*Introductory Essay*

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Meier’s *Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode* (*Gedancken*) deserves a prominent place among treatments of the immortality of the soul in 18th century German philosophy, both within and without the Wolffian tradition of rational psychology. It does not wilt next to Mendelssohn’s *Phädon* in its quality of expression, and might even be compared with Kant’s discussion in the Paralogisms chapter of his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in terms of the boldness of its argument and its philosophical rigour. The *Gedancken* contributed greatly to Meier’s growing reputation as an original thinker and helped him emerge from the shadow of his famous colleague in the philosophy faculty at the Friedrichs-Universität in Halle, Christian Wolff; moreover, it provoked detailed responses on the part of its critics and even made Meier himself the subject of official investigation as an accused aider and abettor of freethinkers. Meier’s *Gedancken* thus stands as a work of central importance within his own philosophical corpus and in the history of 18th century German rational psychology more generally. Accordingly, in this Introductory Essay, I will present the context and argument, as well as the reception, of the *Gedancken*, and then consider Meier’s subsequent defense of his controversial text.

I. Context of the *Gedancken*

The *Gedancken* was published in 1746, at the end of a period of intense philosophical interest, among Wolffian philosophers in particular, in arguments for the soul’s immortality.[[1]](#footnote-1) Wolff himself had sketched a proof for the soul’s immortality in his *Vernünfftige Gedancken von GOtt, der Welt, und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt* (*Deutsche Metaphysik*) of 1720, the first step of which was the demonstration of the immateriality of the soul. For Wolff, that the soul is immaterial follows from the impossibility that any body should think given that consciousness (an ingredient in thought) cannot be accounted for in terms of the figure, size, and positon of the parts of bodies.[[2]](#footnote-2) Since the power of thinking cannot belong to a body, and Wolff thinks similar considerations apply to any composite body, he concludes that it can only belong to an immaterial and therefore simple thing, namely, the soul, which on account of its simplicity cannot perish through division, and so is incorruptible.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Wolff does not, however, view the incorruptibility of the soul as equivalent to or implying the soul’s immortality, properly speaking. In this, Wolff is following Leibniz, who in the *Essais de Théodicée* (and elsewhere), had objected against the Cartesians that incorruptibility is insufficient for immortality given that the latter requires in addition the preservation of the soul’s *personality*, understood as a consciousness of its identity that makes it susceptible to punishment and reward.[[4]](#footnote-4) Accordingly, Wolff argues that we can be certain that the soul will retain its personality after the death of the body on account of the fact that its representations in that state remain grounded in those it had in its former state, so that the latter will prompt it to recall the former in accordance with the (associative) law of imagination that underlies memory, and so to recognize that it is the same soul now that it was previously.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Wolff’s initial treatment was soon supplemented by that of his student, Ludwig Philipp Thümmig (1697–1728), whose dissertation *Demonstratio immortalitatis animae ex intima eius natura deducta* of 1721 offered a comprehensive and innovative discussion of the issue of immortality.[[6]](#footnote-6) Among the most influential features of Thümmig’s dissertation was a detailed analysis of the *desiderata* for any proof of immortality, of which he distinguishes three: (1) the demonstration that the soul persists after the death of the body and preserves its essence, (2) the demonstration that the soul continues in a state of distinct perceptions, and (3) the demonstration that it preserves it personality (understood in Wolff’s sense).[[7]](#footnote-7) Thümmig takes the first and the third to be proven along the lines Wolff himself had outlined; regarding the second, which Wolff had not considered, Thümmig argues as Plato had in the *Phaedo* that the soul pre-existed the body in a state of distinct perception and accordingly that the removal of the body will amount to the re-attainment of that state.[[8]](#footnote-8) After Thümmig, another of Wolff’s students, Georg Bernhard Bilfinger (1693–1750), offered further refinements of the Wolffian proofs, distinguishing for instance between proofs of immortality from the nature of the soul and those based on God’s justice or grace.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Further noteworthy treatments of the soul’s immortality were published by Johann Gustav Reinbeck (1683–1741) and Israel Gottlieb Canz (1690–1753). Reinbeck’s *Philosophische Gedanken über die vernünfftige Seele und derselben Unsterblichkeit*[[10]](#footnote-10) is obviously influenced by Wolff’s treatment, though departs from it in the arguments he offers which emphasize, for instance, the capacity to form general concepts, which is involved in the framing of distinct concepts.[[11]](#footnote-11) Further, taking the issue of the soul’s retention of its capacity for distinct concepts as central to its immortality (as compared to its personality), Reinbeck argues on the analogy with those blind or deaf from birth that the body is not essential for the framing of general or abstract concepts; therefore, there is no reason why the soul would not retain this after the body’s death.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Canz published two lengthy treatments on the topic of immortality—the four-part *Dissertationis de immortalitate animae*,[[13]](#footnote-13) and the *Uberzeugender Beweiß aus der Vernunft von der Unsterblichkeit*,[[14]](#footnote-14) with the latter written in response to what he regarded as the defects of Reinbeck’s discussion. Following the division of Bilfinger (Canz’s former colleague), the first two main sections of *Uberzeugender Beweiß* offer proofs for the soul’s immortality on the basis of grounds internal and external to the soul, respectively. In the first section, after asserting his support for Thümmig’s analysis of the concept of immortality (which was not strictly observed by Reinbeck), Canz supplies numerous proofs, both familiar and novel, for the soul’s incorruptibility and its retention of its spirituality and personality. So, Canz offers diverse proofs for the claim that matter cannot think, which he like Wolff takes to entail the simplicity and incorruptibility of the soul.[[15]](#footnote-15) Against the possibility that the soul might survive the body’s death but fall into a state of obscure representation, Canz argues that the soul preserves its “rank [*Rang*]” as a spirit with respect to, for instance, animal souls, and as such will also preserve the capacities requisite for the principal end that distinguishes beings of that rank.[[16]](#footnote-16) The soul is also taken to preserve its personality inasmuch as its capacity to reason means that it can infer general claims concerning its previous state which spurs the recollection of individual experiences and, thus, consciousness that it is the same now as it was previously.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The second main section of *Uberzeugender Beweiß* arguably breaks new ground as Canz turns to investigating the grounds in God for the soul’s immortality. Specifically Canz attempts to demonstrate that God in fact wills that the soul survives the death of the body and retains its higher intellectual capacities in the afterlife, rather than willing the soul’s annihilation or eternal sleep. Canz argues that we can know that God wills that the soul survives the body’s death since to do otherwise would be inconsistent with His purpose in creating simple, incorruptible souls, but would also upset the connection and agreement among created beings in both space and time, and result in a less perfect and complete world.[[18]](#footnote-18) Concerning the soul’s spirituality and personality, Canz likewise contends that God has chosen in favour of their retention in the life to come, ultimately arguing that without these higher capacities, incorruptible souls could not honour God’s wisdom, goodness, and justice inasmuch as they would not recognize that the reward or punishment received in the future life is the consequence of the present one.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Another figure of immense importance for Meier was Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, though Baumgarten’s discussion in the *Metaphysica* does not limit itself to the now-familiar Wolffian agenda. Like the Wolffians, Baumgarten recognizes that immortality requires more than the mere incorruptibility of the soul but spirituality and personality besides, and Baumgarten deploys recognizably Wolffian arguments against the *thnetopsychists* (who deny the soul survives the death of the body), the *psychopannychists* (who deny the soul has any but obscure representations in the afterlife), and the *patroni lethaei poculi* (who deny that the soul recognizes its identity after death).[[20]](#footnote-20) However, in contrast with the Wolffian discussions, Baumgarten emphasizes the contingent, finite nature of the soul which, he recognizes, entails that it *can* die and so is not immortal in an absolute but only in a hypothetical sense, that is, on the condition that God wills it.[[21]](#footnote-21) Moreover, Baumgarten emphasizes the *moral* state of the soul, as opposed to merely cognitive features of its condition in the afterlife considered by the Wolffians; thus, in addition to the soul’s spirituality and personality,[[22]](#footnote-22) Baumgarten maintains that the soul also retains its freedom, and he takes pains to show that the soul’s happiness (or unhappiness) in the life to come depends upon the perfection it has attained in this life.[[23]](#footnote-23)

A final but essential piece of context is supplied by Meier’s own previous work in rational psychology, and here the most important text is his first publication, the *Beweiß: daß keine Materie dencken könne* (Halle, 1742).[[24]](#footnote-24) Meier’s interest in the topic was likely inspired by the German translation of a manuscript on thinking matter, published as an appendix to Reinbeck’s treatise.[[25]](#footnote-25) Evidently dissatisfied with Reinbeck’s criticism, which turned on the contention that all change in matter amounted to motion, Meier offers his own objection to the materialist that proceeds on more general metaphysical grounds.[[26]](#footnote-26) According to Meier’s alternative proof, the soul’s simplicity follows from the fact that all determinations of composites, such as matter, consist in relations among its parts; yet, a thought cannot be understood as a relation given that, for instance, I can have the thought *I think* antecedent to any known relation to other (external) things; consequently, it follows that no composite is capable of thought.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Significantly, however, Meier makes clear that he regards the materialist’s rejection of the soul’s simplicity as a mere “theoretical error,” and that his primary concern with materialism concerns its allegedly immoral and irreligious consequences.[[28]](#footnote-28) Meier targets specifically those who turn to materialism primarily because they believe that attributing composition to the soul entails a denial of its natural immortality. However, such a materialist is too hasty in assuming this entailment as Meier argues it could well be the case that, assuming thinking matter were possible, its parts could be so bonded together as to be naturally indissoluble, a position that Meier notes is more than merely hypothetical as it was likely endorsed by Stoicists, the early Church fathers, and Tertullian.[[29]](#footnote-29) Meier goes as far as to suggest, rather auspiciously as far as the main argument of the *Gedancken* is concerned, that the power to destroy or to preserve the soul lies outside of the bounds of nature entirely, resting only in the hands of God since even “those who correctly hold the soul to be simple must also admit that nothing could hinder God, other than Himself, should it please Him to destroy the soul.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

II. The Argument of the *Gedancken*

This brief remark in the *Beweiß* is extensively developed and deployed with devastating effect in the *Gedancken*, the declared intention of which is to offer “a critique of the rational proofs of the soul’s immortality” (*Gedancken* §2). As Meier indicates in the initial section, which contains preliminary considerations essential for framing his project (and to which we will return later), he aims to demonstrate three things: first, that we cannot be mathematically certain of the soul’s immortality, second, that all proofs that have been offered in favour of this thesis fall short of demonstrations (with Reinbeck’s and Canz’s discussions drawing most of his critical fire), and third, that even that which can be known concerning the soul’s state in the afterlife is only hypothetically certain (*Gedancken* §5–7).

In the second section, Meier provides an analysis of the notion of immortality. In distinguishing the components of this concept, Meier likewise rejects the Cartesian identification of immortality with incorruptibility, and instead adopts Thümmig’s conception, according to which the soul’s immortality consists in its incorruptibility and survival of the death of the body, continuation of its spiritual life, and preservation of its personality (*Gedancken* §§16–17). However, Meier also incorporates Baumgarten’s distinction between the absolute and hypothetical immortality (and mortality) of the soul.[[31]](#footnote-31) So, while immortality can be understood to involve the impossibility of death, this impossibility can be taken in either an absolute sense, where it would involve a contradiction for a being that was immortal in this way to die, or a merely hypothetical sense, where it is impossible for a being to die only in certain respects or under certain conditions but not as such (*Gedancken* §22). In the case of the human soul it is clear that only its hypothetical immortality (and mortality) is at issue since absolute immortality is proper only to God.

The central argument of the text is presented in the third section, where Meier both makes clear what specter any proof of the soul’s immortality that purports to yield mathematical certainty must dispel, and then proceeds to show that this task cannot be accomplished. Meier begins with a consideration of the soul’s nature, in the course of which he reaffirms the soul’s simplicity and incorporeality and, on the basis of this, its incorruptibility (*Gedancken* §26); however, following Baumgarten, Meier also affirms the soul’s finitude and contingency (*Gedancken* §28). So, while the soul, as simple, cannot naturally pass away it can nonetheless meet its end through annihilation, which is to say that it is absolutely mortal, where this does not imply anything regarding its hypothetical immortality or mortality (*Gedancken* §22). Consequently, it is only the soul’s *hypothetical* immortality that can be at stake in any putative demonstration.

This is already a significant result as it provides Meier with grounds to reject one strategy, and indeed, the one preferred by his predecessors in demonstrating the soul’s immortality. Following Bilfinger, Canz had divided proofs of immortality into those that turn on a consideration of the soul’s nature and those that turn on a ground in something external to the soul, such as God. However, Meier has just shown that the former sort of proofs are, on the whole, irrelevant for such an endeavour since it is clear that the annihilation of the soul could only come about through God’s action (*Gedancken* §§29–32). Accordingly, what is actually needed for a demonstration of the (hypothetical) immortality of the soul, is a proof that we can know with certainty that God would never choose to annihilate it. Of course, this is not demonstrated through, for instance, proofs like Reinbeck’s that rely merely on the soul’s incorruptibility, nor by other proofs that only show that the soul cannot be destroyed by other souls or which emphasize other aspects of its nature, such as its natural drives that are not fulfilled in this life (*Gedancken* §§39–41)

Any adequate proof of the soul’s immortality thus has to dispel the possibility that God would annihilate the soul at or after the death of the body, yet Meier contends that this circumstance cannot be known with mathematical certainty. Speaking in Leibnizian terms, it might be argued that God’s annihilation of human souls would be inconsistent with His choice to make actual the best of all possible worlds. Meier disputes this, however, claiming that our limited reason cannot determine in advance of some event’s occurrence that it belongs in the best world possible. This could not be known *a posteriori* since experience only allows us to infer from what is or has been experienced to what is included in the best of all possible worlds, not from what may be the case in the future. Neither could it be known *a priori* since we cannot be mathematically certain of any future contingent claim given that we are incapable of comprehending the complete concept of the world such that we could deduce that a specific event is (or is not) contained within it (*Gedancken* §35). While Meier thus concludes that even the soul’s hypothetical immortality, considered in its relation to God, cannot be known with perfect certainty, he warns that this result does not generally play to the advantage of the materialist since, recalling his discussion in the *Beweiß*, materialist conceptions of the soul do not uniformly entail that it dies with the body. In fact, as is now clear, Meier views the question of the soul’s simple or composite nature as strictly irrelevant to settling the question of its immortality (*Gedancken* §38).

Meier buttresses this argument later in the *Gedancken* by considering whether we can know, on the basis of God’s goodness, wisdom, or justice, that He chose the future life of the soul (*Gedancken* §§87–90). Meier allows that God will elect in favour of whatever is required by these divine properties but denies that we can know that the soul’s future life is so required. So, it might be argued that the destruction of the soul would be an evil, but Meier notes that the immortality of the soul, while a good considered in itself, need not be a good considered in the context of the best world possible. Regarding the wisdom of God, it might be thought that it would be contrary to divine wisdom to create the human soul only to annihilate it, yet Meier contends that we cannot prove through reason that God’s purpose in creating humanity is such that it requires eternal life in order to fulfill it (and thus that destroying it would conflict with His supreme wisdom). Finally, it might be argued that divine justice is not satisfied in this life, with the evil reaping rewards while the good suffer, and so requires an afterlife, but Meier answers that good and evil actions do have immediate *natural* consequences in this life, with pleasure following the good and pain (or only an illusory pleasure) following the evil; accordingly, Meier contends that the virtuous and the vicious are adequately rewarded or punished already in this life.

In the fourth and fifth sections, Meier turns to what can be known of the soul’s condition in the afterlife, which he divides into its “physical” state (in the fourth section) and “moral” condition (in the fifth). By the soul’s physical state, Meier intends both claims concerning the soul’s literal physical condition, such as the nature of its new body and its role in the soul’s cognitions (*Gedancken* §§50–2), and claims more broadly about what natural (or non-moral) capacities it might retain in the afterlife. Wolffian thinkers have contended that the soul not only retains these capacities but also that they become enhanced after the body’s death. As Meier notes, however, the foregoing already serves to qualify the certainty of this claim since any conclusions that can be drawn on this score are subject to the condition that God does not annihilate the soul upon the death of the body (*Gedancken* §45).

Meier begins his critical discussion in the fourth section by reframing the issue in familiar Leibnizian terms, namely, by distinguishing souls into three classes of elements, animal or sensible souls, and spirits or rational souls, with the first class capable only of obscure perceptions, the second also of clear perceptions, and the third capable of distinct perceptions as well (*Gedancken* §54). As concerns the question of the soul’s condition in the afterlife, the question is whether a soul can exchange its “rank” for another, so whether an animal soul might gain distinct perceptions after death or whether a spirit can lose its capacity for distinct or even clear perception. While Meier acknowledges that it is widely thought that such promotion and demotion of souls is impossible, he finds little in the way of (non-circular) argumentation for this, and indeed, he notes that the Leibnizian characterization of the difference between obscurity, clarity, and distinctness as one of degree rather than of kind suggests that only a small increase or decrease in a soul’s intellectual power would be needed in order to change its rank (*Gedancken* §55).

The issue, then, is whether we can know that the soul will be naturally more or less perfect after the death of the body. Yet, since determining this would require knowledge that God has decreed that some future event is a part of the best world possible, we cannot for reasons already considered determine this with mathematical certainty (*Gedancken* §57). Turning to the specific Wolffian proofs for the retention of the soul’s spirituality and personality, Meier contends that they are also not helpful in this regard. So, there is no contradiction in the soul falling into an eternal sleep and losing the contingent use of its intellect, and the Wolffian argument for the improvement of the intellect in the afterlife through analogy with birth is vitiated insofar as we cannot know that the soul even survives this latter change (*Gedancken* §59–60). Similarly concerning personality, that it is possible for the soul to become forgetful of itself involves no contradiction, and the Wolffian argument that the law of imagination continues to apply in the afterlife presupposes that the soul is not annihilated and preserves its capacity for conscious thought, which cannot be demonstrated (*Gedancken* §64).

The fifth section turns to considerations relating to the soul’s moral condition in the afterlife, where that state includes all that which depends upon the soul’s freedom, including its free actions (in this life and the next) and their consequences such as reward or punishment (*Gedancken* §70). As before, little can be known with certainty about the soul’s moral condition given that it cannot be demonstrated that the soul is not annihilated by God and does not fall into an eternal sleep, nor indeed that there even is a heaven or hell understood as states of increased blessedness or wretchedness respectively (*Gedancken* §71–2). However, Meier contends that, assuming all this obtains, we can know that the soul would have to retain its capacity for free action in the afterlife in order to perform the acts that merit its continued blessedness (or damnation), and also that its cognitive powers would have to be improved in order for it to be more virtuous than in its previous life, though in the case of damned souls their conception of the good remains perverted (cf. *Gedancken* §§73, 78, 83, 85). Yet, much remains uncertain concerning the soul’s moral condition, including whether the soul continues to suffer the consequences of previous sins in heaven (or of good actions in hell—*Gedancken* §§76, 81), and significantly whether the rewards and punishments in this state are in fact eternal (*Gedancken* §§77, 82).

In the last section, Meier turns to a detailed criticism of Canz’s extended argument for immortality. Meier had identified both Reinbeck’s and Canz’s texts as the most important recent treatments of the topic, and throughout the *Gedancken* Meier engages with Reinbeck’s discussion;, taking issue with Reinbeck’s account of the concept of immortality, with his failure to consider the possibility of the soul’s annihilation, and with the deficiencies in his argument for the soul’s retention of its spirituality (*Gedancken* §§22, 39, 63). However, it is Canz’s proof that Meier singles out as the best one available (*Gedancken* §6).

While Meier spends some time exposing the flaws of Canz’s attempted proof on the basis of a consideration of the soul’s nature—pointing out for instance that Canz exaggerates the threat of materialism, and conflates power and faculty in his discussion of spirituality and personality (*Gedancken*, *ad* Canz §§10–44, 59, 99)—it is Canz’s efforts to demonstrate that God wills the soul’s immortality that earns Meier’s praise and in turn his most trenchant criticism. So, against Canz’s argument that the destruction of a soul would upset the connection between all substances in the world and consequently create a rift (“*Riß*”) in space and time, Meier replies that it cannot be known in advance that such a rift would not in fact be a part of the best of all possible worlds (*Gedancken*, *ad* Canz §§121,[[32]](#footnote-32) 126); further, against Canz’s contention that the eternal sleep of finite beings would rob creation of observers to admire it and God, Meier responds that there are infinitely many finite souls that might fulfill this role in place of human souls (*Gedancken*, *ad* Canz §136).

On the basis of this critical discussion, Meier rejects the possibility of gaining any mathematical certainty concerning the soul’s persistence and the nature of its state in the afterlife. Yet, this result only accounts for part of Meier’s aim in the *Gedancken*, as he also makes the positive case for our warranted conviction in and even certainty of the soul’s immortality. Meier first emphasizes that the impossibility of a successful demonstration of the soul’s immortality does not rule out other, non-demonstrative sources or other types of certainty concerning this claim. Consistent with this, Meier endorses the soul’s immortality “with the utmost certainty of faith” on the basis of the “infinitely many testimonies of Holy Scripture” (*Gedancken* §4, cf. also §62). As Meier emphasizes, in offering a direct revelation of the truth of immortality, Scripture is not at odds with reason but is rather to be understood as supplementing reason’s deficiency in demonstrating this truth (*Gedancken* §5). Similarly, Meier conceives of his own project in the *Gedancken* as an attempt to underscore the authority, and indispensability, of Scripture in being the primary source of certainty of such a vitally important truth (§8).[[33]](#footnote-33)

In addition, and crucially, Meier contends that, the impossibility of a demonstration notwithstanding, there is nonetheless a *rational* basis for the certainty of immortality, though this certainty is ultimately *moral* and not mathematical (*Gedancken* §4).[[34]](#footnote-34) Meier’s case for this begins with the contention that the death of the soul cannot be rationally demonstrated—just as we cannot know that God would not will the annihilation of the soul, we also cannot be mathematically certain that He *would* will its annihilation (*Gedancken* §34). As a result, the soul’s immortality is, at the very least, possible, though Meier argues further that we can know it to be the case with a high degree of probability. As Meier notes, proofs that allegedly demonstrate the soul’s continued spirituality or retention of its personality after death are properly understood as demonstrating (only) the probability of their conclusion (*Gedanken* §§55, 64).

What elevates our conviction of the probability of immortality to a moral certainty, however, is the important (if not indispensable) role it plays as a support for morality and religion. If the soul did not survive the death of the body, or if it were to survive but lack its higher cognitive powers and its freedom, then according to Meier we would have fewer and weaker motivation for virtue and piety (*Gedancken* §12). Our moral certainty of immortality, a degree of conviction that is indistinguishable from mathematical certainty as far as practice is concerned, is ultimately warranted on account of the fact that it suffices for virtuous action and thus promotes the ends of morality and religion (*Gedancken* §§10, 12). This positive contention—that we are in fact *morally* certain of the soul’s immortality—thus constitutes a crucial supplement to Meier’s critical aim in rejecting purported demonstrations of it as a mathematically certain claim.

III. Reception of the *Gedancken*

Meier’s *Gedancken* quickly attracted attention, as evinced by a number of reviews in learned journals that appeared shortly after its publication. Meier’s efforts to reassure his audience of the innocence of his intentions and of his abiding conviction in the immortality of the soul as morally certain were not wasted, as the authors of the majority of the early reviews were broadly sympathetic with Meier’s criticisms and did not misunderstand his aims in arguing against our mathematical certainty in immortality.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The first review was published in the Hamburg journal *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten* already at the end of 1745, and it concurs with Meier that the onus of any proof of immortality lies in demonstrating that God wills the eternal life of the soul and even takes Meier’s point concerning the harmlessness of the error of materialism.[[36]](#footnote-36) The author quibbles, however, with Meier’s reasons for holding that (only) God can annihilate the soul, accuses Meier of downplaying the rational confidence in immortality that we can claim (on the basis of its uncontested probability), and goes on to suggest that much of what is significant in Meier’s treatment can already be found in an essay on immortality published in 1742 by Abraham Gotthelf Kästner.[[37]](#footnote-37) Meier himself responded to this review, in a letter published in an issue in the same journal early in 1746, where he distinguishes between God’s ceasing of His preservation and the act of destroying the soul (which would only generate further consequences, thus preserving the soul), denies that he ever downplayed our confidence in immortality, and rejects any resemblance to Kästner’s piece which, contrary to his own, aimed to provide a demonstration of the soul’s immortality.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Two further reviews evidence not only an appreciation of Meier’s intentions in the *Gedancken* but also a sympathy with his criticisms and conclusions regarding our certainty of the soul’s immortality. A lengthy review published in the *Göttingische Bibliothek* notes the continuity of the project with Baumgarten’s discussion in the *Metaphysica* but emphasizes Meier’s originality in spite of this, and mocks those “foolish men of learning” who might wrongly take Meier to be promoting sceptical principles.[[39]](#footnote-39) Another review, published in the *Neue Zeitung von Gelehrten Sachen* (Leipzig), praises the criticism of Canz in particular and emphasizes the piety of Meier’s intentions, that namely “he reveals the weakness of reason in these matters so that the excellence of revelation is all the more evident.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

A final review (for present purposes) published in the Zürich journal *Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern* was more pessimistic in its evaluation of Meier’s conclusions. The reviewer was likewise understanding of Meier’s project, which is characterized as “promoting the humility of philosophers by limiting their reason and checking the lust for demonstration in proofs of immortality” and in which freethinkers will find neither comfort nor safety.[[41]](#footnote-41) Yet, in the opinion of the reviewer, Meier “takes more from humanity than he gives it” and overlooks an important basis for a demonstration of the soul’s immortality in the consideration of the souls of children, whose annihilation would more clearly conflict with divine wisdom.[[42]](#footnote-42) Meier’s close friend, Samuel Gotthold Lange, quotes this review in full in his discussion of the *Gedancken* in his biography of Meier, and praises this as a “very trenchant critique.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

These reviews were followed by more detailed responses to Meier which took up his challenge to craft new proofs of immortality that are not subject to the criticisms presented in the *Gedancken*. Three such texts appeared in close succession in 1747: an anonymous *Lettre d'un conseiller du Roi*, *Gedanken über die Lehren von der Unsterblichkeit und dem Schlafe der Seele* by Christian Ernst Simonetti, and *Die vertheidigte Gewißheit der Unsterblichkeit der Sele aus der Vernunft* by Johann Daniel Müller.

Beginning with the anonymous *Lettre*,[[44]](#footnote-44) the author takes aim at Meier’s contention (in *Gedancken* §90) that the natural consequences of evil (and good) actions count as sufficient punishment (or reward) for those actions and, accordingly, satisfy the demands of divine justice without recourse to an afterlife.[[45]](#footnote-45) The author argues that, rather than constituting punishments, the consequences of evil actions constitute new evils that only further involve the evil-doer in sin; moreover, even in the case that these consequences are to the detriment of the evil-doer, he does not himself always recognize them for punishments but merely as the effects of unknown causes.[[46]](#footnote-46) Indeed, death itself is a consequence of sin rather than a punishment for it, and accordingly is something that must also be answered for by the sinner.[[47]](#footnote-47) The author concludes that the natural consequences of evil (and good) actions, which God establishes through the natural law, are intended merely for the well-being of the human being and serve to reflect God’s goodness rather than his justice.[[48]](#footnote-48)

The author of the *Lettre* builds on this criticism of Meier to demonstrate the injustice of the annihilation of the soul. The author contends that God has established the law of nature in order to reveal all of His perfections, and not merely His goodness.[[49]](#footnote-49) Moreover, our obligation to uphold this law stems not from the consequences of disobedience but from God’s command to do so, a command which all of us feel in our conscience, and as a consequence of which there must be a full and final reckoning for our actions, otherwise God’s justice would not be revealed.[[50]](#footnote-50) Yet, it has been shown that the natural consequences of these actions in this life do not suffice to reveal God’s justice, but only His goodness. Were it the case, then, that God annihilated the soul after the death of the body, God would be in contradiction with Himself since He would have established a law in order to reveal all His perfections but which ultimately fail to do so. Consequently, it must be the case that this final reckoning takes place after death, during which each soul is rewarded or punished for their actions and transgressions, and at which point God’s perfections, including His justice, are revealed to all.[[51]](#footnote-51)

Another detailed discussion of Meier’s treatise is provided by Christian Ernst Simonetti (1700–82), a theologian and philosopher with an unusual background and scandalous reputation who held positions in the philosophy faculty at the recently founded university in Göttingen and, later, in Frankfurt an der Oder.[[52]](#footnote-52) Simonetti’s response to Meier was given in his two volume *Gedanken über die Lehren von der Unsterblichkeit und dem Schlafe der Seele* (Berlin/Göttingen, 1747). Simonetti reports that he was provoked to take up the pen by what he regarded as Meier’s sceptical treatment of the topic (and criticism of his departed friend, Reinbeck), but also by a treatise by the freethinker Johann Heyn (1709–46), entitled *Sendschreiben An Herrn Doctor Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten* (Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1746), in which Heyn argues in favour of the soul’s sleep after the death of the body. Consistent with this, rebutting the possibility that the soul should sleep after the body’s death preoccupies Simonetti in the second chapter of the first volume of the *Gedanken über die Lehren*, and extensively throughout its second volume.

In any case, both Simonetti’s argument against the sleep of the soul and in favour of the soul’s immortality rest upon the metaphysical consideration of the soul outlined in the first chapter of the first volume of the *Gedanken über die Lehren* (§§1–16). Simonetti takes on many of the basic ontological claims in the Leibnizian-Wolffian account of the soul; thus he contends that the soul is simple, finite, and thinking, that it is a substance endowed with a power for representing the world and in which power its essence consists.[[53]](#footnote-53) Indeed, it is this last claim (or at least his version of it) that undergirds much of Simonetti’s later argument. So, Simonetti contends that inasmuch as the Wolffians have shown that the soul’s essence consists in a power, it follows that it is impossible to conceive of a soul independently of such a power. However, to conceive of the soul with its power is also to conceive of the thoughts that are the effects of the power, inasmuch as the power is just the determining ground for those effects, such that when the former is posited so are the latter. This means, then, that to conceive of an individual soul is not just to represent it in abstraction from its representations, but as effecting them through its activity, which is to say that the soul is essentially (actively) thinking and, therefore, essentially *conscious*.[[54]](#footnote-54)

This conclusion, of course, has a familiar Cartesian ring, and Simonetti agrees with the Cartesians that this implies that the soul is in fact constantly thinking and conscious.[[55]](#footnote-55) Interestingly, however, Simonetti outlines his own, rather sophisticated version of this later on, as he denies that this means that the soul is constantly engaged in what the Leibnizian’s identify as apperception, but instead only that the soul retains its *Grund-Bewußtseyn* which amounts to its consciousness of itself insofar as it recognizes that it is distinct from its act of thinking.[[56]](#footnote-56) Still, in order to prove the continued spiritual life of the soul after death, Simonetti seeks to show that this fundamental consciousness on the part of the soul is also possible in the absence of the body.

Along these lines, Simonetti draws a distinction between four types of actions on the part of the human being (or soul-body composite)—the rational, rational-sensible, sensible, and bodily—and contends that the first (which is identified with *Grund-Bewußtseyn[[57]](#footnote-57)*) is in fact possible without the body, a fact confirmed by experience and reason.[[58]](#footnote-58) Accordingly, as long as the soul persists (and at this point Simonetti assumes for the sake of argument that the soul survives the body’s death) it will possess its essence and will continue to execute its rational activity, and so to enjoy a spiritual life in the afterlife.[[59]](#footnote-59) And while Simonetti recognizes that the mere continuation of *Grund-Bewußtseyn* does not suffice for the preservation of personality, as far as a memory of specific deeds is concerned, he contends that this is not required in the afterlife for the justification of divine reward or punishment, given our assurance of God’s perfect justice.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Turning to Meier, Simonetti labels him as a Pyrrhonian sceptic on account of his challenge to any rational certainty in the soul’s immortality,[[61]](#footnote-61) and his detailed discussion of Meier is contained in the third chapter of the *Gedanken über die Lehren.* Simonetti offers a direct challenge to Meier’s claim that the core of any viable proof of immortality must consist in a demonstration that God has decided against the annihilation of the soul, as Simonetti contends that a proof of immortality grounded simply in a consideration of the soul’s own nature can suffice. Along these lines, Simonetti contrasts the consideration of the soul in the abstract, as a finite substance among others in the context of ontology and cosmology (in which case its dependence upon God is relevant), with the consideration of the soul *in concreto* in the context of rational psychology (in which the soul’s relation to God is not taken up).[[62]](#footnote-62) This is to say, that whether or not the soul will be annihilated by God is irrelevant to the proof of immortality, for which it suffices to show that the soul is, considered in itself, naturally incapable of dying. Indeed, as Simonetti wryly notes, when one is dealing with atheists who deny the existence of a God outside of nature, it does not help to appeal to divine choice as the ground of immortality.[[63]](#footnote-63)

For Simonetti, this suffices to vindicate Reinbeck, who did not take divine choice into consideration in constructing his proof.[[64]](#footnote-64) Simonetti’s own proof proceeds along these lines, as he argues, consistent with his previous discussion, that the soul cannot naturally die inasmuch as that would require it to cease to act, which would be inconsistent with its essence as an active power.[[65]](#footnote-65) Even so, Simonetti also addresses Meier’s concerns about proofs that do turn on God’s choice not to annihilate the soul. Against Meier’s key claim that such a decision on God’s part is a matter concerning future contingents, and so not knowable by human beings in advance of its occurrence, Simonetti argues that the soul’s future life and state is only conceptually distinct from its present state since the soul’s essence remains the same throughout, and so there is no obstacle to inferring from the present fact of its existence that it will continue to live.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Simonetti also rehabilitates arguments for the soul’s immortality founded in God’s goodness, wisdom, and justice. For instance, Simonetti contends that the destruction of the soul would be inconsistent with divine goodness since, assuming that the world God created was the best possible, were it the case that some part of the world were annihilated, the world itself, the essence of which is grounded in the composition of its parts, would not remain the same; therefore, the world would no longer be the best of all possible.[[67]](#footnote-67)

Simonetti thus raises a number of formidable philosophical challenges to Meier’s *Gedancken*; by contrast, Johann Daniel Müller (1721–94) would prove Meier’s harshest, and least charitable, critic. Müller, was a philosopher, and later professor of theology at the university in Rinteln, who had written a dissertation on the immortality of the soul during his philosophical doctorate at the university of Giessen.[[68]](#footnote-68) Evidently taking Meier’s diagnosis of a *Demonstrirsucht* in recent philosophical proofs of immortality personally, and bearing some resentment towards Meier for ignoring his dissertation, Müller penned a lengthy reply to Meier’s *Gedancken* in 1747, entitled *Die Vertheidigte Gewißheit der Unsterblichkeit der Seele aus der Vernunft*.[[69]](#footnote-69) The work is divided into four parts: in the first, Müller offers preliminary considerations including an idiosyncratic theory of demonstration that allows for truths of revelation to be used as premises in demonstrations; in the second, Müller details the utility of a proof of the soul’s immortality; in the third, Müller offers two of his own demonstrative proofs of the soul’s immortality; and in the fourth, Müller critically examines a number of Meier’s claims which he finds dubious, including the assertion that spirits can be reduced to the condition of elements, and his denial of any rational certainty that there is eternal punishment and reward.

Müller’s treatment is accordingly fairly thorough, and he raises interesting points through his discussion of the practical importance of the conviction in immortality, and his emphasis on at least the rhetorical utility of the proof of the soul’s simplicity for our confidence in immortality.[[70]](#footnote-70) In general, however, Müller’s critical discussion is marred by his pervasive and likely deliberate misrepresentation of many of Meier’s key claims and conclusions. So, despite Meier’s assertions to the contrary, Müller readily assumes that his denial of rational certainty of immortality by means of demonstration amounts to the claim that we are utterly *un*certain of it, and indeed that Meier regards moral certainty as a deficient form of conviction;[[71]](#footnote-71) similarly, Müller perniciously assumes Meier’s denial that conviction in immortality is required for morality and religion implies that it is completely irrelevant to them.[[72]](#footnote-72)

Focussing, then, on the two attempted demonstrations of immortality that Müller formulates in the third part of the *Vertheidigte Gewißheit*. The first proof derives the soul’s immortality from a consideration of God’s “final end [*Endzweck*]” in creation, and in this draws heavily on his own dissertation.[[73]](#footnote-73) The proof itself is detailed,[[74]](#footnote-74) and presented according to the mathematical method, and it consists in two principal steps. The initial step attempts to address Meier’s challenge by removing the prospect of annihilation at God’s hands. Proceeding on fairly uncontroversial Leibnizian-Wolffian premises, Müller contends that God exists, possess the highest perfection, and unfailingly knows and chooses the best. Following Wolff, Müller then characterizes God’s final end in creation as the glorification of His perfection through the world, for the realization of which end God will choose the most suitable means in accordance with His wisdom.[[75]](#footnote-75) This implies that the end of the human being, as created by God, is His glorification through all of its actions and passions; however, while the pious might succeed in doing so (albeit imperfectly) in this life, it is clear from experience that there are impious people as well who do not honour God in this life.[[76]](#footnote-76) Were, then, God to annihilate the soul after the death of the body, He would act contrary to his final end; therefore, the human soul will not be annihilated by God but will continue to exist in order to glorify God.[[77]](#footnote-77)

After addressing potential objections to this first step, Müller continues in the second step of his proof to show why this implies the immortality of the soul, understood not just as its persistence after death but its retention and use of its higher powers. Müller offers two arguments to this effect, the first in favour of the retention of the soul’s spirituality on the basis of the requirement that the glorification of God on the part of the soul requires a constant living cognition of His perfection, which requires the active use of the soul’s higher powers;[[78]](#footnote-78) and the second contending that this living cognition involves consciousness and thus tokens the preservation of the soul’s consciousness after death.[[79]](#footnote-79)

Müller’s second proof has a similar two-step structure, though in this case it proceeds on the basis of a consideration of the soul’s living power.[[80]](#footnote-80) By a living power, Müller understands a power that involves a drive to act or effect things, and he contends that there must be such a power at the basis of the perfection of a given thing, inasmuch as that perfection consists in the agreement of the actions on the part of a thing with its final end.[[81]](#footnote-81) Accordingly, a thing’s living power must persist as long as the perfections of some thing exist.[[82]](#footnote-82) Müller next turns to a familiar consideration of the world, which is the best of all possible on account of the perfection it contains, and which perfection is grounded in the collection of powers and effects of things that compose it.[[83]](#footnote-83) From this, Müller concludes that, so long as the world remains the best world, the degree of living powers that compose it must remain constant, and because the world is eternal, it follows that all the living powers that make up the world must likewise be eternal and, therefore, will not be annihilated by God.[[84]](#footnote-84) The soul is likewise shown to be immortal since, as an active living power it will constantly exercise its higher powers in the afterlife, and this in turn implies the preservation of its consciousness.[[85]](#footnote-85)

IV. Meier’s *Vertheidigung*

Meier was prepared to reckon with philosophical challenges to his *Gedancken*; indeed, he had been clear that part of his intention in raising objections to familiar proofs of immortality was to provoke philosophers to come up with better demonstrations of this important truth (*Gedancken* §9). Accordingly, the efforts on the part of the author of the anonymous *Lettre* and Simonetti were not only expected but expressly welcomed. However, Müller’s criticism clearly struck a nerve with Meier, with its dogged accusations of freethinking in spite of his confession of faith and declaration of the innocence of his project, and also in spite of his tract *Rettung der Ehre der Vernunft wider die Freygeister* published late in 1746 precisely in order to head off such concerns.[[86]](#footnote-86) Indeed, as reported later by Müller himself, Müller sent a copy of the *Vertheidigte Gewißheit* to Meier, who replied in a conciliatory tone, reassured Müller that he was a Christian, and reciprocated with a copy of the *Rettung*.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Even so, what likely convinced Meier to pen a formal reply to Müllerwas a particularly troubling review of the *Vertheidigte Gewißheit*. While not all reviews of Müller’s text were sympathetic,[[88]](#footnote-88) at least one reviewer echoed his appraisal of Meier’s underlying aims in the *Gedancken*, going as far as to claim that Meier was taking the freedom of thought too far and attempting to “shake the foundations of religion using the mask of a lover of truth.”[[89]](#footnote-89) In a letter printed in a later issue of the same journal, Meier confesses that he was “sickened” by this misrepresentation of his aims, especially in light of his efforts in the *Rettung*.[[90]](#footnote-90) In any case, Meier was obviously upset by this review[[91]](#footnote-91) and clearly recognized the need to reply to his critics to protect his own good name. In this context, Meier references a planned “defense [*Vertheidigung*]” against Müller,[[92]](#footnote-92) in which he will clarify the consistency of his criticism with the foundations of religion. This defense would be Meier’s *Vertheidigung seiner Gedancken vom Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode*, published in 1748, which text also afforded him the opportunity to respond to the more measured criticisms of the anonymous author of the *Lettre* and Simonetti.

In the *Vertheidigung*, Meier first addresses the new proof of immortality offered in the anonymous *Lettre* (though he is confident he knows its author, he does not disclose his name). Meier takes up the author’s charge that the natural consequences of an action do not suffice as reward or punishment. Insofar as both Meier and the author subscribe to the Wolffian theory of obligation, according to which obligation has its source merely in the connection of a motive with an action,[[93]](#footnote-93) this entails that the natural consequences of an action do not generate a motive to perform or abstain from an action. The author of the *Lettre* takes this to undermine the theory of “natural obligation” and to show that any genuine obligation must have its source in the direct command of the divine will.[[94]](#footnote-94) In defense of this theory, however, Meier objects to the author’s claim that consequences amount to new sins, rather than punishments, since many consequences of an action are not freely willed by the original actor (*Vertheidigung* §13), and notes that God’s intention with punishment can be fulfilled even if the actor is not aware that the negative consequences of his actions constitute a punishment (*Vertheidigung* §14).

Ultimately, however, Meier rejects the author’s opposition between the theory of natural obligation and one that has a source in the divine will. Meier contends that it can be known, on the basis of all of His perfections, that God has legislated that the appropriate rewards and punishments are joined to good and evil actions in order that they should tend to our greater perfection, and that any account of obligation that seeks a direct source in a supernatural connection effected by God presupposes an act of God’s will into which we have no insight (*Vertheidigung* §7). Turning to the proof of immortality offered in the *Lettre*, Meier contends that its reliance upon the foregoing account of obligation already implies that it does not offer mathematical certainty of immortality. Even so, he proceeds to point out that the “reckoning” required by the author can be interpreted in a manner consistent with his own theory of natural obligation, that is, as implying that we can expect reward or punishment from God as a (natural) consequence of our actions (*Vertheidigung* §6), and accordingly that it is not clear that an afterlife is required in order for this to take place (*Vertheidigung* §§12, 17).

Simonetti’s treatment of Meier had been favourably received, with reviewers agreeing that there was little left even for a sceptic like Meier to question, and even dismissing the seriousness of the challenge Meier had posed to the proof of immortality in light of it.[[95]](#footnote-95) It is unsurprising then that Meier should also take up Simonetti’s discussion, in the second division of the *Vertheidigung*. Notably, he first disputes Simonetti’s characterization of him as a Pyrrhonian sceptic, objecting that he considers his project within the line of the academic scepticism of Carneades and so entirely consistent with accepting the probability of immortality while doubting its rational certainty (*Vertheidigung* §24).

Meier then offers a detailed consideration of Simonetti’s preferred proof for immortality on the basis of the soul’s own nature, and his criticism focuses on exposing the faulty metaphysical claims that underlie Simonetti’s proof. First, Meier disputes Simonetti’s claim that the soul, considered in terms of its essence, also contains its power of representing inasmuch as this is taken as the ground of *actual* thoughts and changes in it; rather, Meier says that from the point of view of the soul’s essence, one can only ascribe *possible* thoughts and changes to it, which is to say that it is merely a *faculty* of representation, strictly speaking, that is essential to the soul (*Vertheidigung* §26). Given this Meier agrees that we cannot conceive of the soul without the possibility of thinking, though this falls short of requiring that we attribute actual thoughts, and a continuous activity of thinking, to the soul (*Vertheidigung* §27).

Since we need only take the soul to be *capable* of thinking, considered in terms of its essence, Meier takes this to undermine Simonetti’s attempt to rehabilitate the Cartesian thesis that the soul always thinks. In any case the falseness of this claim is even clearer when we assume, as Simonetti does, that this involves a continuous form of self-consciousness (*Vertheidigung* §§28, 30, 32). As a result of all this, Meier likewise rejects Simonetti’s argument that these considerations relating to essence suffice to prove that a state of sleep after death is impossible, since sensible representations are not the only ones that can be obscure and indistinct, and so a state of obscure rational thought might obtain without the body (*Vertheidigung* §39); further, the natural impossibility of the death of the soul does not follow since, outside of God, there is no contradiction in the actual reverting to the merely possible (*Vertheidigung* §42).

Having undermined Simonetti’s attempted proof of immortality, Meier proceeds to reply to the objections to his own treatment in the *Gedancken*. Against Simonetti’s denial of the relevance of the threat of annihilation at God’s hand to the question of the soul’s immortality, Meier replies that a philosophical consideration of immortality such as his must consider the topic in all possible respects, as Canz had recognized, and moreover that excluding any consideration of the soul’s relation to God would be an extraordinary concession to atheists and freethinkers (*Vertheidigung* §§42, 46). Against Simonetti’s contention that the question of the soul’s future life really concerns the natural necessity of its present state, and not a future contingent, Meier replies that Simonetti has not shown that the natural necessity of the soul’s life (that it neither naturally comes to be or passes away) must imply its eternal duration (*Vertheidigung* §§46, 48). Lastly, Meier also responds to Simonetti’s efforts to salvage proofs for immortality from the divine attributes. Against his argument that the annihilation of some part of the best world would alter the world’s identity, Meier contends that this would rule out the destruction of any substance in the world (including the elements of matter), and accordingly that the world must be conceived as dynamically including the (possible) annihilation and creation of substances within its concept (*Vertheidigung*. §48).

Expectedly, Meier devotes the most pages of his *Vertheidigung* to replying to Müller, and indeed to complaining about what he (rightly) regards as mistreatment at his hands which, according to Meier, even extends to the entry for his name in the index to Müller’s text (*Vertheidigung* §103). Indeed, Meier professes initially not to have recognized himself as the author Müller was attacking, given his persistent mischaracterization as a freethinker and mocker of religion (*Vertheidigung* §53). Meier thus points out that, far from disputing the utility of the belief in immortality, he had clearly affirmed it, (*Vertheidigung* §62–5; cf. *Gedancken* §12); moreover, Meier concedes the importance of the proof of the soul’s simplicity for the demonstration of immortality, claiming only that he denied its necessity for this argument (*Vertheidigung* §68). Meier does use the occasion afforded by Müller’s misrepresentations to clarify some features of his own views; thus, he offers a helpful summary of his conception of moral certainty (*Vertheidigung* §67) and also explains that while he allows that someone might be virtuous absent a conviction in the soul’s immortality, the same does not hold for someone who denies the existence of God (*Vertheidigung* §69).

In addition, Meier provides detailed responses to both of Müller’s attempted demonstrations of the immortality of the soul. In his reply to Müller’s first proof (cf. *Vertheidigung* §§71–85) based on the consideration of God’s final end in creation, Meier takes issue with the suitability of a number of Müller’s definitions and theorems for use in demonstrations. More substantively, concerning the first step of the proof, Meier challenges its reliance on the claim that in this life there are godless (and imperfectly pious) people which, as Müller makes use of it, would imply that all souls without exception will come to glorify God (*Vertheidigung* §75); Meier also contends that Müller’s demonstration proves too much since it also suffices to show the eternality of the world, a concession that would be welcomed by materialists and other radical thinkers (*Vertheidigung* §72). Regarding the second step of the proof, Meier points out that even admitting that the soul is not annihilated and preserves living cognition, it does not follow that the soul possesses the clear and distinct cognition that tokens the activity of the higher powers (since living cognition might merely be obscure), and he notes that it follows from Müller’s discussion that the damned will likewise be endowed with living cognition (whatever that amounts to) in the afterlife (*Vertheidigung* §83).

Meier’s reply to Müller’s second proof is comparatively brief (*Vertheidigung* §§86–90). His principal challenge consists in pointing out that it is not required that, in order to contribute to the perfection of the best world possible, every living power, including the soul, must continue to exist. Rather, it is conceivable that some powers contribute to this perfection only through existing for some limited duration, and Müller does not offer any reason to think that this might not be the case with the soul (*Vertheidigung* §§87–8).

As far as addressing the philosophical challenges posed by his opponents, Meier’s *Vertheidigung* was judged a success, a fact reflected in the numerous favourable reviews it received.[[96]](#footnote-96) Unfortunately, it was rather less successful in putting to rest concerns about Meier’s underlying intentions with the *Gedancken*. In a rather worrying development, in 1749 the *Obercuratorium* for Prussian universities, under its new Pietist-leaning head Karl Ludolph von Dankelmann, began an investigation against Meier whom he suspected to be a freethinker on the basis of his *Gedancken*.[[97]](#footnote-97) Meier was fortunate to have a well-placed friend, Christoph Ludwig von Stille, a general with literary interests and much admired by the king, who intervened on Meier’s behalf and testified to his upstanding character, allowing Meier to avoid the fate of a “martyr.”[[98]](#footnote-98)

Nor was the *Vertheidigung* the final published word in the debate concerning Meier’s original *Gedancken*. In addition to Müller’s later response, Meier’s friend and biographer Lange penned a reply without Meier’s knowledge in which he provided a new proof for the soul’s immortality,[[99]](#footnote-99) and which apparently provoked Meier’s last original text on the matter, his *Beweis daß die menschliche Seele ewig lebt* (Halle, 1751). Strangely, one voice that had remained silent throughout the controversy was that of the individual on whose behalf, at least in part, Simonetti and Müller had originally intervened, namely Canz himself. Canz did finally respond with a lengthy discussion of Meier’s *Gedancken* in the chapter on rational psychology in the *Meditationes philosophicae* of 1750.[[100]](#footnote-100) Meier might have hoped for a productive exchange with the eminent theologian and philosopher, and Canz’s response to the *Gedancken* had been eagerly anticipated;[[101]](#footnote-101) unfortunately, Canz did not deliver, but rather accused Meier of including a discussion of his text only in order to enhance Meier’s fame and reputation. Meier voiced his profound disappointment with Canz’s reply in the preface to the *Beweis* of 1751, and even promised to remove the final chapter of the *Gedancken* containing the discussion of Canz from the later edition, by way of showing that he was not seeking to make himself famous by using Canz’s name.[[102]](#footnote-102)

V. Conclusion

It should be clear from the foregoing that, far from an occasional writing, Meier’s *Gedancken* is a key text that should be accorded a central position among his philosophical works, along with his important and better-known texts on aesthetics, logic and hermeneutics. More generally, Meier’s *Gedancken* represents an original and compelling contribution to the broader debate during the long 18th century concerning not only the immortality of the soul but also concerning the respective limits, and priority, of reason and faith. Along these lines, the *Gedancken* provides an indispensable link between the most prominent parties to this debate, namely Bayle, Leibniz, and, later, Kant. But, where Bayle and Leibniz had made their respective cases for the parties of faith and reason with primary reference to the problem of evil, Meier opens a new front in the debate by focusing on whether (demonstrative) reason or faith is the most reliable guide concerning our conviction in the soul’s immortality.

Arguably, and contrary to expectations, Meier’s *Gedancken* must be judged to strike a blow for the party of Bayle rather than that of Leibniz. Of course, Meier himself offers a rather uncharitable characterization of Bayle’s project, rejecting him as a “*duplicist*”who regards the truths of revelation as in conflict with those of reason and who has little more interest in immortality than to make use of it as a means to mischievously engender conflict between reason and faith (*Gedancken* §§5, 8, 37).[[103]](#footnote-103) And while Meier does not regard our conviction in immortality as irrational, yet, his exposure of the futility of any effort to attain mathematical certainty of this important truth provides a distinctively Baylian corrective to the over-weening confidence in demonstrative reasoning on the part of Leibniz’s German intellectual heirs. Indeed, Meier himself seems to encourage his identification as the closest thing to a “German Bayle” when he explains that his intention in penning the *Gedancken* is to provoke philosophers to construct better demonstrations of the soul’s immortality, for if “we did not have a Bayle, we would also not have had a Leibniz,” namely, to write the *Théodicée* (*Gedancken* §9).

It is thus a piece of historical irony that it would ultimately be Kant who would play the Leibniz to Meier’s Bayle. Rather than revealing Meier’s concerns about the basis of our conviction of the soul’s immortality to be without foundation, Kant instead exposed with the Paralogisms of Pure Reason the illusion that underlies any attempt whatsoever to gain theoretical cognition of the soul’s immortality. And far from supplementing our merely moral certainty in immortality, Kant explicitly characterizes our conviction of immortality as a moral belief,[[104]](#footnote-104) and weds this conviction even more closely to our moral vocation, contending that it is not just useful but in fact indispensable for the fulfillment of the ends of morality. Meier’s *Vertheidigung* lays out well enough how he responded to those who claimed to prove him wrong, yet it is for historians and philosophers to speculate on the extent to which he would have welcomed being proved right.

*Note on the Texts*

Meier’s *Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode* appeared in three editions (1746, 1749, and 1762), with no significant changes between them (apart from the prefaces and changes in pagination). The text reproduced here is the second edition. The first edition of the *Vertheidigung seiner Gedancken vom Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode* was published in 1748, with a second following in 1754. The first edition of that text is reproduced here.

1. This is reflected, for instance, in the extensive collection of recent arguments (up to 1735) relating to immortality which was compiled by Valentin Ernst Löscher in his *Auserlesene Sammlung der besten und neuern Schrifften vom Zustand der Seele nach dem Tode* (Dresden, 1735). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Deutsche Metaphysik* §§738, 741 (unless otherwise noted, all references are to the first edition [Halle, 1720]). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Deutsche Metaphysik* §§742 and 921–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Leibniz, *Essais De Théodicée* in *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, 6 vols., ed. C.I. Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidman, 1875–1890); VI 151 (and see also IV 459–60). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Deutsche Metaphysik* §§924–6; cf. also §§238, 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Thümmig’s dissertation was published in his *Meletemata varii et rarioris argumenti* (Braunschwig and Leipzig, 1727); here see pp. 150–82). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Demonstratio immortalitatis animae* §6. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Demonstratio immortalitatis animae* §25. Following Thümmig, Wolff incorporates a similar proof in the second edition of his *Deutsche Metaphysik* (Halle, 1722), §925. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Dilucidationum philosophicarum de Deo, anima humana, mundo, et generalibus rerum affectionibus* (Tübingen, 1725), §CCCLVIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Philosophische Gedanken über die vernünfftige Seele und derselben Unsterblichkeit* (Berlin, 1739), reprinted in Christian Wolff *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. J. École, et al., III. Abt., Bd. 79 (Hildesheim: Olms, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Philosophische Gedanken* §LXVI–LXXI. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Philosophische Gedanken* §§XCIV–CII, CXVII. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Dissertationis de immortalitate animae, Pars 1. Eristica, dubia veterum et recentiorum quorundam discutiens* (Tübingen, 1740); *Pars II. Historica, nonnullorum veterum et recentiorum sententias expendens* (Tübingen, 1740); *Pars III. Dogmatica prior, animae immortalitatem probans ex principio interno* (Tübingen, 1740); *Pars IV. Dogmatica posterior, animae immortalitatem probans ex principio externo* (Tübingen, 1740). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Full title: *Uberzeugender Beweiß aus der Vernunft von der Unsterblichkeit sowohl der Menschen Seelen insgemein, als besonders der Kinder-Seelen*  (Tübingen, 1741), reprinted in Christian Wolff *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. J. École, et al., III. Abt., Bd. 150, (Hildesheim: Olms 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Uberzeugender Beweiß* §44. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Uberzeugender Beweiß* §§80–1. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Uberzeugender Beweiß* §96. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Uberzeugender Beweiß* §§109–10, 121–2, 125–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Uberzeugender Beweiß* §§161–169. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Halle, 1739), §§781–3. For a detailed comparison of Baumgarten’s views with the Wolffian, see Corey W. Dyck “Between Wolffianism and Pietism: Baumgarten’s Rational Psychology” in C. Fugate and J. Hymers, eds., *Baumgarten and Kant on Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018); pp. 78–93. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Metaphysica* §§743, 781. On this, see Paola Rumore, “Kant and Crusius on the Role of Immortality in Morality” in C. W. Dyck and F. Wunderlich, eds., *Kant and His German Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017), pp. 213–31; especially 217–18. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. In this connection, it bears noting that *personality* is first and foremost a cognitive capacity on the part of the soul according to the Wolffians since it has to do with the soul’s capacity to *recognize* its continued identity and is thus distinguished from the Lockean ‘juristic’ conception of person. For more on this, see Udo Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), pp. 312–13; and Corey W. Dyck, *Kant and Rational Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), pp. 142–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. On the former, see *Metaphysica* §782 and for the latter see §§787–91. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Meier published another text on a topic of rational psychology at this time—the *Beweis der vorherbestimmten Uebereinstimmung* (Halle, 1743)—though this does not take up the question of immortality. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Reinbeck, *Philosophische Gedanken*, pp. 321–66. The manuscript itself was widely thought to have been written by Voltaire, though Voltaire himself denied that the views expressed reflected his own and the published version (in the *Lettres écrites de Londres sur les Anglois*) stakes out a rather more moderate position on the topic of thinking matter; cf. *Philosophische Gedanken*, pp. 367–9, and Paola Rumore, “Georg Friedrich Meiers Theorie der Unsterblichkeit der Seele im zeitgenössischen Kontext” in G. Stiening and F. Grunert, eds. *Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–1777). Philosophie als ‘wahre Weltweisheit’* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 165–86; here p. 171n28. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See *Philosophische Gedanken* §XXXIII and Meier, *Beweiß: daß keine Materie dencken könne*, “Vorrede” (unpaginated). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. For Meier’s outline of the proof, see *Beweiß: daß keine Materie dencken könne* §24; cf. also §28 for his discussion of the *cogito*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Meier, *Beweiß: daß keine Materie dencken könne*, unpaginated preface and §54. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid.§41. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid. §41. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* §781. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Meier’s text erroneously refers here to §121 where it is §122 of Canz’s *Uberzeugender Beweis* that is intended. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. For more on Meier’s views on religion, and the authority and interpretation of Scripture, see Leonard P. Wessel, “G. F. Meier and the Genesis of Philosophical Theodicies of History in 18th-Century Germany,” *Lessing Yearbook* 12 (1981), pp. 63–84; and Gunther Gawlick “G.F. Meiers Stellung in der Religionsphilosophie der deutschen Aufklärung” in *Zentren der Aufklärung I: Halle, Aufklärung und Pietismus*, Norbert Hinske es., (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1989), pp. 157–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. For a more detailed consideration of what follows, see my “Meier and Kant on the Belief in the Immortality of the Soul” in C. W. Dyck and F. Wunderlich, eds., *Kant and His German Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017), pp.76–93, especially pp. 83–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. For discussion of some of these early reviews of Meier’s *Gedancken*, see also Rumore, “Meiers Theorie der Unsterblichkeit der Seele,” pp. 179–80 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und der Historie überhaupt*, 24 Dec. 1745 (C), pp. 815–20; here pp. 816–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid., pp. 819–20. Kästner’s essay “Über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele” can be found in the Leipzig journal *Belustigung des Verstandes und Witzes* (Christmon. 1742), pp. 516–34 (the author of the review erroneously provides a date for the essay of 1743). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten*, 25. Jan. 1746 (VIII), pp. 49–53; for these points, see pp. 49–51, pp.51–2, and p. 52, respectively. Meier’s response was followed by a conciliatory reply, presumably from the author of the original review, published in the 11 March 1746 issue of the *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten*, pp. 153–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Göttingische Bibliothek, darinnen der gegenwärtige Zustand der Gelahrheit in und ausserhalb Deutschland prüfend vorgestellet wird* 1746/47 (Dritter Theil), pp. 197–210, here pp. 201–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Neue Zeitung von Gelehrten Sachen*, 20 Jan. 1746 (VI), pp. 53–5, here p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern, und andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen*, 29 Brachmon. 1746, pp. 206–8; here p. 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See Lange, *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers* (Halle, 1778), pp. 122–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Full title: *Lettre d'un conseiller du Roi* *à Monsieur \*\*\* de l'immortalité de l'âme prouvée par la raison humaine* (Le Haye, 1747). The place of publication of the *Lettre* is unclear as it is identified as printed in “Le Haye” on the title page but “Leipzig” at the conclusion (with the latter being likelier). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. A detailed summary of the argument of the *Lettre* can be found in *Verzeichnis der Bücher so gesamlet Johan Christian Gottfried Jahn* (Frankfurt & Leipzig, 2 vols. 1754–58; cf. vol. 1, part 2 [1756], pp. 1118–1121). The *Verzeichnis* was published by J. C. G. Jahn himself, and documents his extensive collection of “paradoxical and heretical” texts which he collected with the intention of compiling a history of heresy in order to document the grounds of this “error” (see the unpaginated “Vorerinnerung” to vol. 1, part 1 [1755]). Little is known about Jahn (1707?–1774?) aside from his identification on the title-page of his *Verzeichnis* as “*Königl. Poln. und Churfl. Sächß. Commißions-Rath*.” (One likely biographical source can be found in C. W. F. Schmid’s *Kleine Bruchstücke zum Versuch einer Gelehrtengeschichte von gebohrnen Marienbergern: Ein Beytrag zur Stadtgeschichte von Marienberg im sächsischen Erzgebirge* [Gerlach, 1806], p. 49: “Jahn. (Johann Christian).”) Of course, Jahn’s title and position at the Sachsen court marks him as a possible author of the *Lettre d'un conseiller du Roi*. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See *Lettre*, pp. 23–4 and pp. 25–6 for these points, respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid., pp. 26–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid., p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid., p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid., p. 8–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid., pp. 23, 32, and 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. For a detailed account of Simonetti’s life and the rumours of the highly inappropriate conduct that precipitated his departure from Göttingen, see Harald Storz, “Dr. Christian Ernst Simonetti und ein ‘Scandaleuses Gerücht’ aus der Gründungszeit der Göttinger Universität,” *Göttinger Jahrbuch* 61 (2013), pp. 127–54 and *Göttinger Jahrbuch* 62 (2014), pp. 89–112. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *Gedancken über die Lehren* §1. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid. §1 (vol. 1, pp. 24–5). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid. §3 (vol. 1, p. 32) [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid. §11 (vol. 1, p. 42–3). Simonetti’s distinction between this basic or original form of consciousness and the consequent reflective consciousness involved in apperception may have been drawn from Crusius, with whose metaphysics he was clearly familiar; see, for instance, the unpaginated preface to the *Gedanken über die Lehren* where Simonetti refers to Crusius’ discussion of immortality in the “Pneumatologie” of the *Entwurf der nothwendigen-Vernunftwahrheiten* (Leipzig, 1745) (and for Crusius’s comparable views on consciousness see especially *Entwurf* §444). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Cf. *Gedanken über die Lehren* “§25” (vol. 1, p. 112 and 118–19). Due to a couple of typographical errors, many of the sections in the third chapter (§§22–32) of the text are wrongly numbered. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid. §18 (vol. 1, pp. 68–71). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid. §21 (vol. 1, p. 84). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid. “§25” (vol. 1, pp.122–4). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. For this, see the unpaginated preface of the *Gedanken über die Lehren*. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *Gedanken über die Lehren* §23 (vol. 1, pp. 92–6). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid. §23 (vol. 1, p. 93); cf. also “§26” (vol. 1, p. 126) [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Simonetti defends Reinbeck’s proof in *Gedanken über die Lehren* “§26” (vol. 1, pp. 124ff). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. This proof is presented in *Gedanken über die Lehren*, “§25” (vol. 1, p. 111) and “§26” (vol. 1, pp. 132). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid. §25 (vol. 1, p. 106). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid. §29 (vol. 1, p. 143). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. *Dissertatio Inauguralis in qua immortalitas animae ex principiis rationis methodo mathematica demonstratur* (Giessen, 1743). One of the few sources for information on Müller’s life and many publications is Friederich Wilhelm Strieder, *Grundlage zu einer Hessischen Gelehrten- und Schriftsteller-Geschichte, seit der Reformation bis auf gegenwärtige Zeiten.* (Kassel 1794); vol. 9–10, pp. 270–284. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Full title: *Die Vertheidigte Gewißheit der Unsterblichkeit der Seele aus der Vernunft, Oder: Gründlicher Beweis, daß man sowol die Gewißheit der Unsterblichkeit der Sele* [sic] *aus der Vernunft erweisen; als durch die vornehmste Einwürfe beantworten könne, die dieser Warheit entgegen gesezet werden* (Frankfurt a. M., 1747). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. On the former, see for instance *Vertheidigte Gewißheit* , pp. 35–7, where Müller echoes Simonetti’s point regarding the need to convince atheists; concerning the latter, see *Vertheidigte Gewißheit* pp. 97–101. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. “Wer hätte wol glauben sollen, daß Herr *Magister* Meier in Halle von der gänzlichen Ungewißheit der Unsterblichkeit der Sele aus der Vernunft [...] schreiben würde, wan es nicht der klare Augenschein lehrete” (*Vertheidigte Gewißheit* , unpaginated preface). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid., pp. 93–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Cf. *Dissertatio Inauguralis*, second section (entitled: “*Immortalitas animae, ex fine creationis demonstratur*”). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. The proof is conducted at *Vertheidigte Gewißheit*, pp. 130–208. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ibid., p. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Ibid., p. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid., p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ibid., pp. 197–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ibid., p. 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. In this, Müller claims to be taking Meier up on his challenge to offer such a proof, and that he would concede that such a proof could succeed in demonstrating the immortality of the soul; cf. *Gedancken* §36. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. *Vertheidigte Gewißheit*, pp. 209–11. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ibid., p. 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Ibid., p. 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ibid., p. 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Ibid., pp. 237–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. While *Rettung* is given a publication date of 1747, an appreciative review of it appears 30 December 1746; cf. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und der Historie überhaupt*, 1746 (CI), pp. 804–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. See the unpaginated preface of the *Neue Bestättigung der Vernünftigen Beweise für die Gewißheit der Unsterblichkeit der Sele* (Marburg, 1752), where Müller quotes a letter from Meier dated 6 May 1747. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. For a rather lukewarm endorsement, and an appeal to raise the tone in the dispute, see *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*, (29 June 1747), pp.422–424. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und der Historie überhaupt*, 11 July 1747 (LIII), pp. 420–4; the original quote reads “Der Herr Professor Meier in Halle hat [...] recht fleißig bemühet, die Grundsäulen der Rebellion [sc. *Religion*] unter der Larve eines Liebhabers der Wahrheit wankend zu machen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und der Historie überhaupt*, 1 Sept. 1747 (LXVIII), pp. 537–9; cf. p. 538. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. The same is suggested by Müller himself in his preface to the *Neue Bestättigung*; cf. also Rumore, “Meiers Theorie der Unsterblichkeit der Seele,” pp. 181–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und der Historie überhaupt*, 1 Sept. 1747 (LXVIII), p. 538: “Ich werde in meiner Vertheidigung wider Herrn P. Müllern diese Sache viel weiter ausführen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. For Wolff’s presentation on this score, see *Vernünftige Gedanken von der Menschen Thun und Lassen* (7th ed., Halle, 1743), §8. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. See *Lettre*, pp. 8–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. See the reviews of Simonetti’s *Gedanken über die Lehren* in *Göttingische Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*, 15 June 1747, pp. 377–79 and *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*, 3 July 1747 (LIII), pp. 470–4; for the dismissal of Meier’s challenge, see p. 470. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Such reviews can be found in *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt*, LI, 5 July 1748, pp. 414–416; *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*, XCIII, 18 Nov 1748, pp. 822–4; *Wöchentliche Nachrichten von Gelehrten Sachen*, VII, Feb. 1749, pp. 49–50; and a lengthy, two-part review in *Göttingische philosophische Bibliothek*, 1750, pp. 346–62; pp. 438–65. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. On this, see Günter Schenk, *Leben und Werk des Halleschen Aufklärers Georg Friedrich Meiers* (Halle: Halleschen Verlag, 1994); pp. 86–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. For details of this, see Lange, *Leben*, pp. 53–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. *Versuch, des von dem Herrn Georg Friedrich Meier* [...]*in seinem Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode geleugneten Mathematischen Erweises der Unsterblichkeit der Seele* (Bernberg, 1749). For a summary of this text and account of the circumstances of publication, see Lange, *Das Leben*, 129–37. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. *Meditationes philosophicae*, 2 vols. (Tübingen, 1750), cf. §§1067–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. As a reviewer of the *Gedancken* writes: “Die Beurtheilung ist genau, gründlich, triftig, und bescheiden. Wir müssen also erwarten, was dieser berühmte Weltweise [i.e. Canz] zu seiner Vertheidigung vorbringen wird” (review in *Göttingische Bibliothek* (1746/47), p. 210). [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. From the unpaginated preface to the *Beweis*: “Ich will ihm noch dazu versprechen, daß, wenn mein Buch wieder aufgelegt werden solte, ich die Beurtheilung seines Beweises ganz weglassen will.” However, the third edition of the *Gedancken* of 1762 retains the final chapter discussing Canz’s proof. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. For a discussion of Meier’s relation to Bayle, see Francesco Tomasoni, “Mendelssohn’s Concept of the Human Soul in Comparison with those of Meier and Kant,” in Reinier Munk ed., *Moses Mendelssohn’s Metaphysics and Aesthetics* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), pp. 131–57. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. See A828–9/B856–7. For more on this, see Dyck “Meier and Kant on the Belief in the Immortality of the Soul,” pp. 91–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)