

Wolff and the First Fifty Years of German Metaphysics

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For my Tante Anna

Acknowledgements

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Previously published material appears in a number of chapters. Chapter 1 contains “Before and Beyond Leibniz: Tschirnhaus and Wolff on Experience and Method,” originally published in *The Experiential Turn in 18th Century German Philosophy*, K. de Boer and T. Prunea-Bretonnet eds. (Routledge, 2021), pp. 17–36, and reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group. Chapter 4 expands on “Women in the German Context,” in the *Routledge Handbook on Women and Early Modern European Philosophy*, K. Detlefsen and L. Shapiro eds.

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Note on Translations and Key to Abbreviations and Citations

In what follows, translations of primary texts for which no English translation are cited are my own. In general, I have provided translations of texts that appear in the body of my exposition and have opted to leave any material provided in the footnotes in its original language. The reader should also note that because the use of German in academic texts was still relatively novel in the 18th century, there are wide variations in spelling and grammatical conventions between authors, or even within the works of a single author. Since these do not often interfere with understanding, I have chosen not to standardize, modernize, or otherwise amend these texts.

For ease of reference, I have made use of the following abbreviations, and when available translations, for frequently cited texts (for full bibliographical references, consult the Bibliography).

Works by Christian Wolff

I have made use of the following editions of, and abbreviations for, Wolff's various publications. In cases where it is necessary to cite a specific edition of a text, I have introduced the convention of appending a subscript number to the abbreviation indicating the edition of the text concerned. Texts are cited by page or section number, as appropriate, unless indicated otherwise here.

Abbr.	Short Title	Editions Used (where applicable)
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<i>AE</i>	<i>Aërometriae elementa</i>	1709
<i>AnfGr/KU</i>	<i>Anfangs-Gründe aller mathematischen Wissenschaften</i> (including a foregoing “Kurzer Unterricht” numbered separately)	1710 (<i>AnfGr₁</i>), 1717 (<i>AnfGr₂</i>), 1725 (<i>AnfGr₃</i>)
<i>AN</i>	<i>Ausführliche Nachricht</i>	1726
<i>AzDM</i>	<i>Anmerckungen zur Deutsche Metaphysik</i>	1724
<i>BWM</i>	<i>Briefwechsel zwischen Christian Wolff und Ernst Christoph von Manteuffel</i> (3 vols.)	
<i>CG</i>	<i>Cosmologia generalis</i>	1731
<i>CR</i>	<i>Cogitationes rationales de viribus intellectus humani</i>	1740 (cited by chapter and section number)
<i>DE</i>	<i>Deutsche Ethik</i>	1720 (<i>DE₁</i>)
<i>DL</i>	<i>Deutsche Logik</i>	1713 (<i>DL₁</i>), 1719 (<i>DL₂</i>), 1722 (<i>DL₃</i>) (cited by chapter and section number; note that the chapter order changes between <i>DL₁</i> and <i>DL₂</i>)
<i>DM</i>	<i>Deutsche Metaphysik</i>	1719/20 (<i>DM₁</i>), 1722 (<i>DM₂</i>), 1725 (<i>DM₃</i>)
<i>ELB</i>	<i>Christian Wolffs eigene Lebensbeschreibung</i>	
<i>EMU/BC</i>	<i>Elementa matheseos universae</i> (including	1713 (vol. 1)

a foregoing “De methodo mathematica
brevis commentatio” numbered
separately)

<i>GKPS</i>	<i>Gesammelte kleine philosophische Schriften</i>	1736–40 (cited by volume and page number)
<i>HSM</i>	<i>Horae subsecivae Marburgenses</i>	1729–41 (cited by volume and page number)
<i>KS</i>	<i>Kleine Schriften</i>	1755
<i>LC</i>	<i>De differentia nexus rerum sapientis et fatalis necessitatis [...] luculenta commentatio</i>	1724
<i>LCK</i>	<i>Merckwürdige Schriften [...] Zwischen dem Herrn Baron von Leibnitz, und dem D. Herrn Clarcke (with a preface by Wolff)</i>	1720
<i>LL</i>	<i>Philosophia rationalis sive Logica</i>	1728
<i>MCL</i>	<i>Monitum ad commentationem luculentam</i>	1724
<i>ML</i>	<i>Mathematisches Lexicon</i>	1716
<i>MMP</i>	<i>Meletemata mathematico-philosophica</i>	1755 (cited by section [I, II, III] and page number)
<i>PE</i>	<i>Psychologia empirica</i>	1733
<i>PP</i>	<i>Prima philosophia sive Ontologia</i>	1730
<i>PR</i>	<i>Psychologia rationalis</i>	1734

<i>RAE</i>	<i>Sämtliche Rezensionen in den Acta eruditorum (1705–1731)</i>	
<i>RP</i>	<i>Ratio praelectionum Wolfianarum</i>	1718 (<i>RP</i> ₁), 1735 (<i>RP</i> ₂) (cited by page number, then section number)
<i>TN</i>	<i>Theologia naturalis</i>	1736 (Part I) and 1737 (Part II)
<i>WLA</i>	<i>Des [...] Langens [...] Anmerckungen über [...] Wolffens Metaphysicam [...] nebst beygefügter Gründlicher Antwort</i>	1724

Works by Joachim Lange

Abbr.	Short Title	Editions Used (where applicable)
<i>AR</i>	<i>Ausführliche Recension</i>	1725
<i>B&AE</i>	<i>Bescheidene und ausführliche Entdeckung</i> (with a foregoing “Protheorie” that is separately paginated)	1724
<i>CD</i>	<i>Causa Dei</i>	1723
<i>HDF</i>	<i>Hundert und Dreyßig Fragen aus der neuen Mechanischen Philosophie</i>	1734
<i>LMM</i>	<i>Medicina mentis</i>	1718 (4 th ed.; cited according to part, chapter, and section number)
<i>MD</i>	<i>Modesta disquisitio</i>	1723
<i>WLA</i>	<i>Des [...] Langens [...] Anmerckungen</i>	1724

*über [...] Wolffens Metaphysicam [...]
nebst beygefüger Gründlicher Antwort*

Works by Descartes

As is conventional, I cite Descartes' works according to the volume and page number in the Adam and Tannery edition, followed by volume and page number in the Cambridge translation.

Abbr.	Title
<i>AT</i>	<i>Oeuvres de Descartes</i> , ed. C. Adam and P. Tannery
<i>CSM</i>	<i>The Philosophical Writings of Descartes</i> , ed. and transl. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothof, D. Murdoch, and A. Kenny

Works by E. W. von Tschirnhaus

Abbr.	Title
<i>MM</i>	<i>Medicina mentis, sive artis inveniendi praecepta generalia</i> (1 st ed. 1689; 2 nd ed. 1695—the 2 nd edition is used exclusively)
<i>GA</i>	<i>Gründliche Anleitung zu nützlichen Wissenschaften, absonderlich zu der Mathesi und Physica</i>

Works by G. W. Leibniz

Abbr.	Title
<i>AG</i>	<i>Philosophical Essays</i> , ed. and transl. R. Ariew and D. Garber
<i>BLW</i>	<i>Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Christian Wolff</i> , ed. C. I. Gerhardt
<i>CLC</i>	<i>Leibniz and Clarke: Correspondence</i> , ed. R. Ariew (where ‘C’ or ‘L’ denotes Clarke or Leibniz as the author of the letter, followed by the number of the letter, and section when appropriate)
<i>G</i>	<i>Philosophische Schriften</i> , ed. C. I. Gerhardt (cited according to volume and page number)
<i>L</i>	<i>Philosophical Papers and Letters</i> (2 nd ed.), ed. and transl. L. Loemker
<i>T</i>	<i>Theodicy</i> , ed. A Farrer and transl. E. M. Huggard (unless otherwise noted section numbers refer to the sections of the main essays, not to the “Preliminary Dissertation”)

Works by Moses Mendelssohn

Abbr.	Title
<i>JubA</i>	<i>Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe</i> , ed. A. Altmann, et. al. (cited according to the volume and page number)
<i>MH</i>	<i>Morning Hours: Lectures on God’s Existence</i> , transl. D. Dahlstrom and C. Dyck
<i>MPW</i>	<i>Philosophical Writings</i> , ed. and transl. D. Dahlstrom

Other Texts

Abbr.	Title
<i>APD</i>	<i>Anton Wilhelm Amo's Philosophical Dissertations on Mind and Body</i> , ed. and transl. S. Menn and J. E. H. Smith
<i>EMGP</i>	<i>Early Modern German Philosophy (1690–1750)</i> , ed. and transl. C. Dyck (contains partial translations of <i>DM₁</i> , <i>TN</i> , <i>B&AE</i> , and a number of other texts referenced in this study)

Introduction

In the early evening of November 12, 1723, a decree was received in the town of Halle an der Saale. Issued directly by Friedrich Wilhelm I, the Elector of Brandenburg and King in Prussia, the decree ordered the philosopher Christian Wolff to leave the city and all of the royal lands, within 48 hours, on pain of hanging. A copy of the decree was delivered to Wolff by the secretary of the Friedrichs-Universität who was attended by a member of the academic senate—by Wolff’s own account it was delivered just as he was preparing for his lecture on natural philosophy.¹ Wolff did not waste much time in reacting. While he repudiated the charges, and was encouraged by at least one administrator to mount a defense, he recognized the pointlessness of contesting them to remain in the service of a hostile king. He quickly took leave from two of his closest colleagues, with one expressing shock concerning the order but, evidently emulating Pontius Pilate, asserting that he would wash his hands of the whole affair. This circumstance so upset Wolff that it reportedly made him physically ill.² Within 12 hours, Wolff had gathered what he could and, together with his wife—at that point pregnant with a son who would be born in January—left the lands of Electoral Brandenburg by crossing the Saale river into Passendorf, which was then part of Saxony. His servant remained behind to tell Wolff’s students what had transpired and they, upon hearing the news, set out to pay their respects to their persecuted professor.³ Wolff used the occasion to repay his students the fees they had deposited for his

¹ *ELB* p. 196. A somewhat conflicting account of Wolff’s receipt of the order is given in Hartmann, *Anleitung zur Historie der Leibnizisch-Wolffischen Philosophie*, p. 699. For discussion of the disparity, see Kertscher, “*Er brachte Licht und Ordnung in die Welt.*” *Christian Wolff – Eine Biographie*, pp. 141–2.

² This is reported in the anonymously published *Nicolai Veridici Impartialis Bohemi Unpartheyisches Sendschreiben an einen guten Freund in B. von dem neuesten Staat in Halle darinnen viel unbekandte und merckwürdige Umstände was die Dimission des Herrn Hof-Rath Wolffens betrifft, entdeckt werden*, p. 31. This account is also referenced in Hartmann, *Anleitung*, p. 878, and Kertscher, “*Er brachte Licht und Ordnung,*” p. 142.

³ See Hartmann, *Anleitung*, p. 700; and Beutel, “Causa Wolffiana. Die Vertreibung Christian Wolffs aus Preußen 1723 als

undelivered lectures, and then departed for Marburg where he would take up a professorship offered to him by the Landgraf of Hesse-Kassel.

Wolff's exile was the climax, if not the finale, of a controversy within the recently founded Friedrichs-Universität in Halle between Wolff and his colleagues in the theological faculty. These latter figures, which included August Hermann Francke and Joachim Lange, were leaders in the Pietist movement, a religious movement that sought to complete Luther's reformation of Christian doctrine by bringing about a *reformatio vitae*, or a reformation of the human being's mind and moral character. The success of Francke's orphanage and various charitable institutions had made Halle the centre of German Pietism, and put the theological faculty of the Friedrichs-Universität (where Francke was a professor) at the intellectual forefront of the movement. After Wolff took up his appointment as a professor in the philosophical faculty, the Pietists had warily eyed his increasingly bold forays into matters that were traditionally the preserve of theology.⁴ The grievances between the two parties only compounded over time, with the conflict finally spilling over after Wolff's prorectoral address on July 12, 1721, which marked the end of his prorectorship and the beginning of Lange's. For the occasion, Wolff gave a lecture on the practical philosophy of the Chinese, and contended that Chinese Confucians served as an example of the attainability of moral and civic virtue in the absence of (Christian) religion.⁵ The tension was only increased after Wolff flatly rebuffed Francke's request to see a written copy of the address on the grounds that, as a philosophical lecture, it did not fall under the remit of the theological faculty. After an appeal by Francke to a minister in

Kulminationspunkt des theologisch-politischen Konflikts zwischen halleschem Pietismus und Aufklärungsphilosophie," p. 192.

⁴ On this, see Beutel, "Causa Wolffiana," pp. 164–6.

⁵ This text was later published as *Oratio de Sinarum philosophia practica*. For discussion, see M. Albrecht's introduction to his German translation of the text, *Oratio de Sinarum philosophia practica/Rede über die praktische Philosophie der Chinesen*, p. xlv.

Berlin proved fruitless,⁶ the Pietist campaign moved into the open, with a series of publications aimed against the Wolffian philosophy written by a former student and later colleague of Wolff's at Halle (who was reprimanded for attacking Wolff by name as that was against the university statutes)⁷ and by Lange (who targetted Wolff all but explicitly). In virtue of Lange's highly uncharitable characterizations of Wolff's thought, and the personal connection that Francke enjoyed with the court in Berlin, the Pietists eventually prevailed upon the Prussian king, convincing him of the dangers lying in the Wolffian philosophy,⁸ though even they were apparently surprised by the severity of the decree—they had only sought to limit Wolff's future teaching to mathematics and natural philosophy.

What is particularly significant about this protracted dispute is that philosophical, and more specifically, metaphysical issues were of central importance from the outset. While it was Wolff's prorectoral address that drove the dispute into the open, the publication in late 1719 of his *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt, und der Seele des Menschen*, commonly referred to as the *Deutsche Metaphysik*, had already inflamed the ire of his Pietist colleagues. Among the many innovations in that text, Wolff's account of the sensory foundations of human cognition, his compatibilist account of freedom, his defense of the Leibnizian system of pre-established harmony, his assertion of the causal concatenation of all events in the world, and his intellectualist conception of God and novel proof of His existence, all conflicted with deeply-held Pietistic intellectual commitments. The sensible foundation of human cognition was taken by Wolff's opponents as a sort of Lockean challenge to the coherence of ideas that purport to have no sensual content whatsoever, in addition to undermining the authority of the ideas and

⁶ Beutel, "Causa Wolffiana," p. 171.

⁷ Beutel, "Causa Wolffiana," pp. 172–8.

⁸ Beutel, "Causa Wolffiana," pp. 186–91.

principles that come by way of the supernatural light. The compatibilist account of freedom was rejected as inadequate, making the human will a slave to its inclinations. Wolff's defense of Leibniz's harmony was thought to undermine the soul's natural authority over bodily motions even as it insulated the soul from all influence from without. Wolff's doctrine of the *nexus rerum materialium* extended the internal determination of the soul's actions to the events of the world as such, thereby introducing a Stoic fatalism into the order of things. Lastly, the denial of the priority of God's will to his intellect and Wolff's half-hearted attempt to prove God's existence (and his vigorous criticism of previous attempts) all raised suspicions as to whether he even believed in a divine Creator, existing apart from His creation, or rather subscribed to a form of Spinozism. It was reputedly through raising just these philosophical concerns about the fatal necessity of our actions (and its alleged consequences for responsibility) that the Pietists were able to prevail upon Friedrich Wilhelm I that Wolff's metaphysics posed a threat to the stability of his kingdom.⁹

One might expect that a dispute that turned on the definition and demonstration of the freedom of the will, where charges of materialism and idealism, fatalism and atheism, were consistently levelled, in which the *libertas philosophandi* was threatened, and all with the spectre of Spinoza looming in the background—one might expect that such a dispute would be recognized as a textbook historical example of a *philosophical* controversy. One would surmise that its impact on the development of German philosophy in the 18th century had been thoroughly examined, indeed, that the importance of this controversy for the establishment of

⁹ For the (unconfirmed) account of the role of the pre-established harmony in swaying the king to Wolff's exile (inasmuch as it excused the desertion of soldiers), see Zeller, *Vorträge und Abhandlungen geschichtlichen Inhalts*, p. 131; Beutel, "Causa Wolffiana," p. 189 and 189n237. Whatever tipped the balance it is clear that the king was convinced that Wolff's system amounted to a kind of atheism; as he writes in his own postscript to the royal order, "Ich habe das nit wuhst, das der Wolf so gottlose ist" (quoted in Beutel, "Causa Wolffiana," p. 191).

philosophy in its properly modern form in German academia and intellectual culture more generally had widely been acknowledged. And yet, with a few exceptions, these expectations are disappointed.¹⁰ Instead, the philosophical elements in the controversy between Wolff and the Pietists are taken as little more than window-dressing, as an intellectual cover for the deeper personal conflicts and professional rivalries that really drove the respective parties. And there are any number of circumstances that can be, and have been, cited that highlight the personal character of the dispute: Wolff's success in the classroom and his popularity among students (which was also on display when they jeered Lange after he took up the prorectorship),¹¹ Wolff's installation of his own student in a professorial position for which Lange's son was a competitor,¹² the (Lutheran) Pietists' fundamental hostility towards reason and philosophy,¹³ and so on.¹⁴

Of course, it served the interests of Wolff and his philosophical defenders to reduce the objections of their opponents to mere personal and professional grievances, or to write them off as the unreasonable but not unexpected reactions of those lacking advanced philosophical training. Significantly, this reductive treatment is seized upon by the (Wolff-aligned) historians of the period from which a good part of our knowledge of the details of the controversy stems. Yet the Wolffian contributions to the debate are frequently just as dismissively treated. Wolff himself has all too often been characterized as a second-rate philosopher, with his principal philosophical achievement consisting in the arrangement of the elements of the Leibnizian

¹⁰ Examples include Bianco's "Freiheit gegen Fatalismus. Zu Joachim Langes Kritik an Wolff," and Grote, "Wolffianism and Pietism in Eighteenth-Century German Philosophy."

¹¹ On this, see Grote, "When Innovation goes out of Fashion: Joachim Lange's Lectures to Empty Benches," and Beutel, "Causa Wolffiana," pp. 169–70.

¹² Beutel, "Causa Wolffiana," pp. 172–3.

¹³ For a suggestion that the cause of the dispute can be reduced to such hostility, see Zeller, *Vorträge und Abhandlungen geschichtlichen Inhalts*, pp. 111–14.

¹⁴ See Hartmann's extensive catalogue of the motives for Wolff's persecution in *Anleitung*, pp. 621–47.

philosophy into a more-or-less coherent metaphysical system. That Wolff's philosophy had any impact in his homeland is rather a testament to the backwards, pre-modern character of the intellectual climate in Germany, than a reflection of the philosophical merit of his views. Given the lacklustre quality of both parties to the dispute, then, it is entirely to be expected that their controversy would issue in a philosophically uninteresting exchange of dozens of polemical texts which continually rehashed the same arguments, counter-arguments, and personal recriminations, generating plenty of heat but, in the end, little light. The only surprise is that the dispute itself carried on for more than a decade after Wolff's exile, when there was little left to be lost, or gained, from doing so.

To a certain extent, one cannot deny the truth of these various characterizations of Wolff, the Pietists, and the resulting dispute. Wolff's metaphysics, quite deliberately, incorporates and engages with core aspects of (what was known at the time of) Leibniz metaphysics, and the systematic veneer Wolff lent to Leibniz's thought does help to account for its rapid uptake within the German academy. Moreover, the Pietists undoubtedly harboured a profound scepticism regarding the depth and extent of insight that human reason was capable of, and in this context unsurprisingly took up a position closer to Luther than to their colleagues in the philosophy faculty. And concerning the controversy itself, there is no question that personal differences and professional boundary-policing contributed plenty of oxygen to the fire. As for the writings generated in the course of the controversy, their overall intellectual quality flatters neither side and, given the high philosophical interest (then and today) in the core topics at issue—freedom and responsibility, Spinozism, the limits of reason—they cannot be read without a certain disappointment that neither party ever really rose to the occasion to pen a lasting contribution on these topics.

All this might be admitted, that is, while denying that it gets to the heart of the matter. Beginning with Wolff, I think it can be safely ventured that he remains the most misunderstood philosopher of note of the entire 18th century (both within and without Germany), a misunderstanding that is nowhere more evident than in the reception of his metaphysics. This is, as far as I can tell, the result of a failure to appreciate the wider context for Wolff's *Deutsche Metaphysik* within his early philosophical project, namely, his effort to articulate the proper method of science (and, once articulated, to introduce it into all domains of rational inquiry). Attention to how Wolff's ambitious consideration of metaphysics engages with and emerges from his early methodological and scientific writings will show that Wolff frames his metaphysics through conversation with a constellation of modern philosophers and scientists, with Leibniz being only one voice, if a particularly influential one, among many. This in turn will bring out the distinctive features of his metaphysics and of his rationalism. Turning to the Pietists, while much has been made of their alleged hostility towards reason, there has been comparatively little effort to understand the intellectual underpinnings of the movement itself and to consider their critiques of enlightenment rationality in terms of them.¹⁵ Once this is done, however, one comes to see that the Pietists differ from their opponents concerning the *priority*, and not the *value*, of philosophy—they hold that philosophy should be the servant of theology, of course, but also that theoretical speculation should not interfere with the exigencies of practical life. The Pietists, then, do not contend for a wholesale rejection of philosophy but rather for a specific conception of its utility, as (but) a part of the whole of human intellectual and spiritual endeavour, and this perspective is reflected in the few philosophical texts published by Pietist authors and by Lange in particular. Finally, relating to the confrontation between Wolff and the

¹⁵ A key exception here is Bianco (in his "Freiheit gegen Fatalismus. Zu Joachim Langes Kritik an Wolff") and, more recently, the study by Chapman, *The Crusian Core of Kant's Critical Project* (see pp. 13–58).

Pietists, it would be uncharitable to limit its significance to the (many) texts exchanged in the course of the controversy. Instead, the significance of the dispute lies in the fact that the two sides articulated diametrically opposed philosophical positions which came to serve as the fixed frame for metaphysical discussion in Germany for the remainder of the first half of the 18th century. The true historical impact, and philosophical significance, of the controversy is thus only appreciated once we also bring into consideration the various philosophers, beyond those immediate disciples and inflexible partisans immersed in the polemics, who worked to resolve the various tensions by refining, revising, and even synthesizing the metaphysical positions at issue. The results are highly distinctive metaphysical views, which in some cases recognizably anticipate later, more famous developments, and which in the end are just proof of the rich *philosophical* vein exposed through the opening of the fracture between Wolffianism and Pietism.

This, in any case, is what I hope to show in detail in the following pages. Obviously, at the centre of all these developments is Wolff's *Deutsche Metaphysik*, and one of the principal tasks of this study will be to offer an accurate and detailed account of its contributions to metaphysics. Precisely this is undertaken in the three chapters that constitute Part I, and which together offer an unprecedentedly comprehensive consideration of Wolff's text, covering its connection with his early methodological and scientific writings, and its evolution over the course of Wolff's early development, as well as surveying the specific doctrines Wolff defends therein. In Chapter 1, I present a key part of the background for Wolff's *Deutsche Metaphysik*, namely, his own early attempt at discovering and formalizing the appropriate method of science. It is within the context of this project, which occupied Wolff from the time of his earliest philosophical studies, that he was first made aware of the work of Ehrenfried Walter von

Tschirnhaus, a Saxon nobleman who was part of Spinoza's circle. Tschirnhaus had a profound, and enduring impact on Wolff, which antedates Wolff's acquaintance with Leibniz and (arguably) frames Wolff's reception of Leibniz's thought, particularly inasmuch as Leibniz was able to resolve (to Wolff's satisfaction at least) some longstanding concerns he had had with the details of Tschirnhaus' account of method in his principal philosophical work, the *Medicina mentis*. Another important set of influences on Wolff, which have been largely overlooked due to the scholarly preoccupation with Leibniz, are British philosophers and natural scientists. Soon after defending his dissertation in Leipzig, Wolff was charged by the editor of *Acta eruditorum* with reviewing English-language publications in science and philosophy, in which role he was brought into direct contact with works by John Locke, Isaac Newton, Anthony Collins, and Samuel Clarke. Wolff's encounter with these authors had a lasting and, initially, frequently positive impact on both his considerations relating to method and his early forays into metaphysics.

Even so, Leibniz' influence made itself felt in various aspects of Wolff's metaphysics and in Chapter 2, I consider one aspect of this, namely, Wolff's adoption of Leibniz's ambition of emending ontology. Surprisingly, particularly when one considers the prominence ontology will later have for him, Wolff had been sceptical concerning the utility of ontology for metaphysics, largely in light of what he regarded as its misuse at the hands of the Scholastics. This negative opinion was revised, most likely as a result of reading Leibniz's programmatic essay on the emendation of ontology (published in 1694, but which Wolff probably only read around 1704). This had the effect of persuading Wolff to introduce a very selective consideration of ontological concepts and principles into his thinking on method, but only insofar as such considerations were requisite for the justification and clarification of the concepts and principles employed within a

domain of scientific investigation (rather than being of interest as a science in its own right). This was not the end of Leibniz's impact on Wolff's ontology, as a subsequent Leibnizian text, this time the published correspondence with Clarke, would prove decisive in prompting Wolff to expand his treatment of ontology in order to further justify the concepts (space and time, for instance) and principles (especially the principle of sufficient reason) that were contested within that exchange. The indispensability of ontology for avoiding the errors of Newtonian metaphysics (among others), accounts for its new-found prominence in the *Deutsche Metaphysik*, even as it retains its *emended* character through its novel and foundational role in justifying the concepts and principles to be deployed throughout the topics of metaphysics.

Wolff's metaphysics proper, that is, the treatment of the soul, world, and God in the *Deutsche Metaphysik* is the subject of Chapter 3. In his metaphysics, Wolff retains the traditional focus on the doctrine of finite and infinite spirit, though the addition of a dedicated consideration of the world and its elements constitutes his own innovation. Despite this general framework, Wolff's principal ambition with the text is to gain clarity on a cluster of longstanding and inter-related topics of interest, and it is to this end that he deploys his entire arsenal of newly-developed philosophical tools. So, a primary aim for Wolff is the provision of a real definition of the soul, and it is in service of this aim that he assiduously considers what can be known of the soul by means of experience, inasmuch as all these states and faculties will need to be derivable from the essence of the soul (which is disclosed by the real definition). With this real definition in hand, Wolff can proceed to demonstrate a variety of other truths concerning the soul, including its immateriality and personal immortality, but as the basis of an account of finite *spirit*, the definition also serves to disclose the essence and attributes of God, or the infinite spirit. Similarly, Wolff's demonstration of the existence of God draws on both his account of the world,

as the collection of existing substances, and his conclusions relating to the soul's essence. The demonstrated contingency of the former requires the posit of some being that contains the reason for its existence, and the fact that the essence of finite spirit (as a power of representing the world) depends on the world leaves God, an infinite spirit, as the only candidate for the (necessary) being in which the reason for the existence of the world and finite spirit is contained. While these lines of argument constitutes the core of Wolff's metaphysics in the *Deutsche Metaphysik*, they are supplemented by a number of considerations inspired directly by Leibniz, including a defense of a compatibilist conception of freedom, an inconclusive discussion of the nature of the simple elements that make up the world, and an investigation of what can be known through experience about the ground of the agreement between states of the body and the soul along with a qualified defense of the pre-established harmony. Yet Wolff is clear that these considerations are not of central importance for his metaphysics, and accordingly that the characterization of his thought in terms of the "Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy" inappropriately shifts the emphasis towards the highly contestable doctrines (especially that of the monads and of the pre-established harmony) that were defended by Leibniz but whose justification was questioned by Wolff and which in any case contributed little to his principal objectives in the *Deutsche Metaphysik*.

With this detailed account of Wolff's metaphysics in hand, the focus of the study in Part II shifts to the impact of and response to Wolffianism. In Chapter 4, I consider a widely-neglected aspect of Wolff's reception in Germany, namely, the striking uptake of his philosophy among women intellectuals. Rather remarkably for the period, neither Wolff nor the Pietists were blind towards issues facing women—Francke, for instance, had taken the lack of adequate education of girls to be an overlooked source of social ills and had included opportunities for

girls and young women within his educational institutions.¹⁶ Wolff, perhaps surprisingly, found plenty of interest in his views from women and, at one point, had drafted an (uncharacteristically) engaging introduction to his metaphysics expressly intended for this readership. More interesting, however, are the innovative efforts on the part of women thinkers to defend and develop the Wolffian philosophy, in the context of making it more accessible for a female audience. Luise Adelgunde Viktorie Gottsched had harboured an early commitment to the importance of philosophy for moral conduct, a commitment shared with Wolff, and she undertook to defend Wolff through a number of literary works, even as she produced texts (translations, critical commentaries) that advanced the (Leibnizian-)Wolffian cause in the scholarly arena. Another significant figure here is Johanna Charlotte Unzer, who produced a highly original translation of Wolffian texts in logic and metaphysics, accompanied by illustrative passages of poetry and prose. Unzer's text was as much a popularization of Wolff (and a bold experiment in genre in its own right) as it was a challenge to the current conceptions of what aspects of Wolffian thought might be suitable for women to engage with. That Wolff's thought should find advocates and defenders in these two talented female thinkers is a testament to its progressive character and positive impact on German intellectual culture (and finds a telling contrast in Kant's less edifying views about women's intellectual capacities at the other end of the century), though it also provides the missing framework for gaining an appreciation of the thus far often overlooked philosophical contributions of Gottsched and Unzer.

We have already seen that the principal critical response to Wolff's metaphysics was from his Pietist colleagues and, in Chapter 5, I provide an account of the intellectual commitments at the foundation of Halle Pietism. While the Pietist movement has attracted no

¹⁶ For more see Dyck, "On Prejudice and the Limits to Learnedness: Dorothea Christiane Erxleben and the *Querelle des Femmes*."

shortage of attention in historical and theological scholarship, it has garnered little sustained attention on the part of historians of philosophy, and this in spite of its outsized influence on the development of philosophy in Germany in the 18th century. Yet the principal contention of this chapter goes beyond an acknowledgement of their historical importance to assert that the Pietists succeeded in elaborating a systematic, coherent, and compelling philosophical alternative to Wolffian metaphysics, one that developed organically from a core set of commitments common to the major thinkers of the tradition. In order to prepare for this reconsideration of their philosophical *bona fides*, I first rebut the charge of an anti-philosophical (or anti-rational, or anti-Enlightenment) bias among the Pietists by highlighting the ways in which key figures of the movement engaged with philosophers and foregrounding their own contributions to scientific inquiry while also providing necessary context for their criticisms of philosophy. With this, the way is cleared for a sympathetic consideration of what is arguably the most ambitious philosophical work within the Pietist tradition, namely, Lange's own *Medicina mentis*, originally published in 1704, and a text which antedates the dispute with Wolff but which nonetheless raises a number of issues—the limits of the human intellect, the nature of freedom and how we become aware of it—that later take on central importance within it. A familiarity with Lange's text is also vital for appreciating the systematic character, and the philosophical integrity, of his subsequent critique of Wolff articulated throughout the various *Streitschriften*. In the end, however one might appraise the result of Lange's campaign against Wolffianism, he does succeed in outlining, for the first time in Germany, a comprehensive metaphysical perspective, one that proceeds on the novel basis of a foundational commitment to the freedom of the human will.

In Part III, comprising Chapters 6 through 9, the focus is narrowed to specific topics in metaphysics. In each case a similar approach is taken. First a contentious metaphysical issue is isolated and the contrasting positions of Wolff and his Pietist opponents are considered. Then, I consider the immediate reception of that debate among thinkers within the broader Wolffian and/or Pietist traditions. Finally, I show how some thinkers who engaged with this debate adopted a variety of strategies for resolving the apparent tension between the Wolffian and Pietist views (beyond offering dogmatic defenses of their favoured view), but also developed novel metaphysical positions of their own as a result of this engagement. In this way, I hope to illustrate how, in spite of the unilluminating polemics, the dispute between Wolff and the Pietists nonetheless served as a crucial frame for metaphysical inquiry, inspiring and shaping discussion among subsequent German thinkers in the first half of the 18th century (and often beyond).

Chapter 6 looks at a key topic in ontology, and a focal point of the controversy, namely, the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). Following Leibniz, Wolff had installed the PSR at the centre of his ontology, though Wolff appears to go further than Leibniz in offering a proof of the principle itself, a circumstance that only seems to confirm his more extreme rationalistic commitments. Yet, as I show, this is not the case, as Wolff's proofs of the PSR in the *Deutsche Metaphysik* draw, quite deliberately, on Leibniz's published thoughts on the matter, while Wolff's own reflections on the justification and use of the principle outside of the *Deutsche Metaphysik* are quite consistent with a more moderate characterization of Wolffian rationalism. Even so, it was Wolff's deployment of the PSR within his metaphysics that drew the ire of Lange, who contested that principle's unlimited use across the domains of metaphysics, particularly with respect to spirits. Lange's objections were taken up by subsequent thinkers sympathetic to the Pietists, such as Adolph Friedrich Hoffmann and Christian August Crusius,

who rigorously distinguished between versions of the PSR and introduced formal restrictions on their respective uses. More striking, however, is the reception among these later anti-Wolffian thinkers of the PSR as a principle of cognition, which both Hoffmann and Crusius accept independently of any need for proof and the use of which they do not in anyway circumscribe. Additionally, it is through the presumption of the principle in this sense that Hoffmann is led to formulate other principles that are foundational for human cognition (i.e., they supply the reason for any instance of conviction on our part), and in this Hoffmann is followed by Crusius. As becomes clear, the stark opposition between Wolff and his Pietist critics in the original dispute gives way to a far more complex and nuanced treatment of the PSR among subsequent thinkers (including avowed opponents of Wolffianism).

Chapters 7 and 8 take up issues in empirical and rational psychology, respectively. Chapter 7 makes the case for the foundational importance of the faculty of sensation, both in Wolff's account of cognition but also as playing the key role in his derivation of all the faculties of the soul from a single, fundamental power. The centrality of sensation for Wolff has been overlooked by many, but it was not lost on his Pietist critics, as Lange challenged it explicitly, claiming that it yielded an impoverished account of the sorts of ideas human cognition was capable of (particularly concerning our ideas of spiritual things), and that it generated an inconsistency with Wolff's account of freedom, as Wolff's claims concerning the strict necessity of sensation contradict his characterization of acts of the will grounded on those sensations as free. Interestingly, these challenges provoke two rather contrasting strategies among Wolff's defenders. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, for instance, seeks to address the former concern by filling out Wolff's account of the lower cognitive (and appetitive) faculty considerably. By contrast, Anton Wilhelm Amo, identified by at least one contemporary historian as a Wolffian

thinker, attempts a more radical response to the latter problem, excising the (passive) faculty of sensation from the soul entirely, conceiving of it instead in terms of pure, spontaneous (and non-necessitated) activity.

Chapter 8 turns to the topic of immortality, where the discussion sets out from Wolff's initial, fairly perfunctory presentation near the conclusion of the psychology of the *Deutsche Metaphysik*. In response to Pietist criticisms, including that Wolff's conception of the afterlife prioritized the preservation of our cognitive capacities without any attention to our practical situation (of virtue, for instance, or blessedness), Wolff's disciples and defenders variously amended and expanded his treatment. Yet, among the most interesting and original contributions to this intense discussion concerning the soul's immortality within the Wolffian school, was that of Georg Friedrich Meier, a student of Baumgarten and later a professor at the Friedrichs-Universität. Meier adopts a critical position on the possibility of any *demonstrative* certainty concerning the soul's survival of the body's death or the nature of its life afterwards. Nonetheless, Meier also defends the importance of a conviction in our immortality founded on faith (inasmuch as the soul's immortality is revealed through Scripture) and on the significance of that conviction as an incentive for virtuous action. In both of these respects, Meier offers a clear anticipation of Kant, but also serves as an excellent illustration of the originality, sophistication, and subtlety that Wolffian philosophers in this period were capable of.

Finally, Chapter 9, which also serves as a conclusion to the study, takes up issues in both cosmology and natural theology in the context of Lange's charge that Wolff's metaphysics constitutes a form of Spinozism. While Lange was not the first to level this accusation, he did offer the most detailed case in favour of attributing at least a partial Spinozism to Wolff. Wolff did respond to this accusation in a number of publications, but his responses were subsequently

deemed inadequate by at least one Wolffian sympathist, namely Moses Mendelssohn, who revived Lange's charge that the pre-established harmony has its source in Spinoza's psycho-physical parallelism. Indeed, that Mendelssohn, in his first philosophical publication, should seek to reignite this dispute is all the more surprising given his apparent approval of Wolff's diagnosis (in his *Theologia naturalis*) of the source of Spinoza's errors in his faulty ontological definitions. However, I contend that Mendelssohn's actual concern is to elucidate a deeper continuity between Spinoza and Wolffian metaphysics, consisting in their shared conception of the relation of the world to the intellect of God before the act of creation. Mendelssohn's aim in pointing out this shared heritage is not, as Lange's was, to undermine Wolff's metaphysics, but rather to draw attention to an instability in Wolffian metaphysics itself in relying on an unacknowledged debt to Spinoza while purporting to refute the doctrine itself. For Mendelssohn, this instability is at the root of a certain prevalent, cynical attitude towards metaphysics, which accordingly must be immunized from the threat of Spinozism before it can reliably serve its important role as a foundation of science and morality. Mendelssohn would, of course, prove prescient in this diagnosis of the contemporary state of metaphysics, and he himself would serve as a crucial connection between Wolff's controversy with the Pietists and the *Pantheismusstreit* more than a half-century later.

By way of concluding this introduction, it might be appropriate to add a brief word qualifying, and justifying, the title of this study. As should be clear, the *fifty years* at issue are from roughly 1700 (marking the commencement of Wolff's university studies) to 1750 (when the influence of Wolffianism on intellectual culture begins to wane). As revealed by Mendelssohn and Unzer, Wolffianism still finds its staunch defenders after 1750, but its influence on debate is largely negative as the next generation of thinkers strains against the limits

of Wolffian thinking. That I refer to these as the *first* fifty years of German metaphysics is not intended as a denial that there was any metaphysical tradition in Germany before (Leibniz and Wolff, as this tradition obviously goes back well beyond Wolff's text (as studies by Lewis White Beck, Max Wundt, and others have documented). Instead, the title is intended to highlight the novelty and significance of Wolff's decision to publish his metaphysics in *German*, a fact that without question enhanced its reach and impact and uniquely contributed to the rapid development of a German philosophical lexicon and literature. More importantly, however, the *German Metaphysics* that is squarely the focus of this study is just Wolff's *Deutsche Metaphysik*, and my aim is to offer a comprehensive treatment of its development, interpretation, impact, and influence over the first half of the 18th century. This leads to a number of omissions in coverage, for instance, of treatments of metaphysics by Wolff's contemporaries who did not contribute materially to the development of his system, or engage with it after it was constructed. But even some of Wolff's own texts, such as his later, Latin presentation of his metaphysics, do not receive consideration in their own right, but only insofar as they clarify Wolff's original treatment or respond to an objection by a Wolffian critic (such as Wolff's response to Lange's charge of Spinozism in the *Theologia naturalis*).

Even with such costs, however, I take it that my focus on Wolff's *Deutsche Metaphysik* is justified by the fact that it was, by far, the most influential of all Wolff's forays into metaphysics and the most important text on the topic for much of the first half of the 18th century in the German-speaking lands of Europe. Even for some decades after (until, roughly, 1781), the *Deutsche Metaphysik* was the indispensable starting point for any systematic consideration of metaphysical themes. That the *Deutsche Metaphysik* is still so misunderstood by philosophers today thus means that a crucial, foundational, and formative, period in the history of German

philosophy—and indeed *classical* German philosophy—also remains misunderstood. It is to rectifying this oversight, and to giving Wolff—but also his Pietist critics and the philosophers who took up positions between them—their rightful place near the beginning of the story of the development of German metaphysics, that this study is devoted.