares the situation with this manuscript to that of *Über die Bestimmung* might be taken to indicate that it treated a similar (or at least similarly controversial) theme. It does, nonetheless, show that even if Holst did not (as far as can be ascertained) publish anything after 1802, this was not as a result of her inaction as she evidently continued her intellectual and literary activities until late in her life.

2. Holst and Lessing on the Errors of Philanthropinism

With this background in mind, we can turn to Holst’s first publication, the *Bemerkungen über die Fehler unserer modernen Erziehung* of 1791, which is the product of her longstanding interest in the education of youth. In her *Bemerkungen*, Holst issues a criticism of the highly influential Philanthropinist movement, the first such criticism offered by a German woman. Among the principal architects of this movement was Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724–90), a student of H. S. Reimarus in Hamburg and of C. A. Crusius in Leipzig who founded the *Philanthropinum*, an educational institution modelled on his theories, in Dessau in 1774. Another leading figure was Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746–1818), one-time tutor to the Humboldts who briefly took over the leadership of the *Philanthropinum* from October 1776 to September 1777 before falling out with Basedow, after which he moved to Hamburg and went on to publish an influential program for reforming education and even undertook the reform of the school system in Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel. That Holst identifies herself as a “praktische Erzieherinn” on the title page of the *Bemerkungen* is not only a reference to her long career as an educator but likely also to the highly influential program for educational reform published by Campe entitled *Allgemeine Revision des gesammten Schul- und Erziehungswesens von einer Gesellschaft praktischer Erzieher* (in 16 volumes, from 1785 to 1792).[[40]](#footnote-40) In terms of their educational theory, Basedow and Campe sought to replace the emphasis on the learning of what they regarded as useless material, including foreign languages, with a wide-ranging education in modern science, religion, and morality. Rather than relying on rote-memorization, Basedow and Campe introduced an element of play, and even competitive games, in the lessons of their students, and made use of specialized textbooks, the so-called *Elementarbücher*, which included model conversations between pupil and instructor, as well as a wealth of visual aids.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Holst shares Basedow’s and Campe’s reservations regarding the old educational methods, but she contends that their innovations take the sensible modernizations in pedagogy introduced by Locke and Rousseau too far. Her diagnosis is presented in the treatise under four broad headings, each of which considers how the distinctive methods of the Philanthropinists produces untoward effects in students, with the first being that “reasoning with the child too often and too early produces stubbornness and disobedience.”[[42]](#footnote-42) In contrast with the traditional conception of the educator as an unquestioned authority issuing “dictatorial commandments”[[43]](#footnote-43) to their charges, the Philanthropinists promoted the use of reason with students, even the very young, in order to explain, for instance, the wrongness of a course of action or in order to show why some proposition holds. Holst objects, however, that the recourse to reason is made with little attention to the stage of development of that faculty in the students,[[44]](#footnote-44) and in any case reason can only be of limited effectiveness given that the transition from sensory impression to impulse to the drive to satisfy it is effected in a moment in children, leaving little opportunity for reflection.[[45]](#footnote-45) Given the ineffectiveness of the appeal to reason, the result is that children become stubbornly insistent on their own will and disobedient to the teacher’s entreaties.

The second error diagnosed by Holst consists in the fact that youth educated according to these methods are characterized by their “spirit of frivolity” and “superficial pedantry [Vielwissen].”[[46]](#footnote-46) While traditional education wrongly focuses on filling the student’s head with “Wörterkram und unverständlichen Lehrformeln” such that students are never inspired to inquire further,[[47]](#footnote-47) modern educational theorists go too far in the other direction, hastily introducing students to the fundaments of *all* sciences, giving them little opportunity to appreciate what is truly useful and beautiful in each before leaping to the next topic.[[48]](#footnote-48) In addition to the quantity of subjects taught, Holst objects to the “zuckersüß” manner in which the booksare written, with everything presented in a manner that appeals to the memory but does not engage the power of judgment or thought.[[49]](#footnote-49) Third, and referring now to the numerous “Lesebücher” within Campe’s ever-expanding *Kinderbibliothek*, Holst claims that the stories they contain of examples of virtue to be imitated by children engender vanity (“Eigendünkel”) and an overweening desire for approval in children, while the peculiar games involving role-playing developed by Campe (one of which the travel game “Reisespiel” involves one student playing a wanderer relating invented tales of his journeys to his hosts but who is unceremoniously ejected if he gets anything factually incorrect)[[50]](#footnote-50) likewise have morally adverse consequences given the hierarchies imitated within the game. Continuing in this vein, the fourth error calls attention to the effect that these readings have on the imagination of children. This occurs particularly through the moving stories, plays, and poetry contained in the books, which awaken passions that the child is as yet unable to control,[[51]](#footnote-51) but also through Basedow’s use of engravings to depict non-sensible things which threatens to provoke a kind of enthusiasm within young minds.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Throughout Holst’s criticisms of the Philanthropinists in *Bemerkungen*, there is a single unifying theme, namely that the fault of modern education lies in a failure to attend to the extent to which the child’s faculties are developed. Holst notes that Campe himself explicitly warns against educating children too early in a manner unsuited to their capacities;[[53]](#footnote-53) however, she charges that this warning is effectively ignored in practice. Thus she points to a fictionalized dialogue published in one of the books of the *Kinderbibliothek* in which a mother discusses issues such as the soul, death, God, and heaven with her three-year-old child.[[54]](#footnote-54) Even if not intended for a three year old, the dialogue presupposes a clarity concerning abstract concepts, like those of piety or the soul, and a sufficiently refined faculty of reason needed to follow the argument, that Holst says in her experience would not be found in older children. Given this inattention, children in the Philanthropinists’ institutions are exposed to ideas and passions that are unsuited to their stage of development, and as a result are forced into an “early maturity [frühe Reife],” leading Holst to compare them to hothouse plants whose quick growth renders them incapable of bearing fruit.[[55]](#footnote-55) In this way, the modern educator fails in their task, and rather than producing useful citizens, “delivers over to the state a worthless half-man” incapable of functioning alongside his fellows.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Significantly, Holst is not the first to have raised this objection to the Philanthropinists, as her general criticism finds an influential prefiguration, albeit in a rather unexpected place. The historicized account of revelation presented by Lessing in his *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (*Education of the Human Race*) is animated by a similar emphasis on the importance of attending to the developmental stage of one’s charges, in Lessing’s case, the people who are the audience for revealed truths. Relating to Lessing’s *Erziehung* itself, the first part of the text (§§1–53) was appended to the notorious “*Fragmenten eines Ungenannten* [Fragments of an Unknown]” written by H. S. Reimarus and published by Lessing from 1774–78. The full text would be published in 1780, and in both cases Lessing only identifies himself as the ‘editor,’ a fact that has long occasioned questions as to the real authorship of the text.[[57]](#footnote-57) In any case, the text constitutes a response to the fourth fragment in which Reimarus contended that the old testament was not written in order to reveal a religion given that doctrines essential to “eine[r] übernatürliche[n] seligmachende[n] Religion,” like the immortality of the soul, are not presented within it.[[58]](#footnote-58) Against Reimarus, Lessing defends the claim that, in spite of not containing this core doctrine, the old testament can be seen to constitute the revelation of a religion, and he does so by considering revelation to be to the human race as a whole what education is for the individual.[[59]](#footnote-59) God, then, is construed as the supreme educator, while the human race is compared to a student, and just as the effective educator would not rush to reveal everything to their charge at once, so God would not reveal truths to the human race that exceed its capacity to grasp them:

And just as education is not indifferent to the order in which it develops the powers of the human being, and just as it cannot impart everything to an individual all at once, so also has God had to observe a certain order, a certain measure in His revelation[.][[60]](#footnote-60)

That the doctrine of the soul’s immortality does not appear in the old testament, then, is to be explained by the fact that God chose “an *individual people* for his special education,”[[61]](#footnote-61) namely, the Israelites, whose servitude in Egypt rendered the God of their fathers “completely unknown to them.”[[62]](#footnote-62) The fact that this people was “still so completely immersed in its childhood” meant that they had a distinctively this-worldly outlook, and that they were motivated only by the prospect of being happy or unhappy on earth, and so were unable to grasp the concept of an existence in the next life much less to be motivated by it in their actions.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Lessing’s emphasis on God’s attention to the stage of development of the human race anticipates Holst’s own emphasis in her criticism of the Philanthropinists. Indeed, Lessing’s views on this score likely have their source in his own interactions with the Philanthropinist thinkers, going back to his critical responses to an early presentation of the Philanthropinists’ pedagogical theory by Johann Andreas Cramer (1723–88) in a Danish moral weekly. Cramer was inspired by Basedow to seek a reform of religious education in Danish schools. Among his suggestions was for the child to be introduced to Jesus first “as the most loving, most tender, and most caring friend and benefactor [als den liebreichsten, zärtlichsten, sorgfältigsten Freund und Wohltäter],”[[64]](#footnote-64) and only later in their development to be informed of his divine nature. Lessing took issue with this in his *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend*, objecting that the effect of adopting this approach amounts to “making the child into a Socinian until the time comes that they can grasp orthodox doctrine,”[[65]](#footnote-65) and that in fact there was no more opportune time to introduce the child to the mystery of Christ’s divinity than in early childhood rather than waiting (or hoping) for reason to certify this truth later on.[[66]](#footnote-66) Lessing’s criticism provoked a response by Basedow himself in 1760 and a further dismissive reply by Lessing. Yet, as it is reflected in the much later discussion in *Erziehung*, Lessing claims that it is one thing for a teacher to overlook a doctrine in light of a consideration of the student’s capacities but quite another to misrepresent a doctrine in such a way that it will pose an obstacle to its later acceptance:

An *Elementarbuch* for children may very well pass over in silence this or that important part of the science or art which it expounds, if the teacher judges that it is not yet appropriate to the capacities of the children for whom he is writing. But it must contain absolutely nothing which might block the children’s way to the important items hitherto withheld, or point them in the wrong direction.[[67]](#footnote-67)

In spite, then, of the unmistakable parallel between the secularized doctrine revealed to the “uncultivated and barbarous” Israelites on Lessing’s account and the conception of Christ as a *Menschenfreund* advocated by Cramer and Basedow, there is a key difference in that the former but not the latter promotes rather than interferes with the eventual acceptance of the truth. It would thus be too hasty to take this, as well as Lessing’s frequent mention of the *Elementarbücher* in (an apparent) reference to Basedow throughout *Erziehung*,[[68]](#footnote-68) as evidence of a late-developing sympathy with Philanthropinist pedagogy.[[69]](#footnote-69)

3. Holst’s Radical Pedagogy in *Über die Bestimmung*

Interestingly, this shared critical attitude towards the Philanthropinist program draws attention to other points of continuity between Lessing and Holst. To be clear from the outset, there is no evidence of any direct connection between Holst and Lessing. Holst never explicitly cites Lessing in her writings (in spite of referring to Reimarus and Mendelssohn), and in fact it is uncertain whether Holst would have even known that Lessing was the author of *Erziehung* (despite the fact that it was something of an open secret). In any case, Lessing’s initial suggestion, that regarding education as “revelation that is imparted to the individual human being” [[70]](#footnote-70) might have applications in contemporary pedagogy, is arguably taken up by Holst. Even if Holst rejects the antiquated model of education where the student was treated like a slave and “had to take everything on *faith* [alles auf Glauben annehmen mußte],”[[71]](#footnote-71) she can nonetheless be taken to agree with Lessing that education in early childhood ought to resemble revelation insofar as this is opposed to the excessive and ultimately harmful reliance on reasoning preferred by the Philanthropinists. More generally, Holst appears to endorse the parallels Lessing finds between the stages of development of the individual, on the one hand, and of the human race on the other. Thus, she writes, just as a people, when it attains a certain level of culture, becomes capable of re-directing its attention from the useless objects of speculation to the things that constantly surround it, so it is also with the individual, “whose history is a microcosm [kurzer Inbegriff] of the history of the entire human race [Menschengeschlechts].”[[72]](#footnote-72)

This intellectual affinity between Holst and Lessing continues to be apparent in her *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes* of 1802. The second chapter, dedicated to a consideration of woman’s vocation as a mother, provides the occasion for an elaboration of a positive program of education that offers a supplement to the primarily critical treatment in *Bemerkungen*.[[73]](#footnote-73) Here she discusses a number of subjects that are fundamental for a child’s education, including natural history and physics, and geography, but foremost among these is history. In contrast with the traditional approach, as well as with Campe’s suggestion of how history might be taught to girls,[[74]](#footnote-74) Holst does not think history should be taught as a “dry register of the names of kings great and small [...] alongside the dates on which battles occurred,”[[75]](#footnote-75) but rather the instructor should seek to abstract a “philosophy of history” that serves to unite events:

The philosophy of history consists, however, as I see it, primarily in retracing the path which human inclinations and passions have taken, always and at all times albeit with various nuances.[[76]](#footnote-76)

In addition to providing the child with insight into the “rise and fall of great states,”[[77]](#footnote-77) Holst intends for the student to “learn about one’s own self, but also about the human being in general and in particular”[[78]](#footnote-78) through a consideration of the range of motives behind human actions, from the noble to the base. This will also serve to demonstrate to the child that, just as is the case in the physical world, so also in the moral world human beings are organized according to a chain or ladder, such that not all can enjoy the same level of culture or act from the same elevated motives at the same time. In any case, the lesson which this is intended to impart to the student is to be *tolerant*, which Holst identifies as “the noblest and most human of all virtues.”[[79]](#footnote-79)

The centrality of history, as something beyond a chronicle of wars, in Holst’s educational program, not to mention the emphasis on toleration are themes that find clear parallels in Lessing’s works. For Holst, however, the most important implication of this is that the one educating the child must themselves be sufficiently educated:

Yet in order to have so internalized the spirit of history, one must know it in its full compass, have studied it in connection with other sciences so that one can view it as a whole[.][[80]](#footnote-80)

As Holst proceeds to explain, among these other sciences that the educator will need to command are natural history and physics, as well as geography: through the former the student can learn the laws of the natural world which serves to explain the ordering of natural events,[[81]](#footnote-81) and through the latter the student comes to appreciate the influence of environment, politics, and religion on the actions of human beings.[[82]](#footnote-82) Given, according to Holst, that at least for the beginning of a male child’s education (but for the entirety of a female’s) the educator responsible for so guiding the student is the mother, it follows that women require education in order to fulfill this traditional role. Moreover, this is as it should be (and here Holst’s discussion links up with her previous criticism of Campe), since no one knows a student’s ability and stage of maturation better than its own mother:

The mother, who has attained this high level of education where with refined judgment she surveys the field of knowledge, knows the measure of her children’s powers and the proper amount of what she may and can impart to them, as well as the right time to do so. She will not pluck these fruits in the time of blossoming, she will not damage the health of her children through a premature and overly demanding forming of the mind[.][[83]](#footnote-83)

As mothers, then, women constitute, in Holst’s suggestive formulation, the “first educators of the human race [erste Erzieherinnen des Menschengeschlechts],”[[84]](#footnote-84) and to succeed in this role they will require sufficient education themselves.

Whether or not this is an explicit reference to Lessing’s *Erziehung*, it is interesting to consider Holst’s designation of women as the *first* educators of the human race, educating their charges in preparation for a “future educator [späteren Erzieher],”[[85]](#footnote-85) in light of the foregoing context. We might wonder, for instance, whether Holst’s program of early education would have the effect of making students *more* receptive to the theological and religious doctrines—the belief in the divinity of Christ, for instance—that Lessing took to characterize the next stage in the education of the human race. It will be recalled that while Lessing thought it acceptable to pass over such doctrines in silence, the educator of the human race could not pass anything off as a truth, as the Philanthropinists allegedly did, that risked blocking the way to these truths or that pointed us in the wrong direction.[[86]](#footnote-86) Yet, when we look at Holst’s text with an eye to its effectiveness as a preparation for learning these (and other) revealed truths, the result is ambiguous at best. Within the pedagogical program outlined by Holst, there is a notable absence of any topics that might be considered a step on the way to a subsequent religious education—God is sometimes mentioned as the “author [Urheber]” of creation, but the focus is decidedly on the natural context, both relating to human affairs (actions as the products of passions) and to external nature (where everything proceeds in accordance with cause and effect).[[87]](#footnote-87)

Indeed, it may very well be the case that Holst neglects to mention religious and theological topics because these are traditionally in the purview of male teachers. Yet, the lessons that she intends to impart through her own program of education would arguably have the effect of reducing the child’s credence in the supernatural truths that might be inculcated by a subsequent educator. So, the student’s education in natural history will, according to Holst, have the effect of rendering the child impervious to superstition, including the belief that God will punish one when one acts against His putative plans;[[88]](#footnote-88) similarly, the lessons in geography teach us to honour “the wise and loving instincts of *nature*”[[89]](#footnote-89) in arranging things to promote the development of our powers. With respect to history, while Holst does not offer much in the way of specifics. But when she claims that there will come a moment when the mother, as educator, decides to offer the suitably educated student a “glimpse behind the curtain of history,”[[90]](#footnote-90) there is the distinct suggestion that what they behold is nothing more than the truth that natural events are merely the products of the laws of nature, and even the actions of human beings only the effects of natural inclinations and passions in combination with historical circumstances.[[91]](#footnote-91) Were this the case, then this would make Holst vulnerable to the same criticism that Lessing had issued against the Philanthropinists, namely, that such an education “might block the children’s way to the important items hitherto withheld, or point them in the wrong direction.”

Even so, where the Philanthropinists (likely) did not intend to obstruct or mislead children from the path to accepting the revealed truths of religion, in Holst’s case there are indications that this is just her intention, as sprinkled throughout Holst’s *Über die Bestimmung* are a number of passages that indicate an unmistakable (and perhaps unsurprising) sympathy for the views of freethinkers. Holst notes that some have claimed the authority of the Bible, and particularly the account of the creation of Eve, in support of the claim that women “are merely there for the sake of men.”[[92]](#footnote-92) However, Holst contends that it “is more than probable that Moses [...] did not write these books at all,”[[93]](#footnote-93) thereby drawing an implicit contrast with Wollstonecraft, who only claims that “Moses’ poetical story” should be interpreted figuratively rather than literally.[[94]](#footnote-94) With respect to the account of creation, Holst claims that it “bears the stamp of the crudeness of [Moses’] people and of his age,”[[95]](#footnote-95) though this is not because, as Lessing might urge, that it is the result of God’s accommodation of revelation to the Israelites, but rather because Holst dismisses God’s creation of the world from nothing as an “absurdity [Unding],”[[96]](#footnote-96) an assertion that would align her (at least in the eyes of some) with Spinozistic ways of thinking.[[97]](#footnote-97) Holst’s critical hermeneutics extends to the new testament as, against those who cite the authority of Paul in women’s subordination, Holst charges the apostle with “poisoning the at first gentle and loving Christian religion with that spirit of sophistry and intolerance which has been so horribly propagated by the clergy, to the detriment of humanity.”[[98]](#footnote-98) That Holst’s treatise contained such dangerous “Freidenkerei” was not lost on at least one reviewer of the book.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Contrary to the Philanthropinists, then, Holst’s educational program looks to be a deliberate attempt to reduce the human race’s susceptibility to the supernatural truths of revelation, and indeed, even to the belief in a God separate from His creation. Still, the radicalness of Holst’s views should not be exaggerated, as there are signs of moderation in her published works. Even though Holst does not view matter as inert but attributes a “formative power [bildende Kraft]” to nature which accounts for its taking on certain forms, she does assert that this power is bestowed on matter by God.[[100]](#footnote-100) Similarly, Holst claims that while we have no insight into the way in which “nature forms its forms [die Natur ihre Formen bildet],” through the study of nature we can come to understand that matter abides by “eternal, unchangeable laws and that matter *or its author* [ihr Urheber] never deviates from it” but in any case that such laws are framed by “the highest wisdom and goodness.”[[101]](#footnote-101) Notably, Holst is similarly measured in her discussion of the soul’s immortality in the context of her previous letters on *Elisa* (published in 1799). There, in response to Wobeser’s omission of any discussion of immortality in the education of Elisa, Holst defends the utility of the doctrine for morality as adding “one motive more.”[[102]](#footnote-102) Even so, she allows that the soul’s immortality is not contained in any clarity within Scripture (it is a “later addition on the part of priests”) nor can it be proven or disproven “with apodictic certainty,”[[103]](#footnote-103) a fact that also serves to distinguish Holst’s from Lessing’s views on immortality at least as far as can be gathered from his *Erziehung*.

Whatever the radicalness of her underlying views, Holst likewise brings a measured approach to her envisioned reform of education. Living up to her claim that she is no “Revolutionspredigerin,” Holst does not propose an immediate overhaul of educational practices (of the sort proposed in her *Bemerkungen*) but adopts a gradualist approach that would see similarly dramatic results albeit only after a considerable period of time. Holst’s case for the education of women in their role as mothers is made with an eye towards their future task of inculcating their charges with enlightened conceptions of human history, nature, and the world. This has the result of making this generation of youth less susceptible to the harmful and intolerant views propounded by subsequent educators which are rooted in the fanciful set of beliefs displaced by this education. As a result, this generation will be less prone to passing along the same prejudices as their predecessors and, presumably, this will have a wholly salutary effect after they enter society and, at least in some cases, take on roles as educators themselves. Considered in this way, Holst’s advocacy for women’s education begins to look like only a part, and indeed only the first step, of a much larger and more ambitious agenda to reform general education in light of the ideals of the enlightenment.

We are now in a position to return, by way of conclusion, to what I identified at the outset of this chapter as the three features of Holst’s discussion that have complicated her reception in the history of philosophical feminism. Most generally, we might note that the pedagogical context of Holst’s discussion has proven essential for not only drawing out her deeper philosophical views, but also for providing a perspective from which a unified project connecting her published texts can be discerned. Relating to the specific concerns that were raised, we can now see that the first worry, about Holst’s originality with respect to Wollstonecraft and Hippel, turns on a fairly superficial understanding of Holst’s project. On the one hand, the foregoing actually provides the basis for a much more nuanced comparison of Holst’s and Wollstonecraft’s respective projects (given Wollstonecraft’s own interests in women’s education) which cannot be pursued here, though importantly Holst’s conclusions regarding women’s education ultimately do not find their foundations in rights-based discourse but in rather more radical philosophical commitments. And even if the intended consequences of Holst’s reform of education are probably just as far-reaching as Hippel’s, her methods of attaining them and the gradualism she adopts set Holst’s project apart from his. Concerning Holst’s conservatism in couching the case for women’s education within the assumption of traditional gender roles, at least when it comes to women’s role as mothers, we can see that this is done for the sake of a further end, namely, that inasmuch as for Holst the mother is ideally situated to educate the child in the most effective way, educating her will mean that Holst’s proposed reforms have the most immediate and profound impact. Lastly, and perhaps most controversially, Holst’s apparently needless exclusion of lower-class women from access to education might likewise be the result of her focus on first educating those who would have the resources sufficient for themselves and for their children to pursue education and, subsequently, to be in a position to take up the education of others (in, for instance, an institutional capacity). The lower class’s exclusion from Holst’s project should not, then, be taken as permanent, but is rather consistent with her gradualism and a reflection of her recognition of the exigencies that inhibit their participation initially. Indeed, in connection with this last point, we find a final parallel with Lessing’s *Erziehung*, as Holst’s decision to appeal to a limited group of women, much like God’s initial choice of a select people, is made according to Lessing not to exclude others from access to revealed truth but rather only “so as to be able, in the course of time, to use individual members of this [chosen] people with greater assurance, as educators of all other peoples.”[[104]](#footnote-104)

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[anon.] *Neu durchgesehenes Verzeichniss der verbothenen deutschen Bücher*. Vienna, 1816.

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1. Holst’s *Über die Bestimmung* was listed as a banned book in Austria in 1816; cf. *Neu durchgesehenes Verzeichniss der verbothenen deutschen Bücher* (Vienna, 1816), 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, for instance, the oft-quoted sentence: “Es sey denn! im Namen unsers ganzen Geschlechts fodere ich die Männer auf, uns die Rechte zu beweisen, deren sie sich anmaßen, die eine ganze Hälfte des Menschengeschlechts zurückzusetzen, ihnen die Quelle der Wissenschaften zu versagen, nur höchstens von ihrer Oberfläche abzuschöpfen erlauben zu wollen” (Amalia Holst, *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höhern Geistesbildung*. Berlin 1802, 3; cf. also 158). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for instance, *ibid*., xiii–xiv, 5–6n. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In fact, a contemporary reviewer even insinuated that parts of Holst’s texts were derived from “irgend ein englisches oder franzözisches Werk”; cf. review of Amalia Holst’s *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höhern Geistesbildung* (Berlin 1802), *Hamburg und Altona, eine Zeitschrift zur Geschichte der Zeit, der Sitten und des Geschmacks*. Hamburg 1802, 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Holst, *Über die Bestimmung*, 6n. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Ibid*., 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Justi’s date of birth is sometimes given as 1720 (as in Johann Beckmann’s *Vorrath kleiner Anmerkungen über mancherley gelehrte Gegenstände* (Drittes Stück). Göttingen 1806, 550). For evidence that he was born in 1717, see Ferdinand Frensdorff, *Über das Leben und die Schriften des Nationalökonomen J. H. G. von Justi*. Glashütten im Taunus 1970, 5–6; and Eric S. Reinert, “Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi – The Life and Times of an Economist Adventurer,” in J. G. Backhaus (ed.), *The Beginnings of Political Economy: Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi*. New York 2009, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, *Dissertation qui a remporté le prix proposé par l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles Lettres sur le système des monades*. Berlin 1748 (containing Justi’s “Untersuchung der Lehre von den Monaden und einfachen Dingen, worinnen der Ungrund derselben gezeiget wird”). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For references, see Elke Spitzer, *Emanzipationsansprüche zwischen der Querelle des Femmes und der modernen Frauenbewegung: Der Wandel des Gleichheitsbegriffs am Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Diss.). Kassel 2001, 165. In advocating for a women’s academy, Justi is contributing to a wider tradition that was particularly active in England but also in Germany. For the former, see Ina Schabert’s “Bürgerinnen in der Republik des Geistes? Gelehrte Frauen im England der Aufklärung” in I. Karremann (ed.), *Die Gleichheit der Geschlechter. Eine Literaturgeschichte der Aufklärung*. Berlin 2021, 3-27. For treatment of the German discussion of girls’ education, see Corey W. Dyck, “On Prejudice and the Limits to Learnedness: Dorothea Christiane Erxleben and the *Querelle des Femmes*,” in C. W. Dyck (ed.), *Women and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Germany*. Oxford 2021, 51-71, esp. 62-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, *Geschichte des Erd-Cörpers*. Berlin 1771, viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Reinert, “Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi,” 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The precise birthplace of Amalia Holst is unclear. Holst identifies herself as a “Landeskind der Preußischen Staaten” in her last published work (see Holst, *Über die Bestimmung*, unpaginated preface), and the announcement of Holst’s marriage indicates she is “gebürtig aus Berlin.” However, Berta Rahm (in whose edition of Holst’s treatise the announcement is reproduced—see Berta Rahm (ed.), *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höhern Geistesbildung. Neu Ausgabe des 1802 in Berlin bei Heinrich Frolich erschienenen Buches*. Zürich 1984, 165) indicates that Holst was born in Altona (cf. 160), whereas Elke Spitzer anomalously claims that Holst was born in Mecklenburg (Spitzer, *Emanzipationsansprüche*, 164). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Spitzer (*Emanzipationsansprüche*, 165) claims that the daughter served “als Schreiberin,” though Holst herself only goes as far as to say that she “ging mit dem Vater nach Cüstrin zu seiner Pflege, und blieb bey ihm bis zu seinem Tode” (cf. Beckmann, *Vorrath kleiner Anmerkungen*, 561). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Beckmann, *Vorrath kleiner Anmerkungen*, 549–50. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Reported in Beckmann, *Vorrath kleiner Anmerkungen*, 562. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Holst’s authorship was only made publically known in her *Über die Bestimmung* of 1802 (177), but was also announced in Beckmann’s account of her father’s life and works in 1806; cf. Beckmann, *Vorrath kleiner Anmerkungen*, 548–49. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See also Hans Schröder, *Lexicon der hamburgischen Schriftsteller bis zur Gegenwart* (Dritter Band). Hamburg 1857, 330; and Spitzer, *Emanzipationsansprüche*, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For a brief account of Johann Ludolf Holst’s life and works, see Elke Kleinau, “Pädagoginnen der Aufklärung und ihre Bildungstheorien,” in: C. Opitz, U. Weckel, and E. Kleinau (eds.), *Tugend, Vernunft und Gefühl: Geschlechterdiskurse der Aufklärung und weibliche Lebenswelten*. Münster 2000, 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Otto Rüdiger, *Geschichte des hamburgischen Unterrichtswesens*. Hamburg 1896, 74; Kleinau, “Pädagoginnen der Aufklärung,” 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Holst’s responses were published as “Briefe an eine Freundin über *Elisa, oder das Weib, wie es seyn sollte*” in the monthly journal *Musarion, die Freundin weiser Geselligkeit und häuslicher Freuden*, edited by August Lindemann. Four letters were published (vol. 1 [1799], 345–61; and vol. 2 [1799], 30–52, 213–27, and 326–41)—a fifth, concluding letter is mentioned at the end of the fourth letter (cf. *Musarion* [1799] vol. 2, 341) but does not seem to have appeared. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Reviews appeared in *Hamburg und Altona, eine Zeitschrift zur Geschichte der Zeit, der Sitten und des Geschmacks* (1802), 95–99, 205–12, 356–60; and *Beilage des Hamburgischen Correspondenten* (1802), no. 23 (Feb. 9) (unpaginated). See Karl Jacoby, *Beiträge zur deutschen Litteraturgeschichte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Hamburg 1911, 27–8, who also mentions a third in *Kaiserlich-Privilegierte Hamburgische neue Zeitung* (1802), though the original could not be located (it is in any case reprinted in Rahm, *Über die Bestimmung*, 140–1). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. There are suggestions that Holst’s and Elise Reimarus’ social circles might have overlapped during Holst’s time in Hamburg. Elise Reimarus was familiar enough with Holst’s views that when Franz August Gottlieb Campe (a publisher in Hamburg who was a mutual acquaintance of both Reimarus and Holst) sent her a copy of Holst’s *Über die Bestimmung*, Reimarus replied that she had no interest in reading it, in part because she knew very well “die Feder der Mad[ame]. H[olst]” (quoted in Almut Spalding, *Elise Reimarus (1735–1805) The Muse of Hamburg*. Würzburg 2005, 216n46). Kleinau suggests that Holst was an associate of Reimarus’ (cf. “Pädagoginnen der Aufklärung,” 321), but it is not clear what evidence might support this assertion. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See Rüdiger, *Geschichte*, 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Kleinau, “Pädagoginnen der Aufklärung,” 323, and 323n107. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See *Neuer Nekrolog der Deutschen. Siebenter Jahrgang, 1829* (Erster Theil). Ilmenau 1831, 63; Jacoby, *Beiträge*, 6–7. For a discussion of this chronology, see Kleinau, “Pädagoginnen der Aufklärung,” 336n110. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Rahm, *Über die Bestimmung*, 163. The same record identifies Holst as a “Doktorin” (*ibid*.), and in the previously mentioned obituary, it is claimed that “Holst führte den Doktortitel, und man behauptet, daß er nicht von ihrem Ehemanne, sondern [...] durch Selbst-Promotion erworben sei” (*Nekrolog*, 63). However, in his study of Holst, Jacoby notes that he was unable to confirm that any such title was awarded through the university at Kiel; cf. Jacoby, *Beiträge*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Kleinau, “Pädagoginnen der Aufklärung,” 323. Indeed, Kleinau claims “man wohl schließen kann, daß das Ehepaar sich getrennt hatte” (*ibid*.). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. These documents are part of the collection of the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Handschriftensammlung (SUB HH), in the Hennings Nachlass and the Campe-Sammlung. The materials to be referenced here are the letter from Amalia Holst to August Hennings, May 29, 1802 (SUB HH, NHA: 11: 287–88); letter from August Hennings to Amalia Holst, June 9, 1802 (SUB HH, NHA: 7: 153–54); and letter to Franz August Gottlieb Campe, Oct. 31, 1824 (SUB HH, CS 2: Holst: 1–2). In addition, the archive has a “Lebensabriß von Amalia Holst” (undated, SUB HH, CS 2: Holst: 3–4) written by an unknown author, but not in any case by Holst herself. All of these materials are, as far as I can tell, previously unknown to scholars working on Holst. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. “Geistesbildung des schönen Geschlechts,” in A. Hennings (ed.): *Der Genius des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Dritter Band). Altona 1801, 318–24. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. “Die sehr schwächliche Gesundheit meines Gatten erlaubt es ihm nicht länger, das Geschäft eines Vorstehers einer Erziehungsanstalt zu verwalten. Schon lange beseelte mich der feurige Wunsch, auch praktisch für die Bildung meines Geschlechts würken zu wollen; er aber wollte nie seine Einwilligung dazu geben, so lange er noch für das seinige thätig zu seyn, die Kräfte in sich fühlte. Jetzt aber da er es zugegeben hat, widme ich mich mit Enthusia[s]m einer Bildungsanstalt für junge Mädchen” (Holst to Hennings, May 29, 1802). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. “Ich bin nach Berlin und Mecklenburg dazu aufgefodert worden; aber da wir in diesen Zeitläufen, so viel an unserm grossen Hause, und an dem Mobiliar, durch den Verkauf verlieren müßten; so bleibe ich lieben an Ort und Stelle” (Holst to Hennings, May 29, 1802). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. “Seit meinem 15ten Jahre widmete ich mich dem Erziehungsgeschäft, und habe mit rastlosem Eifer mich bemüht, mir all die dahin gehörigen Kenntnisse zu erstreben, und was noch mehr ist, ich treibe dies Geschäft mit Lust und Enthusiasm. Ich bin so innig überzeugt, daß nur durch die höhere Ausbildung der Weiber, die Veredlung der gesamten Menscheit zu bewürken ist” (Holst to Hennings, May 29, 1802). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See Hennings to Amalia Holst, June 9, 1802. Hennings seems to have been familiar with Holst previously, as he mentions her *Über die Bestimmung* himself, noting that he is having it bound with the latest book by her husband (*Versuch einer kritischen Uebersicht der Völker Seerechte*), which Holst had sent along with her letter. Johann Ludolf’s book was subsequently given a (rather cursory) review in Hennings’ journal; cf. review of Johann Ludolf Holst, *Versuch einer kritischen Uebersicht der Völker-Seerechte, aus der Geschichte, der Staatslehre und der Philosophie in Hinsicht auf ihre Streitigkeiten* (Hamburg 1802), in A. Hennings (ed.), *Der Genius des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Sechster Band). Altona 1802, 174–77 (only the last paragraph actually mentions Holst’s book, where it is claimed that considering it in any detail is contrary to the aim of the journal). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. For discussion of Holst’s views on marriage, see Spitzer, *Emanzipationsansprüche*, 178–81. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. “Mein Gatte theilt diese Hochachtung gegen Sie mit mir” and “Mein Gatte empfiehlt sich Ihnen achtungsvoll, und würde stoltz auf Ihren Beyfall sein” (Holst to Hennings, May 29, 1802). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Franz August Gottlieb Campe (1773–1836) was the nephew of Joachim Heinrich Campe, who is discussed below. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. “Dann hatte ich meine Emilia aus ihrem zweiten Wochenbett, dort [Buckow] zu verpflegen” (Holst to Campe, Oct. 31, 1824). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. “Daß Sie sich meines Manu[s]cripts nicht annehmen wollen, hat mich sehr gekränkt” and “ich weiß das Geschöpf nicht anders als durch Ihre Patrition [sc. *Parturition* C. D.] den Eingang ins Publikum zu verschaffen” (Holst to Campe, Oct. 31, 1824). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. “Ich erinnere mich daß Sie einmals meine Bestimmung d[es] W[eibes] gewissen Rücksichten halber, auch nicht

    selb; sondern in Leipzig verlegen ließen wenn Sie es nun mit diesem Manuscript eben so machten, es bei irgend einem andern Buchhändler empföhlen; so wäre dem Dinge ja abgeholfen” (Holst to Campe, Oct. 31, 1824). It bears noting that Holst’s reference to Leipzig here is not a reference to the place of publication of *Über die Bestimmung*, since it was published by Heinrich Frölich in Berlin (unless Holst is misremembering, or confusing this book with her earlier *Bemerkungen* which was published in Leipzig). Most likely, she is referring to the Leipzg *Buchmesse* where it might have been presented to possible publishers. *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes* is listed in the catalogue for the Frankfurt and Leipzig book fair (*Michaelismesse*) in 1801 as “*Holst*, Amalia, geb. von Justi, über die Bestimmung der Weiber zur höhern Geistesbildung.” 8. Berlin, *Fröhlich* (*Allgemeines Verzeichniß der Bücher, welche in der Frankfurter und Leipziger Michaelismesse des 1801 Jahres*. Leipzig 1801, 326). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Holst refers to this text expressly in *Bemerkungen über die Fehler unserer modernen Erziehung*. Leipzig 1791, 37–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Robert Louden, *Johann Bernhard Basedow and the Transformation of Modern Education: Educational Reform in the German Enlightenment*. London 2020, 12–18. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Holst, *Bemerkungen*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *Ibid*., 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Ibid*., 26–27. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Ibid*., 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *Ibid*., 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *Ibid*., 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. *Ibid*., 37; cf. also 39–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. *Ibid*., 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Ibid*., 56–57; cf. Joachim Heinrich Campe (ed.): *Kleine Kinderbibliothek*. Volume 7. Hamburg 1781, 57–61. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Holst, *Bemerkungen*, 84–86. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Ibid*., 89–91. For details on Holst’s critique of the Philanthropinists, see Robert Louden, “A Mere Skeleton of the Sciences? Amalia Holst’s Critique of Basedow and Campe,” in Corey W. Dyck (ed.), *Women and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Germany*. Oxford 2021, 72–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Holst, *Bemerkungen*, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. See *ibid*., 65–66 for discussion. Note that Holst provides incorrect pagination for the dialogue: it begins on page 37 rather than 117 in Joachim Heinrich Campe (ed.), *Kleine Kinderbibliothek*. Volume 3. Hamburg 1781. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Holst, *Bemerkungen*, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. *Ibid*., 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. On the so-called “Thaer legend,” see Louis Ferdinand Helbig, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts: Historisch-kritische Edition mit Urteilen Lessings und seiner Zeitgenossen, Einleitung, Entstehungsgeschichte und Kommentar*. Bern 1980, 54–57; and Hugh Barr Nisbet, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: His Life, Works, and Thought*. Oxford 2013, 572. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (ed.), *Zur Geschichte und Literatur: Aus den Schätzen der Herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttel*. Braunschweig 1777, 384. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*. Berlin 1780, §2. (Section numbers are given for citations of Lessing’s *Erziehung*; English translations follow those given in Nisbet’s collection of Lessing’s *Philosophical and Theological Writings* (Cambridge 2005), though I have emended these when appropriate. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Lessing, *Erziehung*, §5 (translation emended). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. *Ibid*., §8. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *Ibid*., §9. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Cf. *ibid.* §§16–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Jürgen Overhoff, *Die Frühgeschichte des Philanthropismus (1715–1771)*. Tübingen 2004, 132. For general discussion, see *ibid*., 124–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Quoted in Overhoff, *Frühgeschichte*, 143. See also Nisbet, *Lessing*, 260–1. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. “[Wäre] es nicht billiger, es gleich ganz der bereitwilligen Kindheit *einzuflößen*, als die Zeit der sich *sträubenden* Vernunft damit zu erwarten?” (Letter of July 26 1759, quoted in Overhoff, *Frühgeschichte*, 143). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Lessing, *Erziehung*, §26. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. See, for instance, *Erziehung*, §§27, 38, 47, 50, 64, 66–71. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. This is Overhoff’s suggestion; cf. *Frühgeschichte*, 149n65. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Lessing, *Erziehung*, §§2–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Holst, *Bemerkungen*, 18 (emphasis mine). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. *Ibid*., 45. There are a number of other, more superficial resemblances, such as Holst’s references to *Fingerzeig* at *Bemerkungen*, 92 (echoing *Erziehung* §46), and Holst’s identification as a “practical educator” which, in addition to the intended contrast with Campe and Basedow, recalls Lessing’s identification of Christ as a practical teacher (“praktischer Lehrer,” *Erziehung*, §§58, 60). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. The close thematic connection between Holst’s *Bemerkungen* and this part of *Über die Bestimmung* is underlined by the fact that it is here that Holst publicly acknowledges her own authorship of the earlier text for the first time (cf. *Über die Bestimmung*, 177). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Cf. Holst, *Über die Bestimmung*, 198n. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. *Ibid*., 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. *Ibid*., 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. *Ibid*., 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. *Ibid*., 197–98. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. *Ibid*., 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. *Ibid*., 202–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. *Ibid*., 215–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. *Ibid*., 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. *Ibid.*, 195–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *Ibid*., 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Lessing, *Erziehung*, §26. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. See, for instance, Holst, *Über die Bestimmung*, 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *Ibid*., 204–5, 209–11. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. *Ibid*., 217 (my emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. *Ibid*., 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Interestingly, Holst aligns women’s interest in history, as educators of the human race, with that of the philosopher and opposes it to that of the “jurist and theologian,” where the latter focuses particularly on the “nonsensical jumble of legends and church history [unsinnige Wust der Legende und Kirchengeschichte]” which has the effect of “rusting” the mind rather than promoting “moral education [sittliche Bildung]” (*Über die Bestimmung*, 195–96). See also her caricature of the theologian at 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Holst, *Über die Bestimmung*, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. *Ibid*., 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (S. Tomaselli, ed.). Cambridge 1995, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Holst, *Über die Bestimmung*, 106. See also 107, where she writes: “Aber alle diese theils großen, theils kleinlichen Ideen von der Gottheit, liegen vorworren und nur im Embrio da, der philosophische Geist des Menschen muß sie erst aus dem Wuste von Allegorien und Fabeln, aus der hyperbolischen Sprache der Morgenländer hervorsuchen und deuten.” [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Holst, *Über die Bestimmung*, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See, for instance, Wolff’s elevation of the denial of creation to a characteristic mark of Spinozism in his *Theologia naturalis* §677n (in Corey W. Dyck (ed. and trans.), *Early Modern German Philosophy (1690–1750)*. Oxford 2020, 162–3). It is notable in this context that Holst explicitly draws on the views of Jean-Baptiste-Claude Delisle de Sales (1741–1816), as expressed in his work *De la philosophie de la nature* (first ed. 1770) and which earned him a reputation as a “materialist, sensualist, and *Spinosiste*” (cf. Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750–1790*. Oxford 2011, 677). Holst refers to Delisle in *Über die Bestimmung* 5–6n, 107, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Holst, *Über die Bestimmung*, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. See the review in the *Kaiserlich-priviligirte Hamburgische Neue Zeitung* reprinted in Rahm, *Über die Bestimmung*, 140–1; cf. also Jacoby’s study of Holst, where he notes the incongruity of the fact that Holst should dedicate a book to the Prussian queen that is “durchaus freisinning und antikirchlich” (Jacoby, *Beiträge*, 14). [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Holst, *Über die Bestimmung*, 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. *Ibid*., 202 (my emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. See Holst’s first letter in *Musarion*, 1799 (vol. 1), 356 [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Here again, see Holst’s first letter in *Musarion*, 1799 (vol. 1), 358–89. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Lessing*, Erziehung*, §18. I am particularly grateful to Isabel Karremann and Anne-Claire Michoux for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. I would also like to thank Anne Pollok, Stefanie Buchenau, Reed Winegar, Lauren Kopajtic, Nabeel Hamid, and audiences in Montreal, Zürich, New York City, and Vienna for their constructive feedback and encouragement. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)