

Preface

Israel Gottlieb Canz's *Überzeugender Beweis aus der Vernunft von der Unsterblichkeit sowohl der Menschen Seelen insgemein, als besonders der Kinder-Seelen (Beweis)* was first published in 1741 and is reprinted here in its second, expanded edition (a third, and further expanded edition would follow in 1746).¹ At the time of its initial publication, Canz was already well known, particularly for his extended argument for the compatibility of the Wolffian philosophy with theology in *Philosophiae Leibnitianae et Wolffianae usus in theologia (Usus)* of 1728.² *Beweis* is a continuation of the project launched in that text, as Canz undertakes the application of the Wolffian method to the revealed truth of the immortality of the soul.

Beweis stands as Canz's most influential discussion of the soul's immortality with one critic pronouncing this text in particular to be "one of the best [treatments of immortality] that we have."³ Even so, *Beweis* is not his only nor even his most detailed publication on the topic.

¹ For details regarding Canz's life and publications, see "Canz, Israel Gottlieb (1690–1753)" in Heiner F. Klemme and Manfred Kuehn (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Dictionary of Eighteenth Century German Philosophers*, 2nd edn. (London 2015), pp. 123–6.

² Israel Gottlieb Canz, *Philosophiae Leibnitianae et Wolffianae usus in theologia per praecipua fidei capita* (Christian Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. J. École, et al., III. Abt., Bd. 110.1–2, Hildesheim 2009).

³ Georg Friedrich Meier, *Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode* (Halle 1746), p. 17.

Indeed, Canz discusses immortality in *Usus*, where he presents two complementary proofs, with the first proceeding from the soul's nature and the second on the basis of God's justice. In the former, Canz argues that the soul's simplicity is required by consciousness, and that the continued activity of the soul after the body's death follows from the fact that its later states are causally generated by its earlier ones (*Usus* §461). In the latter argument, Canz contends that the soul's immortality, particularly its retention of its higher cognitive faculties follows from God's justice inasmuch as reward or punishment presupposes consciousness and memory (*Usus* §466).

This relatively brief treatment in *Usus* was followed up with the publication of a much more detailed four-part dissertation in 1740, the *Dissertatio de immortalitate animae*.⁴ The first and second parts take a historical approach, with the first discussing the doubts concerning immortality raised by ancient and modern authors, the second presenting a historical survey of opinions on immortality. The third and fourth parts adopt a more systematic approach, with the third presenting a series of arguments for immortality that are grounded in a consideration of the soul's internal nature, and the fourth offering arguments that have their ground in a principle external to the soul, namely in God. As Canz explains in the

⁴ The full title is: *Dissertationis de immortalitate animae, Pars I. 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).

introductory section of *Beweiß* (cf. pp. 1–2), he was encouraged by readers of his dissertation to publish a treatment of the topic in German so that his thoughts on this important matter might reach a wider audience, though he initially hesitated in following this advice.

While Canz was not among Wolff's students, and would develop a rather more speculative and eclectic Wolffianism,⁵ his discussion of immortality throughout these treatments falls squarely within the Leibnizian-Wolffian tradition. Canz regularly draws upon Leibniz's *Essais de théodicée*, particularly Leibniz's criticism of the alleged Cartesian proof, but he also makes reference to Leibniz's views on space and time as laid out in the correspondence with Clarke. Regarding Wolff, Canz takes Wolff's initial treatment in the *Deutsche Metaphysik* as his point of departure,⁶ though Canz's attention to the division of the concept of immortality likewise indicates a debt to Ludwig Philipp Thümmig (1697–1728) and specifically to his ground-breaking dissertation *Immortalitas animae ex intima ipsius natura demonstrata* of 1721 (which likewise influenced Wolff's own presentation).⁷

⁵ See "Canz, Israel Gottlieb (1690–1753)," p. 125.

⁶ *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt* (*Deutsche Metaphysik*), (Christian Wolff *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. J. École, et al., I. Abt., Bd. 2.1, Hildesheim, 2003), §§738–42, 921–27).

⁷ The dissertation is included in Thümmig's *Meletemata varii et rarioris argumenti* (Leipzig 1727), pp. 150–82. For discussion of Thümmig's importance in influencing Wolff's own discussion of the soul's immortality, see Corey W. Dyck, *Kant and Rational Psychology* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 44–5, 149. Canz refers to Thümmig's dissertation in *Usus* §459.

A more immediate debt is owed to the treatments of two other important Wolffians, namely Georg Bernhard Bilfinger (1693–1750) and Johann Gustav Reinbeck (1683–1741). Bilfinger had been Canz's colleague in Tübingen from 1721 to 1725, and Canz frequently refers to his discussion of immortality in the *Dilucidationes philosophicae* of 1725.⁸ Reinbeck's treatise was published the same year as Canz's dissertation,⁹ and Canz credits Reinbeck's book with ultimately convincing him to complete his own German treatise on the topic, in part because Reinbeck had not treated the soul's immortality in accordance with a rigorous analysis of that concept's *Theilbegriffe* (*Beweiß* pp. 3–4). It was also due to Reinbeck that Canz was led to devote a section to the peculiar problems posed for a demonstration of immortality by the ~~soul's~~ souls of children (cf. *Beweiß* p. 2 and §172).

Beweiß consists of four main sections, though the principal arguments for the immortality of the human soul are presented in the first two, with the third and fourth turning to the immortality of the souls of children, and a more precise if highly speculative determination of the soul's state in the afterlife. The division of labour between the first two main sections corresponds to that between Canz's third and fourth parts of the dissertation on immortality, respectively, with the former tackling the grounds internal to the soul's nature for immortality and

⁸ Cf. *Dilucidationes philosophicae de Deo, anima humana, mundo et generalibus rerum affectionibus*, (Christian Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. J. École, et al., III Abt., Bd. 18, Hildesheim 1982), §§357–369.

⁹ *Philosophische Gedanken über die vernünfftige Seele und derselben Unsterblichkeit* (Christian Wolff *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. J. École, et al., III. Abt., Bd. 79, Hildesheim, 2002).

the latter the grounds for immortality in God and so external to the soul's nature.

Before turning to the proofs, Canz begins by laying out the components of the concept of immortality (*Beweis* §§1–6). Following Wolff and Thümmig,¹⁰ Canz distinguishes three necessary and jointly sufficient elements of immortality: *incorruptibility*, or that the soul does not naturally pass away as the body does; *spirituality*, or the soul's preservation of its higher capacities such as reflection and reasoning; and *personality* (in the Wolffian sense), or the soul's preservation of its capacity to recognize that it is the same being in the afterlife as it was previously. Canz takes up the proof of each of these theses in turn in the subdivisions of the first main section.

Canz's proof for the soul's incorruptibility proceeds, again along the lines of Wolff's,¹¹ by arguing for the soul's distinction from matter (and composites in general), which is taken to entail that the soul is simple and further, since nothing simple can pass away through the dissolution of its parts, that the soul is incorruptible (*Beweis* §44). Taking the latter two steps as uncontroversial, Canz focuses on offering a variety of independent arguments for the soul's distinction from matter, all of which try to demonstrate the inexplicability of the soul's higher cognitive activities on a materialist account. Among the novel arguments offered for this claim, Canz contends that a material composite is incapable of forming representations of universal concepts and truths, where this is required for the use of reason (*Beweis* §§15–19); that such a composite cannot possess the unity and identity of the subject

¹⁰ See *Deutsche Metaphysik* §925 and *Immortalitas animae* §14, respectively.

¹¹ *Deutsche Metaphysik* §§738–42.

required for reflection and willing (§§27–28); and that the capacity to maintain a thought over time requires a subject that remains unchanged over time (§34).¹² Since such capacities cannot be realised in a material composite nor, presumably, in anything of a composite nature, Canz concludes that the human soul is not subject to dissolution and so is incorruptible.

However, the incorruptibility, or natural immortality, of the soul does not of itself imply that it remains a spirit, that is, that it retains the use of its higher cognitive and conative functions in the afterlife. It remains possible that an incorruptible soul would revert to its previous state (that before birth), or even fall asleep after the death of the body (whether intermittently or eternally), and so that it would exist in a state where it is subject to none but obscure and unconscious representations (*Beweiß* §68). To dispel the former possibility, Canz contends in a teleological vein that just as our state before birth is merely a means to attain to the present and improved state, so the present is merely a means for attaining the future state which is likewise an improvement over the previous (*Beweiß* §§69–75).

By way of ruling out the eternal sleep of the soul, Canz argues that since the soul will retain its powers, and so remain within the “order [*Rang*]” of rational spirits as long as it exists (*Beweiß* §52), it follows that its “principal internal end” must consist in continuing to demon-

¹² For discussion of the senses of identity at issue here, consult Udo Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject* (Oxford, 2011), p. 317. Canz’s other proofs borrow from Wolff (compare *Beweiß* §24 and *Deutsche Metaphysik* §738), Bilfinger (compare *Beweiß* §§36–39 and *Dilucidationes* §271), and Leibniz (see *Beweiß* §40).

strate that it belongs within this class of spirits, which requires the exercise of its rational faculties in the afterlife (*Beweiß* §§80–1). In response to the challenge that the soul’s use of these faculties presupposes the body as the source of its cognitions, and so that without the body the soul would lack representations for thought, Canz invokes the Leibnizian-Wolffian characterization of the body as the *limit* of the soul’s representative power so that the loss of the body merely amounts to the removal of this limitation (*Beweiß* §89). Nor is it possible that the soul should intermittently sleep and wake in the afterlife since this condition is likewise only due to the exhaustion of the body (*Beweiß* §§390–1).

Canz turns, finally, to the demonstration of the soul’s personality. Such a demonstration is required since the soul’s reward and punishment in the afterlife depends upon its retention of the capacity to recognize that it is the same soul as that which performed certain actions in its previous existence (*Beweiß* §4), and in order to rule out extravagant hypotheses such as the metempsychosis defended by the Pythagoreans (*Beweiß* §94), but it is also important for distinguishing what immortality consists in for the human soul from what it consists in for the souls of brutes.

Canz’s proof is rather distinctive in that it proceeds on the basis of a “reflective,” or logical connection between our representations in the afterlife and those in the present existence (*Beweiß* §96).¹³ Such a connection is effected, according to Canz, insofar as the soul reasons to claims concerning its previous state through the use of universal truths, but also insofar as reflection on these

¹³ Canz refers to this as a ‘logical’ connection in *Dissertationis, Pars. III*, §47.

truths prompts the recollection of individual experiences that provide examples of them (*Beweis* §§97–8). This serves to distinguish the immortality of the human soul from that of the animal soul since, while the latter might likewise be admitted to be simple and so incorruptible, it remains incapable of such reflection or a grasp of universal truths (*Beweis* §§100–3).

In the second main section, on the grounds in God for the soul's immortality, Canz turns to demonstrating that God has decided in favour of preserving the soul along with its higher capacities after the body's death. Against the possibility that God might simply annihilate the soul upon the death of the body, its natural immortality notwithstanding, Canz provides a number of proofs drawn from philosophical and natural theological considerations.

Among the former, he argues that the annihilation of the soul would be inconsistent with the nature of the world conceived as in space and time. So, he notes that created substances exist in connection in space insofar as the sufficient reason for the state of one substance lies in that of others; thus, were God to annihilate some among these simple substances the result would be a world in which there is a gap or rift (*"Riß"*) and, as a result, the world would not constitute a whole (*"All"*) of created substances (*Beweis* §122). Similarly with respect to time, the connection of created substances in time would likewise be broken were a soul to be annihilated since the previous state of the world would contain the sufficient reason for a change in the successive state but such a change would not come about with the annihilation of a substance (*Beweis* §125).

Regarding grounds drawn from natural theology, Canz argues that the annihilation of the soul conflicts

with God's wisdom and goodness. It conflicts, namely, with His wisdom to destroy a being which He created as incorruptible, and it is more consistent with His goodness to give eternal life than to take it away (*Beweis* §§128, 130). Canz argues that we can know that, in addition to not annihilating the soul, God would preserve its spirituality as well as its personality in the life to come. The principal case for the former rests upon the contention that preserving the soul's spirituality would amount to a gift that the soul has not made itself unfit to receive, and so one which God's magnanimity implies that He would give (*Beweis* §§133–35).

Canz offers a variety of further parallel proofs for this claim, but also considers a number of objections, including that we do not know whether it is possible to grasp something by means of the pure intellect alone, and that our representation of universal truths relies upon sensible symbols and so would be impossible without the body (*Beweis* §150). However, against the former objection he again points out that consciousness itself does not depend upon the body but the body instead only serves to limit it to sensible things (*Beweis* §151), and against the latter he distinguishes between the symbol, which is arbitrary and sensible, and its signification, which is fixed and refers to a non-sensible concept (*Beweis* §152).

Lastly, regarding God's choice to preserve the soul's personality, or consciousness that it is the same being now as that which acted previously, Canz argues that were God not to preserve this capacity, then we could not honour God's wisdom, goodness, or justice, where such is God's ultimate end in creating rational souls (*Beweis* §161). Souls without consciousness of their previous state would not honour God's wisdom since, without a memory of their past, such a soul could not regard the

future state as the end or aim, arranged by God, of their previous existence (*Beweis* §166). Neither could such souls come to honour God's goodness, since they would be senseless of the source of all the goods in their previous life (*Beweis* §168), nor could they honour God's justice as they would not recall the previous actions that are the grounds of the rewards or punishments they receive in the afterlife (*Beweis* §169). This is not to say that God would not be supremely wise, good, or just, but only that a soul without personality thus understood could not reasonably be expected to *recognize* Him as such.

The remaining two main sections concern the immortality of the souls of children and a more precise determination of the soul's condition in the afterlife. Canz's discussion of the souls of children sets out from Reinbeck's treatment,¹⁴ and tackles the problem of accounting for how such souls could be said to have distinct representations, thoughts of universal truths, and the capacity for inferences in the afterlife despite lacking the opportunity to develop these capacities in their former life (*Beweis* §173). Canz argues that such souls are of course human souls, and so with a disposition to develop such capacities, and moreover that not only does God set them "on the path to eternity" by bringing them into the present life (*Beweis* §183), but also that these souls do have an opportunity to develop their capacities, such as differentiation, in this life (*Beweis* §184) and will not lack for opportunity to develop these further in the afterlife (*Beweis* §§190–1). Notably, similar issues would be taken up later by Moses Mendelssohn (in connection with the loss of his eleven-month old daughter Sara) in an exchange with

¹⁴ See *Philosophische Gedanken* §§134–8.

Thomas Abbt relating to Johann Joachim Spalding's *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (Greifswald 1748).¹⁵

The final main section turns to speculations concerning the human soul's condition in the afterlife, including the improvements in its cognitive and conative capacities (*Beweiß* §§205–12, §§213–19), the character of the soul's new, spiritual body and consequent change in our sensations and desires (*Beweiß* §§228–39), and the improvements in our reason insofar as it is liberated from its corruption (*Beweiß* §§240–2). Ultimately, Canz holds that “as the child of a very young age stands to a man of adult years, so one of adult years stands to the qualities of a citizen of the next world” (*Beweiß* §202).

Despite its modest aims and careful avoidance of polemic, *Beweiß* provoked a bitter reply on the part of one vehemently anti-Wolffian critic, in the *Erste Probe bescheidener Anmerckungen* which was published anonymously.¹⁶ Among the uncharitable characterizations of Canz's arguments, petty quibbles over words, and baseless insinuations of Spinozism and atheism¹⁷ are a smat-

¹⁵ See Abbt's “Zweifel über die Bestimmung des Menschen” and Mendelssohn's “Orakel, die Bestimmung des Menschen betreffend,” in Moses Mendelssohn *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe*, eds. A. Altmann, et al. (Berlin 1929–; Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt 1971–); Bd. 5.1, pp. 619–37

¹⁶ The full title of the work is: *Erste Probe bescheidener Anmerckungen über Tit. Herrn Ißrael Gottlieb Canz, hochberühmten Professors in Tübingen sogenannten Ueberzeugenden Beweiß aus der Vernunft von der Unsterblichkeit der Seelen* (Göttingen, Hager: 1741), with a second volume (*Zweiter und letzte Probe* [...]) following in 1742.

¹⁷ The treatise itself consists of the titular *Anmerckungen* which is prefaced by a scurrilous preface allegedly inserted by someone else identified only as “*Diogenes im Faß*,” and followed by

tering of relevant objections, including an objection to his demonstration that matter cannot represent universal truths (*Probe* §8), a challenge to the assumption that the use of reason requires universal concepts (*Probe* §11), and a charge that Canz is too hasty in identifying immateriality with simplicity since he has not ruled out the possibility of material simples (*Probe* §28). Canz replied to a number of these objections, which replies account for many of the footnotes added to the second edition of *Beweiß*.¹⁸

Canz's *Beweiß* received a far more philosophically sophisticated treatment at the hands of Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–77), a fellow Wolffian (broadly construed), in the *Gedancken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode* (1746). It is likely that Meier's general challenge regarding any insight into God's decisions (*Gedancken* §35), his criticism of attempts to prove immortality on the basis of external grounds in God (*Gedancken* §§87–90), and even his charge that some speak of the state of the soul in the afterlife "as if they had already been dead once" (*Gedancken* §1) target Canz specifically.

a remark by the author of the *Anmerckungen* and a final satirical response by "Diogenes." The book was negatively reviewed, with the preface in particular drawing criticism in *Göttingische Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, 1741 (96), p. 834. Shortly after, Johann Matthias Gesner (1691–1761), a renowned philologist at Göttingen and former student of Johann Franz Budde, seems to acknowledge having written the *Anmerckungen* but denies authoring the preface or seeing it before it was bound with the *Anmerckungen*; see *Göttingische Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, 1742 (18), p. 144.

¹⁸ Canz's responses to the above-mentioned objections can be found in the footnotes to *Beweiß* §§16, 19, and 28.

In addition, Meier devotes the sixth and final division of his book to the detailed evaluation of Canz's arguments. Among other criticisms, Meier contends that the soul's simplicity is irrelevant to immortality and accordingly objects to Canz's uncharitable presentation of the materialist position as upholding the death of the soul (*Gedancken* pp. 188–90, *ad* Canz §§10–14); argues for the possibility of a step-wise diminishment of consciousness to its disappearance *within* the order of rational souls (*Gedancken* pp. 195–6, *ad* Canz §61); and denies that it is possible that finite beings could ever know with certainty that the annihilation of some finite souls, or even a rift in space and time, could not somehow contribute to the overall perfection of the world (*Gedancken* pp. 211–13, *ad* Canz §§121–2).

In the end, however, Canz seems ready to admit that certain aspects of his proof might be less than fully convincing. In a passage near the conclusion of his treatment, he compares the learned world to a “*form of government where the people rule*” rather than a monarchy, which allows for topics to be openly debated and for everyone to be left to form their own judgment. Yet, he is also optimistic that even criticisms of accepted truths, such as the soul's immortality, can yield a sought-for occasion for further, productive reflection on the rational basis for our confidence in them (*Beweiß* §200).

Corey W. Dyck