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# Women and Philosophy in Eighteenth- Century Germany

*Edited by*

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several occasions that our knowledge of the nature of things is very limited. In other words, our understanding cannot grasp the metaphysical principles underpinning the relation of physical influence between the soul and the body. This position is very close to Locke's in his *Essay*, which Élisabeth Charlotte appears to defend as well, and it is more than possible that Sophie's view shares with theirs strong similarities. Third, and finally, it thus seems inadequate to conclude that Sophie adopted a form of materialism, or any kind of ontological principle. In response to van Helmont's, Leibniz's, and Molanus' doctrines, she systematically resisted the idea of either approving or disapproving of them, and instead simply pointed out that our knowledge cannot grasp such principles. She admired their conceptions, but reminded them that several positions they support were confused and probably insufficiently grounded. Her empirical approach to the problems of psychology thus avoided certain ill-founded speculations and allowed her to focus on phenomena specific to the soul-body relationship, such as the origin of sensations and the different functions of memory and imagination. According to her, a posteriori descriptions give us a better picture of the nature and role of thoughts and ideas. Significantly, this conception would have an important posterity in Germany, most notably in Wolff who, for instance, based his psychology on empirical descriptions, but also in several other thinkers in the Wolffian movement.

## 2

## A Modern Diotima

Johanna Charlotte Unzer between Wolffianism,  
Aesthetics, and Popular Philosophy

Stefanie Buchenau

At first glance, German Enlightenment philosophy presents itself as an esoteric domain. The motto one read over the entrance to Plato's Academy—'Let no one untrained in geometry enter'—also seems to apply to the then-prevalent Wolffian *Schulphilosophie*. Conceived of as a methodical science in the mathematical and Cartesian style, this philosophy requires particular technical skills to understand it. It consequently seems to be reserved for the happy few who are not only able to attain a genuinely philosophical standpoint but who are also trained in logic and mathematics. Inversely, it excludes those who will not benefit from those studies and for whom a mathematical and philosophical conversion would not be possible. It is therefore quite surprising that this school-philosophy takes an exoteric and popular turn toward the middle of the eighteenth century, where one observes new tendencies towards the popularization, democratization, and feminization of philosophy. This mathematical philosophy not only allows for popular and didactic forms of translation but also appeals to a new set of female authors and readers. Strikingly, this has an influence on the philosophical system itself as it begins to absorb a popular and rhetorical element, blurring the borders between the order of invention and a more popular order oriented to teaching. As a result, popular and feminine authors begin to view themselves as more than teachers and translators, and begin to claim the title of philosophers for themselves. This tendency is already visible in several authors from the Wolffian school, such as with Johann Christoph Gottsched, whose moral weekly *Die vernünftigen Tadelrinnen* was published from 1725–26,<sup>1</sup> but also with the poetry and translations of his wife Luise Adelgunde Gottsched, Emilie Du Châtelet's

<sup>1</sup> This moral weekly has fictional female editors: Phyllis (alias Johann Friedrich May), Iris (Johann Georg Hamann), Clio (Lucas Geiger), and Calliste (Gottsched himself) desirous to contribute to their sisters' (and brothers') moral education and decided to do so without any male mentorship (Gottsched 1725, n° 1). For particular articles on women emancipation, see also issues 6, 7, 12, 23, 27, 40, 44, 50, 51, 52 of 1725 and issues 21, 24, 26, 37, 43, 49 of 1726.

*Institutions physiques* (1740),<sup>2</sup> Samuel Formey's *La belle Wolffiennne* (6 vols., 1741–1753)<sup>3</sup>, and even in a presentation of his philosophy intended for women drafted by Wolff himself in 1738.<sup>4</sup>

But this tendency is perhaps best illustrated by Johanna Charlotte Unzer (1724–1782). Unzer<sup>5</sup> (also referred to as 'Unzerin' or 'Zieglerin', after her maiden name, according to the older German convention) was a German writer, poet, and philosopher. In some sense, she was Germany's *very first* female philosopher, publishing, in 1751, the first metaphysical treatise expressly for women, the *Grundriss einer Weltweisheit für das Frauenzimmer* (*Outline of a Philosophy for the Lady*), which was presented according to the Wolffian style and stands as a testament to her active participation in the German Enlightenment debate. For this treatise, which will be the focus of this chapter, she not only seems to have benefited from the protection and support of several major figures, in particular: the Wolffian Georg Friedrich Meier, co-founder with A. G. Baumgarten of the discipline of aesthetics, and two major philosopher-physicians in Halle, her uncle Johann Gottlob Krüger and her husband Johann August Unzer, whose philosophical arsenal she develops and deploys. This support was key in allowing her to practise philosophy within the social conventions of her time. Strikingly, Unzer neither shows up dressed in men's clothes at male philosophers' reunions, as Châtelet did in Paris, nor does she enter into a mathematical competition with her male counterparts. She does not even attempt to question certain traditional 'essentialist' assumptions about female nature, honours, or duties. Instead, she contents herself with exploring aesthetic and stylistic dimensions, adding nothing more than 'ornament' and 'pleasant clothing'. Her philosophy is all about traditionally 'feminine' topics, about love and falling in love, about contemplating and mirroring beauty, about sentiment, art, poetry, the art of conversation, and happiness. Otherwise put, in order to engage in the practice of philosophy, she plays the 'aesthetics' card.<sup>6</sup>

But as I will show here, despite this playful dimension, Unzer actively participated in the philosophical debate, and she offers a serious criticism and revision

<sup>2</sup> Châtelet's project to act as Wolff's apostle in France met with Wolff's approval, but was soon abandoned. See Ostertag (ed.), *Der philosophische Gehalt des Wolff-Manteuffelschen Briefwechsels*, pp. 38–44. See also Hagenruber and Hecht (eds), *Emilie Du Châtelet und die deutsche Aufklärung*.

<sup>3</sup> Formey puts his Wolffian lessons into the mouth of Espérance, a young and charming lady from Berlin-Charlottenburg.

<sup>4</sup> Christian Wolff, in 1738, drafted a presentation of his philosophy for women, set up as a series of letters between himself and a fictional young noblewoman. For the details of this project, see Wolff's correspondence with Manteuffel in 1738, presented in Ostertag, *Der philosophische Gehalt des Wolff-Manteuffelschen Briefwechsels*. One might also see Corey Dyck's contribution in this volume for details of the Thomasian context for the feminization of philosophy in the period.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this chapter, references to 'Unzer' should be taken to refer to Johanna Charlotte, whereas I shall refer to her husband by his full name.

<sup>6</sup> For a general presentation of this first aesthetics and Wolff's and Baumgarten's respective contributions, see Buchenau, *The Founding of Aesthetics in the German Enlightenment*.

of the Wolffian model of philosophy, concerning its very idea, nature, aims, and ambitions. Together with her male colleagues, she elaborates on the particularities of Wolff's model of philosophical systematicity in order to transform and expand the mathematical model of philosophy into a popular model, thereby paving the path of philosophy towards the later Enlightenment. To blend systematic and popular philosophy, she recurs to older, long-forgotten Platonic views about philosophy, and offers a view of philosophy as the love of wisdom, as an art of happiness, beauty, poetry, and dialogue. This in turn allows her to confer a properly philosophical value to certain areas and talents traditionally ascribed to women, such as wit, invention curiosity, love of beauty, and poetry, heart, and healthy understanding; it allows her to act as a 'teacher of her own sex' and as a philosopher. Unzer appeals to her 'sisters,' to rise above their present state of dwelling among the 'lowest kinds of souls' and exhorts them to become 'enlightened minds.'<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter, I will try to reconstruct Unzer's argument from its Wolffian premises, and show in what sense Wolffianism itself allows for such a reversal. My discussion will be divided into four parts. The first is a general presentation and historical contextualization of Unzer and her philosophical project. The second is on philosophy as love of wisdom and wisdom of ignorance. The third is on philosophy as an art of happiness. The fourth and final part is on philosophy as an art of poetry, dialogue, and communication.

## 1. Unzer's *Weltweisheit* and the Social Obstacles to Women in Philosophy

It will be helpful to begin with some words on Unzer's biography. Born in Halle, the headquarters of Pietism, Wolffianism, anthropology, and aesthetics, Unzer was raised in a family of musicians. Her parents were Johann Gotthilf Ziegler (1687/8–1747), organist at the Ulrich's church and a student of Johann Sebastian Bach, and Anna Elisabetha (1699–1751), born Krüger, from a line of clock-makers. Educated in the 'higher daughters' school in Halle, part of the famous educational institutions founded by the Pietist A. H. Francke, Unzer underwent the traditional female curriculum, focusing on practical matters and religion. As she explains herself in one of her writings, her school did not offer her the opportunity to learn Latin, Greek, and foreign languages. Presumably, it did not offer any extensive learning of mathematics and the sciences either.<sup>8</sup> And yet, thanks to her

<sup>7</sup> Unzer, *Weltweisheit*, §15.

<sup>8</sup> For a general presentation of Unzer's life, see in particular Gehring, *Johanne Charlotte Unzer-Ziegler, Ein Ausschnitt aus dem literarischen Leben in Halle, Göttingen und Altona*; Bennet-Vahle's introduction to the reprint of Unzer's *Weltweisheit*; Green, *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1700–1800*, in particular chapter 5, 'From Hanover and Leipzig to Russia,' pp. 102–30; Langer,

family's connections, Unzer was deeply immersed in the Halle cultural and intellectual milieu and directly in touch with its innovators in aesthetics, poetry, anthropology, medicine, and natural philosophy. She was the niece of Johann Gottlob Krüger<sup>9</sup> (1715–1759), who from 1743 held a chair in medicine at the university of Halle, before becoming a professor of philosophy and medicine at the university of Helmstedt in 1750. And she was married to the philosopher-physician Johann August Unzer (1727–1799)<sup>10</sup> who had studied medicine with her uncle and piano with her father, regularly replacing him as an organist at the Ulrich's church.

After their marriage in 1751, the young couple moved to Altona, close to Hamburg. In the same year, 1751, Unzer published her philosophical treatise *Grundriss einer Weltweisheit für das Frauenzimmer (Outline of a Philosophy for the Lady)*<sup>11</sup>, composed of a metaphysics and a natural philosophy, and a separate work on natural history and natural philosophy, the *Grundriss einer natürlichen Historie und eigentlichen Naturlehre für das Frauenzimmer (Outline of a Natural History and Proper Doctrine of Nature for the Lady)*. She completed these philosophical writings along with several collections of poetry in the Anacreontic style, including the *Versuch in Scherzgedichten* (1751), *Versuch in sittlichen und zärtlichen Gedichten* (1754), and the *Fortgesetzte Versuche in sittlichen und zärtlichen Gedichten*, (1766). Her first volume of poems earned her the 'imperial poet's crown' in 1753 and she was named an honorary member of two literary societies, the *Deutsche Gesellschaften* of Göttingen and Helmstedt. She seems to have had a happy marriage with Johann August—'Damis', as she calls him in several poems—though it was overshadowed by the loss of two children and her husband's and her own illness.<sup>12</sup> Unzer died in Altona, at the age of 57.

<sup>9</sup> 'Johanna Charlotte Unzerin: erste deutsche Weltweise,' pp. 8–22; and Meyer, *Philosophinnen Leben: Johanna Charlotte Unzer*.

<sup>9</sup> Johann Gottlob Krüger is mainly known for his *Naturlehre* and for his research on electrotherapy but he composed a number of writings on anthropological and psychological matters, such as a treatise on education in 1752, a literary volume entitled *Träume* in 1754, and the *Versuch einer Experimental-Seelenlehre* in 1756. For a broader overview over the philosopher-physicians in Halle and Krüger in particular, see Zelle (ed.), *Vernünftige Ärzte: Halle Psychomediziner und die Anfänge der Anthropologie in der deutschsprachigen Frühaufklärung*.

<sup>10</sup> Johann August Unzer took an active part in the anthropological debates of the Enlightenment, at the crossroads of philosophy and medicine. He was particularly concerned with the philosophical impact of Haller's new physiology. After his dissertation *De sternatione* (1743), he published a number of philosophical and medical treatises, including *Philosophische Betrachtung des menschlichen Körpers überhaupt* (1750); *Gesellschaftliche Erzählungen für die Liebhaber der Naturlehre, der Haushaltungswissenschaft, der Arznei-Kunst und der Sitten*, (1753–1754); *Sammlungen zur speculativen Philosophie* (1766); a *Medicinisches Handbuch* in three volumes (1770); *Erste Gründe einer Physiologie der eigentlichen thierischen Natur thierischer Körper* (1771). Johann August Unzer was also the editor of the weekly *Journal Der Arzt. Eine medicinische Wochenschrift* (1760–1764).

<sup>11</sup> For clarity of reference, I will refer to Unzer's *Grundriss einer Weltweisheit für das Frauenzimmer* as 'Weltweisheit', and to her *Grundriss einer natürlichen Historie und eigentlichen Naturlehre für das Frauenzimmer* as 'Naturlehre'.

<sup>12</sup> See the preface to Unzer, *Fortgesetzte Versuche in sittlichen und zärtlichen Gedichten*.

Undoubtedly, Unzer's *Weltweisheit* would not have been written if she had not benefited from her male mentors' and friends' support. For despite the proclaimed Enlightenment of her age, she faced dismaying obstacles in overcoming the exclusion of women from the circle of the learned and in reconciling her philosophical interest and convictions with the social conventions of her time which imposed upon women a totally distinct set of 'honors' or 'duties'. These difficulties are already reflected in the formal arrangement of the treatise. Her uncle Krüger wrote a dedication and a long preface, to justify the 'unhabitual' enterprise,<sup>13</sup> to act as a protector, and stand surety for the moral virtue and truths expounded by his *protégée*. To show the latter's female modesty, he insists that he had to 'wrest' and even 'steal' the manuscript from her hands; that he had to even use violence to make her publish it against her will. Krüger, who dedicated the treatise to princess Philippine Charlotte of Prussia,<sup>14</sup> appeals to Germany's national pride, recalling the 'recent Italian and French examples', presumably alluding to Francesco Algarotti's *Il newtonianisme per le dame* (1737), Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), and the *Institutions physiques* (1740) by Emilie Du Châtelet, all of which seem to have found their way to Germany and have, in Krüger's view, set an example for the German nation.<sup>15</sup>

In his long preface, Krüger adds a number of further arguments 'to save the honor of the lady,'<sup>16</sup> to justify his own support, and to anticipate possible objections. Some may think, Krüger imagines, that his defence of his niece's project exhibits his hate for his own male sex, or represents an attempt to turn the world upside down and 'disturb the public order.'<sup>17</sup> One could even be worried that he himself may encourage women to neglect their domestic duties and initiate a larger and socially dangerous change: that women could first try to become students, 'bursting the lecture halls', and, later on, 'priests, lawyers and doctors'. Their attempts to 'sneak into public service' would be all the more successful since they 'possess the gift to win their superiors' hearts.'<sup>18</sup> It goes without saying, Krüger adds, what a 'disaster [*Unglück*]' this would represent for the male sex, and the objections might have persuaded him to destroy her manuscript, affirms Krüger, but confronted with the *fait accompli*, he does not regret his decision. He adds that these objections mainly express a wounded vanity, and a male 'tyranny' that has all too long hindered women from prospering. In addition to his lengthy

<sup>13</sup> Krüger, preface to Unzer, *Weltweisheit*, unpaginated.

<sup>14</sup> Krüger obviously hoped to find support for Unzer's writing project on behalf of his Princess who was herself an Enlightened mind, and even a reader of Wolff. According to Cramer she even composed an 'extract' of Wolff's writings in French—Cramer, *Zur Geschichte Friedrich Wilhelms I. und Friedrichs II., Könige von Preussen*, p. 77.

<sup>15</sup> Fontenelle's *Entretiens* have been translated by Gottsched in 1726. Unzer and her husband also seem to be familiar with these references (Châtelet, Fontenelle), as indicated by certain quotes in the text. Unzer particularly refers to Fontenelle.

<sup>16</sup> See Unzer's preface to *Weltweisheit*, unpaginated.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

preface, Krüger enriches his niece's treatise by a great number of footnotes, illustrations, and diagrams in order to develop, clarify, and sum up her argument, gently correcting her whenever she goes astray, or to rebut real or imagined objections to Unzer's philosophical enterprise.

Unzer's project received further encouragement from Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–1777), a colleague and disciple of Baumgarten, and a close friend of the Unzer family. Although he did not sign as a co-author, Meier seems to have initiated the very project realized by Unzer in his own journal *Der Gesellige*, as early as 1748, that is, three years before the publication of Unzer's *Weltweisheit*.<sup>19</sup> Meier here drafts an educational programme for women in philosophy and the humanities. Attacking the reign of shallow academic scholarship in philosophy, he explicitly formulates the wish that 'someone may compose a logic and metaphysics for the lady', suited both for women and the uneducated public and presented in the style of aesthetics, and he expresses regret that no one has yet undertaken such an endeavour.<sup>20</sup> In 1751, the year of the publication of the *Weltweisheit*, Meier came back to the same issue. In an entry of his weekly, *Der Mensch*, he develops a political position in favour of women's emancipation. He here appeals to his reader to acknowledge the female sex as an equal part of humanity, as *Menschinnen*,<sup>21</sup> as he puts it, and he denounces the male attitude of disrespect or contempt towards women, as well as the lamentable state of women's education of women and its underlying cause, namely, a male desire to dominate and prevent women from becoming as intelligent as them, as Meier states very clearly.<sup>22</sup>

Unzer herself, joined her male mentors' argumentative line, although her own statements seem to downplay her involvement in the project. In the preface of her *Naturlehre*, she curses her own 'temerity' and 'male ambition', incompatible with 'the weakness of her sex'.<sup>23</sup> In the preface of the *Weltweisheit*, she confirms the truth of her uncle's account of the origin of the text and waives any pretension to philosophical originality and genuine authorship. In order to better comply with *decorum* and to demonstrate her feminine modesty, she here willfully endorses

<sup>19</sup> Meier, 'Von der Gelehrsamkeit des Frauenzimmers,' in *Der Gesellige*, Vol. 1, 75. Stück, pp. 424–30. Thanks to Corey Dyck for making me aware of this important reference.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>21</sup> 'Wir erkennen das weibliche Geschlecht für Menschinnen, für die angenehmere und schönere Hälfte und für die Zierde des menschlichen Geschlechts; wir behaupten, dass sie eben so viel Verstand haben als die Mannspersonen; wir wollen, dass sie jeder Mensch hochachten soll. Unsere Arbeit soll dahin gehen, den Zustand dieser Menschinnen zu verbessern.' (Meier, *Der Mensch*, 41. Stück, p. 376)

<sup>22</sup> Meier's defence echoes the authors of the *Vernünftigen Tadelrinnen*. In n° 40 (1725), one reads similarly: 'A major intention of our weekly essays is to encourage the female sex to improve their understanding and will; another intention is to save our honor against the unreasonable calumniars of the lady.' ('Eine Hauptabsicht unsrer wöchentlichen Schriften ist die Aufmunterung des weiblichen Geschlechtes zur Verbesserung ihres Verstandes und Willens; und eine andere, die Rettung unserer Ehre gegen die unverständigen Verächter des Frauenzimmers'). But as we will see, on account of his move toward aesthetics, Meier reserved a more important space for woman in philosophy than Gottsched and his co-authors.

<sup>23</sup> Unzer, *Naturlehre*, preface (unpaginated).

the role of her husband's student, confessing that she, from the very beginning, felt a certain 'indifference' toward her own treatise. Originally, she had only intended to sum up her husband's letters (four very thick quarto volumes) containing his translation of and annotations on Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, to make sure that she had understood them correctly and to give them a pleasant form. Later on, she seems to have decided to publish them so as to let her 'sisters' benefit from this 'translation' and more popular and pleasant 'clothing': 'I cannot say that in the whole writing I have invented a single truth. My proper contribution does not reach further than the verbal clothing (*Einkleidung*) of the presentation and the choice of a few examples and ornaments (*Verzierungen*).'<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Philosophy as Love of Wisdom and Wisdom of One's Own Ignorance

At first glance, Unzer's ornamental and rhetorical ambition to 'cover the thorns of the sciences with flowers,'<sup>25</sup> as her uncle Krüger puts it in his dedication, seems to express a rather formal adherence to Wolffianism, or, alternatively, a popular and didactic rather than a properly philosophical ambition. Unzer, of course, maintains the Wolffian division of logic and metaphysics in her 852 page-long *Weltweisheit*. She here roughly follows the same outline and the same methodical and systematic order, beginning with logic, in the first part, and continuing through the different parts of metaphysics, ontology, cosmology, psychology with its two parts i.e. empirical and rational psychology, and concluding with natural theology. She appears to use Wolff's *Vernünfftige Gedanken von den Kräften des menschlichen Verstandes und ihrem richtigen Gebrauch in der Erkenntnis der Wahrheit (or the German Logic)*, as the basis for the introductory part, including sections on philosophy, the acquisition of concepts, propositions, judgements and syllogisms, and practical logic. As already noted, her presentation of metaphysics is based on Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* of 1739; and in her treatment of ontology in the context of metaphysics, she covers most of the principal topics from Wolffian metaphysics, including the role of ontology as an architectonic science, the notions of being and non-being, essence, substance, the principles of contradiction and of sufficient reason, perfection, reality, order, possibility, and she notably devotes a lengthy discussion to the monads.

Despite these formal and structural resemblances with Wolff's systematic treatises, Unzer seems to have abandoned the very core of Wolff's philosophical ambition, namely, to provide an exhaustive systematization and mathematization of all branches of knowledge. Wolff famously combined the ideals of logical

<sup>24</sup> Unzer, *Weltweisheit*, preface to the second edition. See also §171.

<sup>25</sup> Krüger, dedication to the *Weltweisheit*, unpaginated.

rigour (*Gründlichkeit*) or systematicity and aspired to transform historical knowledge into philosophical and mathematical knowledge.<sup>26</sup> As Kant put it in a well-known passage from the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Wolff's merit is to have introduced the spirit of 'well-groundedness' in Germany, by giving us 'the first example... of the way in which the secure course of a science is to be taken, through the regular ascertainment of the principles, the clear determination of concepts, the attempt at strictness in the proofs, and the prevention of audacious leaps in inferences.'<sup>27</sup> Wolff even went beyond all of his predecessors in the rationalist tradition such as Descartes and Leibniz, insofar as he sought to include all of the sciences and the arts in this vast enterprise of mathematization.

Unzer, by contrast, seems reluctant to develop a philosophical discourse in the mathematical style, employing axioms, definitions, propositions, and proofs as if she judged such a formal style unnecessary for exhibiting a systematic order. While retaining the definitions from Wolffian philosophy, she summed up the explanatory parts, replacing them with examples and various narratives but pays little attention to the most abstract parts such as ontology and rational psychology. In her preface to the second edition of the *Weltweisheit*, she even expresses regret for having devoted too much space to metaphysics. Moreover, she makes her distrust of mathematicians clear, affirming that they 'are those serious people who always have lines and circles on their mind and a woman should not even bother trying to get to know them as they are so sullen [*mürrisch*]!'<sup>28</sup> Neither mathematics nor academic philosophy deserve any effort on behalf of women philosophers. Deep thoughts which make philosophers 'wear a permanent scowl on their face' are as inappropriate to women as learning 'the herringbone stitch [*Hexelstich*]' is to a university professor, she insists, and her female readers should not ever aspire to become professional academics:<sup>29</sup> 'The subject matter is all too serious, and it is enough that the most gloomy men worry their minds. It is natural to them, not to us.'<sup>30</sup> While acknowledging the need for acquiring a habit of ordered thinking<sup>31</sup> and of progressive clarification of one's notions toward greater distinctness, she devalues the mathematical style and tendency toward exhaustive formalization as a mere 'fashion,' expressive of a vain and excessive passion of demonstration (*Demonstrirsucht*)<sup>32</sup>. Although originally intended to uncover logical errors, such a style may on the contrary effectively mask such errors and serve as a 'veil of ignorance.' It may express stubbornness rather than guarantee certainty. Her uncle complicates this verdict in several footnotes, presenting Euler as a counterexample and as 'the most affectionate and amiable

fellow,'<sup>33</sup> emphasizing his niece's tendency to understate her own mathematical skills, and underlining the use of mathematics in acquiring a habit of reasoning. But Unzer did not seem willing to fundamentally revise her judgement on this score.

While thus relativizing the value of the mathematical model for philosophy, Unzer introduced new alternatives. She suggests a return to the Greek origins of philosophy, in Solon, Thales, and Plato,<sup>34</sup> and to the Platonic conception of philosophy as a love of wisdom that seems to have fallen into oblivion in recent times. True philosophy cannot be mere mathematical wisdom, grounded on a distinct and mathematical knowledge of first principles. Before becoming such a mathematical science, it must first and foremost be grounded in love, *eros*, in some attraction to a higher realm of things for their beauty, goodness, and true being. Such love of beauty is not a kind of infatuation (*Verliebtheit*), disturbing the mind and distracting the mental effort of attention—Unzer insists that she does not wish to speak to enamoured readers (*verliebte Leserinnen*)<sup>35</sup>—it is rather the love of beauty and desire for good things, wisdom, and happiness, which must lie at the very foundation of knowledge, wisdom, and philosophy.<sup>36</sup> And this higher realm of beauty and truth is what Unzer herself has irresistibly fallen in love with. As her uncle Krüger recognizes,

my sister's daughter has fallen in love with the charming regions of a country which, in spite of its greatest pleasantness, has so few inhabitants that she has sketched these and has drafted a map more for her own pleasure than ever thinking that she would show the beautiful sex the path to the temple of wisdom.<sup>37</sup>

For Unzer, such a nascent love of truth first takes the shape of a love of the world's and the soul's own beauty. Souls are not sleeping but wakeful monads,<sup>38</sup> whose quest for knowledge is stirred by their contemplation of the world in its divine beauty. As Unzer puts it, souls are 'mirrors reflecting the beauties of the world- edifice, enhancing and duplicating its beauty and its shine.'<sup>39</sup> This receptiveness for and love of beauty, accompanied by a particular curiosity for novelty and attention to detail is what conditions the methodical acquisition of an art of attention, developed in the parts on logic and natural history, and the faculty of sense, or 'clear' and 'vivid' knowledge of the world. Attention, as opposed to

<sup>26</sup> See the distinction between three forms of knowledge: historical, philosophical, and mathematical in the first chapter of Wolff's *Discursus praeliminaris de philosophia in genere*.

<sup>27</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxxvi.

<sup>28</sup> See the first part of the *Weltweisheit*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, §15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, §51.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, see her uncle's note to §131.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, §110.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, § 5, footnote.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, §§10 and 169.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, §43.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 210d f.; and Unzer, *Weltweisheit*, §10.

<sup>37</sup> 'Meiner Schwester Tochter hat sich in die reizenden Gegenden eines Landes, das bey der größten Annehmlichkeit so wenig Einwohner hat, dergestalt verliebt, daß sie dieselben entworfen und mehr zu ihren eigenen Vergnügen eine Chartre davon gezeichnet, als daß sie sich es hätte sollen in den Sinn kommen lassen, dem schönen Geschlechte dadurch den Weg zum Tempel der Wahrheit zu zeigen.' (Krüger, *Weltweisheit*, dedication)

<sup>38</sup> Unzer, *Weltweisheit*, §224 ff.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, §1.

distraktion (*Zerstreuung*), here comprises both a positive faculty of recollection (*sein Gemüth beysammen halten*) and of obscuration (*Verdunkelung*).<sup>40</sup> Such an art of attention is not concerned with mental constructions, but with a rich and 'fruitful' perception of the empirical world and its objects, allowing for new discoveries.<sup>41</sup> Poetry and in particular Brockes' and Haller's physico-theological and didactic poetry seem to offer a model for such an art of attention and *aisthesis*. They are part of a novel natural history, natural philosophy, an art of invention and heuristics, allowing the mind to focus on the empirical objects, represent and distinguish its particular features, and draw the kind of inferences that allow it to discern novel features. According to Unzer, natural history offers an art of observation and a catalogue,<sup>42</sup> collecting and describing beautiful and wonderful objects. This is why she advises her female readers to establish their own collections, to practise observation and even experimentation,<sup>43</sup> in order to make their own discoveries and enhance their own faculties for invention.

But according to Unzer's Platonic intuition, philosophy is not only love of wisdom, but also the wisdom of one's own ignorance. As Plato points out in the *Apology*, Socrates is wise precisely because he neither knows nor thinks that he knows. Unzer elaborates on this Socratic ignorance and scepticism in several strategic paragraphs of both of her philosophical works. In the *Weltweisheit*, she decides to suspend her judgement on the validity of certain metaphysical truths and leave them 'undecided'.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in the *Naturlehre*, she explains that 'nothing shows us better the limits of our knowledge than natural history and philosophy', whose effect is both morally elevating and devastating, crushing, or humiliating. For the contemplation of sublime nature and the infinite planetary system simultaneously stirs our quest for knowledge and shows us how little we know. Nature in fact 'reveals no more of her secrets than what is necessary for the best possible promotion of our happiness'. This is why Unzer concludes her treatise with the 'humble sentence which should be a motto for all philosophers': 'I know that even after all my efforts, I do not know anything perfectly.'<sup>45</sup>

Yet, this substitution of the mathematical model of philosophy by an alternative Platonic model of philosophy emphasizing the *love* of wisdom (if not its attainability) is not as dismissive of Wolff as it may seem, for this Platonic reversal seems incipient in Wolff and Wolffianism itself. Although borrowing from mathematical Cartesianism and extending its mathematical method to all fields of knowledge, Wolff already tends to relativize its importance. According to his

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, §25.

<sup>41</sup> See for example §41.

<sup>42</sup> Notice that Unzer relies on Linnaeus but does not show any interest in the methodical debates on classification in natural history, particularly that between Linnaeus and Buffon in the first half of the eighteenth century.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, §88.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, §134. See also the quote from Gellert.

<sup>45</sup> 'Niemand wird mir es also verdenken, daß ich diese Schrift, mit dem demüthigenden Satz beschließe, welcher billig der Wahlspruch aller Philosophen sein sollte: Ich weiß, daß nach vielen Fleiß/ Ich doch nichts Vollkommenes weiß.' (Unzer, *Naturlehre*, pp. 479f.)

original reading of Euclid, mathematics can, of course, cultivate the understanding and serve as a propaedeutic discipline for the 'higher studies', but it is far from representing an autonomous science, producing its principles out of itself. As Wolff explains in a highly instructive essay on guiding notions, *De notionibus directricibus et genuino uso philosophiae primae* (*On the Guiding Notions and the Genuine Utility of First Philosophy*),<sup>46</sup> even mathematics and logic are built on common notions that it receives from the first science, ontology, or the 'architectonic' science. As a result, mathematics does not serve as a model for philosophy as it does for Descartes. While mathematics serves for the cultivation of a habit of reasoning, and while mathematical and distinct knowledge of quantities represents the ideal end-point of an infinite progress, neither philosophical knowledge, nor systematic philosophy require an extensive training in mathematics. Mathematics, furthermore, has an applied dimension, and its branches such as land-surveying and geometry or architecture have progressively developed from the state of an art to the state of a science,<sup>47</sup> the result of the artisans' efforts to progressively formulate their rules and to systematize them.

As a result, mathematics proper loses its exemplary status for philosophy, and philosophy, defined either as knowledge of causal relations or science of possibilities, transmutes into an esoteric science, grounded on empirical or historical knowledge. In Wolff's view, philosophy does not suppose any prior mathematical initiation, and possesses a dynamic, a collective, and an aesthetic dimension: it aims at the progressive clarification of the common notions, natural ontology, and natural logic that we all possess. While Descartes writes his *Discourse on Method* as a first-person narrative, Wolff employs the first-person plural. Philosophy sets out from contemplation of the world, allowing for the parallel acquisition of world-knowledge and self-knowledge, the world and the soul mirroring God or divine beauty and perfection.<sup>48</sup> Wolff already introduces some of these insights in one of his letters on the topic of women and philosophy in 1738, where he defines artificial logic as an art teaching a habit (*Fertigkeit*) of thought, by means of a few directing and fundamental notions. He here distinguishes between a method of teaching, a method of invention, and a third method, similar to the second in its concern with heuristics, but beginning with an art of attention, concerned with the most ordinary objects.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> A French version of this essay opens Formey's *La belle Wolfienne*; see Buchenau, 'Notions directrices et architectonique de la métaphysique. La critique kantienne de Wolff en 1763.'

<sup>47</sup> See Wolff on mathematics and architecture, in particular *Anfangsgründe aller mathematischen Wissenschaften*, and 'Von Geschichten der Baukunst,' pp. 150–66.

<sup>48</sup> Wolff, *Vernünftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*, §1079.

<sup>49</sup> 'Man darf bloß die Aufmerksamkeit einer Dame auf sich selbst und dasjenige, was ihr täglich vorkommt, erwecken, und Sie darüber zu reflectiren anführen; damit ihre Begriffe sich aufklären und deutlich werden, so kan Sie mit vielem Vergnügen die ersten Begriffe, die den Grund zu Ihrer Erkenntnis legen, aus sich selbst und den ihr täglich vor Augen schwebenden Sachen herleiten, und was



The same line of argument developed by Wolff is perpetuated by his disciples in the 1740s, particularly in Meier's 1745 *Abbildung eines Weltweisen* (*Portrait of a Philosopher*), and the 1748 *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften* (*Foundations of all Fine Sciences*), which in turn borrow from Baumgarten's *Meditationes de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (*Reflections on Poetry*) of 1735, and *De vitiis quasiphilosophorum ethicis* (*On the Ethical Vices of the Quasi-Philosophical*) of 1742. Baumgarten and Meier already take their distance from Wolff's overly ambitious definition of philosophy as a science of possibilities; thus, they redefine it as 'the science of the qualities of things that can be cognized independent of faith,' and they also introduce a novel distinction between a natural and an artificial form of metaphysics, the former being achieved by use, the latter by developing notions.<sup>50</sup> In the aforementioned essay from *Der Gesellige* of 1748, Meier already celebrates a certain 'happy and beautiful ignorance,' perfectly compatible with the practice of genuine philosophy. His novel programme for the humanities is intended for women and for those gentlemen who are not and do not want to become professional philosophers. Excluding mathematics and medicine, it comprises the fine arts (*schöne Wissenschaften*), that is, history, literature, and philosophy (metaphysics and logic), revealed theology, natural law, and natural history. In particular natural history is suitable for women, for 'what is more charming than getting to know nature's beauties?' Its aim is to cultivate a 'vivid, correct, persuasive cognition of an infinite number of important truths,' and the 'faculty to distinguish error amidst a shining varnish of prejudices.'<sup>51</sup>

Unzer thus remains faithful to these insights, expressed by the second generation of Wolff's disciples in Halle. She shares their attitude of distrust toward the excessive ambitions of a certain mathematical rationalism in its anti-speculative and exoteric tendency, and she elaborates on their alternative models of philosophy and aesthetics.

### 3. Philosophy as Practical World-Wisdom and an Art of Happiness

This diminishment of the mathematical model seems in turn to attest of a clarification of priorities and the primary aims of philosophy or 'world-wisdom [*Weltweisheit*].' Throughout the *Weltweisheit*, Unzer lays emphasis on philosophy's practical orientation. She affirms that 'we learn wisdom in order to attain happiness and to communicate our own happiness to other humans.' Her uncle adds that 'the reader would be mistaken if he thought that in Unzer's opinion, a young

Sie zu wissen begehret, gleichsamer vor sich selbst erfinden! (Wolff, letter to Manteuffel, in Ostertag (ed.), *Der philosophische Gehalt des Wolff-Manteuffelschen Briefwechsels*, p. 30).

<sup>50</sup> See for instance Baumgarten, *Metaphysics*, 53.

<sup>51</sup> See Meier, *Der Gesellige*, Vol. 1, 75. Stück, pp. 429f.

lady should not marry unless she had studied metaphysics. The study of her own heart is more important than ontology or the science of things [*Dingerlehre*].

These statements clearly recall the Socratic model of philosophy, presenting Socrates as a model of wisdom, living his philosophy in practice and, as a citizen of the world, and bringing wisdom back from the heaven to the cities.<sup>52</sup> But they also directly echo Wolff who, in 1703, had first sketched his project of a 'universal practical philosophy'<sup>53</sup> as an affective science and who elaborated this project that shapes the whole system including metaphysics in greater detail in his later career. Wolff's declared ambition was to guide the will of men (and women) toward the true good and to influence and direct the will. In his view, cognition and action go hand in hand, and philosophy follows a twofold aim which is both theoretical and practical. The practical task of philosophy lies in the progressive formalization of the agent's practical syllogisms in an effort to achieve greater distinctness. It is this formalization that the mathematization of philosophy is primarily in the service of. Wolff also confers a particular moral and pedagogical status and responsibility upon philosophers. Morally speaking, philosophers are teachers of mankind and can pretend to greater wisdom or lucidity than non-philosophers insofar as they are capable of detecting errors in reasoning. But in order to ensure their pupils' comprehension of their teachings, philosophers still need to be able to put themselves into their shoes and acknowledge that the quest for knowledge and wisdom also remains personal, empirical, and historical. Any wisdom in the true, practical sense of the term must depend on a clear and distinct form of cognition, that can exert an impact on the will and translate into action.

This idea is found in Wolff's own project for introducing women to philosophy, in his previously mentioned draft of a letter to a fictional noble lady:

Noble and most gracious lady. Nothing more pleasant could have happened to me than your highness' will to honor me by her dedication and to direct my thoughts to a subject-matter best allowing me to attain my end of producing truth and virtue in the human minds and promoting their happiness.... You express an insight which few among philosophers have had, which is that the human species will not attain happiness unless the female sex begins to philosophize and unless it realizes that those ladies, who are distinguished by their birth and by the qualities supplied by gentle nature, must take the lead, since their illustrious example can make a greater impression in the minds of their fellows than the most well-grounded expressions of the most subtle philosophers.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, V, 10: 'Socrates however (was the) first (who) called philosophy down from heaven, and placed it in cities, and introduced it even in homes, and drove (it) to inquire about life and customs and things good and evil.' This quote is conveyed by another Wolfian philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, in his 1767, *Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*.

<sup>53</sup> Wolff, *Philosophia practica universalis: methodo scientifica pertractata*.

<sup>54</sup> 'Hochgebohrnes, Gnädigstes Präulein. Es hätte mir nichts erfreulicheres begegnen können, als

As mentioned in this draft, Wolff's philosophy pursues two goals—theoretical truth and practical virtue—without yet establishing a hierarchy between them. Wolff's disciples begin to clarify this ambiguity. They insist that the practical objectives deserve priority over the theoretical and mathematical. They argue that the practical value of cognition cannot lie in its distinction, but that it must consist in its 'clarity', 'vividness', 'nobility', and 'fruitfulness'. According to Baumgarten, in his *De vitiiis quasiphilosophorum ethicis*, and Meier, in his *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen*, a true philosopher has a clear and vivid cognition of the most noble and fruitful philosophical truths.<sup>55</sup> Both, moreover, begin to point out the practical, aesthetic, and affective deficiencies of a certain rational and purely symbolic (*figürlich*) or abstract, speculative philosophy and to contest the capability of academic philosophy to fulfil such a practical aim by themselves, unassisted by those who have a sense of *decorum* and propriety and who are capable of clear, vivid, and noble cognition and speech, which is to say unassisted by poets and by women.

Under the influence of Halle's philosophical doctors,<sup>56</sup> this argument for the need for aesthetics in turn attests to new medical and anthropological perspectives. The second generation of Wolffians in Halle not only endorse an anti-dualist and holistic perspective on the human being, as a psychophysical entity, but begin to consider the possibility of a pathological and excessive tendency toward the practice of philosophy and metaphysics. A few years after the original *Weltweisheit*, such a criticism of metaphysics is expressed in Krüger's *Träume*.<sup>57</sup> The medical perspective begins to claim supremacy over the philosophical, in a sort of 'conflict of the faculties' where philosophy and medicine dispute their respective territories in the disciplinary landscape of anthropology and the humanities.

Unzer directly participates in this criticism of academic philosophy, and borrows its key terms from Meier and Baumgarten. Of course, causation is a matter for philosophers; nonetheless, those philosophers who 'never stop asking why,

daß Euer hochgräfl. Gnaden mich dero Zuschrift würdigen und dadurch meine Gedanken auf eine Sache zu richten Anlaß geben wollen, wodurch ich meinen Zwecken Wahrheit und Tugend in den Gemüthern der Menschen zur Beförderung ihrer Glückseligkeit am fügichsten erreichen kan... Sie sehen eine Wahrheit ein, die bisher wenige unter den Weltweisen erkannt, daß alsdann erst das menschliche Geschlecht werde glücklich werden, wenn das weibliche Geschlecht wird anfangen zu philosophieren und erkennen, daß die Damen, welche die Geburt und besondere von der milden Natur mitgetheilte Qualitäten distinguieren, den Anfang machen müssen, als deren erlauchtes Exempel mehreren Eindruck in die Gemüther der anderen machen kann, als die gegründesten Ausdrücken der subtilsten Weltweisen.' (Wolff, Letter to Manteuffel, from November 29 1738, in Ostertag (ed.), *Der philosophische Gehalt des Wolff-Mateuffelschen Briefwechsels*, pp. 26f.)

<sup>55</sup> Meier, *Abbildung eines wahren Weltweisen*, §47.

<sup>56</sup> See Zelle (ed.), *Vernünftige Ärzte: Halle Psychomediziner und die Anfänge der Anthropologie in der deutschsprachigen Frühaufklärung*, and in particular the first chapter, 'Sinnlichkeit und Therapie. Zur Gleichursprünglichkeit von Ästhetik und Anthropologie um 1750', pp. 5–24.

<sup>57</sup> Krüger, *Träume*, Traum 55, quoted by Gehring, *Johanne Charlotte Unzer-Ziegler, Ein Ausschnitt aus dem literarischen Leben in Halle, Göttingen und Altona*, p. 23.

just like small children do,<sup>58</sup> who tend to acquire words without concepts, who engage in merely verbal academic disputes, who practise abstraction for its own sake and who forget about philosophy's true goal, happiness, do not deserve the title of philosopher, but are mere scholars, *Schulfüchse*, *Mathematici*, and *Metaphysici*. They have lost their common sense or healthy understanding (*gesunder Menschenverstand*) and become distracted (*zerstreut*), mad (*verschoben*, *verrückt*) or morose hypochondriacs (*Grillenfänger*).<sup>59</sup> Their philosophical practice can be qualified as idle and even pathological. It cannot serve as an example for women who seek to attain a higher goal: thinking humanly, *menschlich denken*.<sup>60</sup> For this it is required that the author adapts to their respective audience and their concerns in order to communicate their own equanimity of soul and happiness, and not play-act as a philosopher and try to make a show of their erudition with all-too abstract, dry, or confused speech.

#### 4. Philosophy as an Art of Poetry, Dialogue, and Communication

These insights in turn affect the question of style, which directly concerns what Unzer presents as her own philosophical contribution and originality. From within Wolffianism, Unzer comes back to a Socratic conception of philosophy as an art of speech. As we mentioned earlier, Unzer explains that her only originality concerns the new 'verbal clothing', some 'ornament', and her witty style. To avoid a 'dryness' of expression, and the contemporary taste of scholarship, she 'embellishes' the treatise by introducing a great number of quotes from poems including Barthold Heinrich Brockes, Jean de la Bruyère, Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, Johann Christian Günther, Friedrich von Hagedorn, Albrecht von Haller, and Michael Richey. Most of the time, she tries to illustrate and explain abstract definitions, such as of ontological notions, through concrete examples. She also introduces personal experiences, stories, and dialogues, which reveal that she is an attentive reader of certain moral weeklies including the *Bremische Beiträge* and the English *Spectator*. Only the metaphysical part of the treatise constitutes an exception. It contains a more limited number of additions so as to avoid the stirring of passion and temptation towards vice which she holds to be the particular danger immanent to this science.

These stylistic embellishments are intended to offer far more than an *elocutio* in the narrow sense of the term that prevailed until the early Enlightenment. For Unzer and her mentors, style is far more than a 'dressing-up', merely applying 'enticing words', and pursuing objectives foreign to logic and philosophy. It is not a translation of truth in a popular form that could also be presented otherwise,

<sup>58</sup> Unzer, *Weltweisheit*, §7, see also §141.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, §51.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, § 66.

not a *pis-aller*, a didactic and pleasant alternative and supplement to true philosophy. For the opposition between logic as an art of invention and communication, and rhetoric as an art of persuasion that the early Modern age inherited from Peter Ramus no longer applies in the German Enlightenment. There is no such a thing as a naked truth, no content without form, no thinking without words, no method without style.<sup>61</sup> Any truth is personal. Its comprehension only depends upon the speaker's ability to adapt and pursue his or her explanatory effort until reaching what he or she can suppose to be his or her audience's 'common', and yet contextually-dependent notions.<sup>62</sup> In this logical and rhetorical framework, style acquires a philosophical and methodical value because it is what stirs and guides the reader's attention and thought.

Notice that Wolff himself had already partly acknowledged these consequences to follow from his own basic presuppositions and his doctrine of 'common notions'. He had, of course, still viewed philosophy and rhetoric as opposed, and claimed that philosophy's concern was with the 'naked truth' and the style of oratory was 'to be proscribed'<sup>63</sup> from philosophy. In a similar vein, he had restricted the presentation of his philosophy for women to a didactic and popular supplement to systematic philosophy. At the same time, he himself had already initiated this debate concerning logic and rhetoric, heuristics and language, and he had included sections on hermeneutics and communication within his logic,<sup>64</sup> much like his Pietist colleagues.<sup>65</sup> He had coined the very terminology of 'fruitful notions', and pointed out their utility for empirical science and natural history. Fruitful notions are those which reveal new resemblances. They allow one to forge comparative notions and infer new predicates, thereby contributing to a notion's distinctness (*Deutlichkeit*). 'Fruitful notions' include metaphors and flowery or ornate (*verblümt*) expressions.<sup>66</sup> But for the founders of the new discipline of aesthetics, one must go a step further, conceive of a logic, concerned with language and dialogue from the outset, and enact a novel division of the realm of thought and speech, or *logos*, according to the ancient sense of the term. From their viewpoint, logic must comprise both philosophical and poetical forms of reasoning and speech, with the latter, aesthetics, as the logic of poetry forming an auxiliary discipline to logic. The difference lies in their respective objectives.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, §36.      <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, §19.

<sup>63</sup> Wolff, *Discursus praeliminaris de philosophia in genere*, §150.

<sup>64</sup> See in particular chapters 11 and 13 of Wolff's *Vernünfftige Gedanken von den Kräften des menschlichen Verstandes und ihrem richtigen Gebrauch in der Erkenntnis der Wahrheit*; and Unzer, *Weltweisheit*, §67 ff.

<sup>65</sup> See Budde, *Elementa philosophiae instrumentalis seu institutionum philosophiae eclecticae* (1697–1714); and Lange, *Medicina mentis, quae, praemissa historia mentis medica, seu philosophica, detectaque ac rejecta philomoria*.

<sup>66</sup> See Wolff, 'De notionibus foecundis', in *Horae subsecivae Marburgenses, Anni MDCCXXX* (Trimestre Brumale), pp. 105–66.

According to Baumgarten who, in his *Reflections on Poetry* of 1735, 'amends' the scale of cognition first proposed by Leibniz and developed by Wolff, philosophy in the narrow sense only aims at intensive clarity or greater distinctness, or at showing logical stringency. Clarity and the pleasure of beauty is not a stated objective of analysis: 'Conceptually distinct, completely adequate representations that aim to penetrate the depths are not sensible and thus not poetic.'<sup>67</sup> This is why philosophy may be 'dry' and 'abstract'.<sup>68</sup> Poetry by contrast consists in the poem's expression of 'extensive' rather than 'intensive clarity', or in its presentation of a thought through a wealth of images. The poet's excellence lies in his clear and vivid perception (*aisthesis*) and communication of truth. He or she is supposed to act as a mediator between the public and the world, to teach them how to see and perceive the world and to guide their attention through his poetry. From their viewpoint, perception and linguistic expression form a unity and all perception or distinction of differences already depend upon language. This upsets traditional patterns, and confers a novel philosophical status to poetry. Even a philosopher must be a poet insofar as he or she must be able to perceive (and express) the world in its beauty. This argument is also present in Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, and it will be further elaborated in the *Aesthetica*. In the *Metaphysica*, it receives a special treatment in the section on psychology. While reason shrinks to a symbolic faculty, sensibility becomes a faculty of poetry and an analogue of reason comprising a certain poetic wit and perspicuity, or a faculty of grasping resemblances and differences. Meier not only takes up this line of argument but applies it to the philosophical text itself. In the *Anfangsgründe*, he expands on Wolff's idea of fruitful notions to suggest a blending of more technical and aesthetic forms of explanation, of erudition and beauty within the philosophical text. While logical perfections take precedence over aesthetic perfections, the latter, nonetheless proves necessary in order to 'ornament' the fields of erudition, or stir the reader's pleasure, interest, and attention.<sup>69</sup>

Unzer's text shows deep traces of these philosophical influences. She shares Meier's ambition to act both as a systematic and a popular philosopher: she views herself as a philosopher and a 'teacher for her own sex' (*Lehrerin meines Geschlechts*).<sup>70</sup> To invent a philosophical style appealing to her *Leserinnen*, she combines philosophical and aesthetic explanations.<sup>71</sup> Under the influence of the Enlightenment interest in sociability and salon culture, her philosophical style begins to adopt a dialogical and conversational element. This philosophy may not be the kind of midwifery and art of maieutic that Plato lays out in his *Theatetus*: it

<sup>67</sup> See Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, §14.

<sup>68</sup> See Baumgarten, *Gedancken von dem vernünfftigen Beyfall auf Academien*, §5.

<sup>69</sup> On this, see Buchenau, 'Weitläufige Wahrheiten, fruchtbare Begriffe. Georg Friedrich Meiers *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften*'.

<sup>70</sup> See the preface of Unzer's *Naturlehre*.

<sup>71</sup> See Unzer, *Weltweisheit*, §82, §110 and the section on presentation, §129.

is not directly composed of questions and answers but adheres to Wolff's systematic pattern. Yet Unzer does continue the epistolary conversation with her uncle throughout her treatise, as is evident from numerous notes on various issues, including mathematics, method, metaphysics, and anthropology. She gives up the long-standing opposition between systematic and dialogical philosophy, still present in Gottsched's preface to Fontenelle.<sup>72</sup> In her view, philosophy is essentially dialogical, and despite the social barriers hindering women from engaging in conversation with men,<sup>73</sup> 'a lady capable of conducting a philosophical conversation or to compose written essays of this kind, can be ensured that it is only a matter of will to transform herself completely into a *Philosophin*.'<sup>74</sup>

And yet, at this point of our investigation, one may also raise the question as to what Unzer's positive contribution to this philosophical dialogue consists in. Most of her material seems to come from Wolff and Baumgarten, and most of her own philosophical programme seems to be already sketched in Meier's 1748 programme sketched in *Der Gesellige*. Unzer seems to more or less follow and fulfil her male mentor's programme in order to show that she has listened carefully and that she has understood the lesson. One could even argue that she serves as some kind of showpiece woman put in the centre-stage by her male mentors *in spite of herself* rather than as defending her own philosophical convictions and arguments.

These objections are not without ground, but a closer look at the historical constellation may help to minimize them and defend Unzer's status as an accomplished philosopher. First, she herself conveys her own philosophical ambition in the previously cited preface of the *Naturlehre*. Second, she does introduce a few new arguments. For example, she seems to be the first to elaborate on the 'erotic' dimension of philosophy as a love of beauty and wisdom. Third, one can imagine that the texts do not reflect the full scope of the potential dialogue between Unzer and her mentors; that Unzer already exerted some positive and indirect philosophical influence on Meier's earlier essays, and also those of her husband before beginning to publish herself. Chronologically, it seems difficult to imagine that Meier's 1745 and 1748 essays reflect any such discussion; however, Meier's 1751 essay and her uncle's preface and notes which develop the political stakes of women's education may well reflect such a colloquy and Unzer's conversational impact.

Fourth and last, one must bear in mind the *collective* dimension immanent to Wolffian *Schulphilosophie* itself, in order to appreciate Unzer's philosophical contribution. Wolffians, we said, believe in universal reason, common notions, natural logic, and philosophy's possible popularity. They value the adhesion to what

they perceive as a philosophical *school* rather than individual accomplishments, relativizing the importance of philosophical originality and, instead, positively valuing compilation and clarification. This attitude seems to be common to most of these authors, including Unzer, and Meier himself, who does not seem to bother much about his own originality when beginning to actively work toward the circulation of the novel aesthetics both through his prolific literary production and his own teaching in the 1740s. Of course, he already sketches a philosophical programme for Unzer's philosophy for women, but he himself is greatly influenced by Baumgarten. His *Anfangsgründe*, published two years prior to Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*, are mostly a compilation from a variety of Baumgarten's treatises and lectures. More than originality, the participation in a philosophical school, the depth of its understanding and practical impact or force of conviction is what matters to the Wolffians, philosophically speaking. From this viewpoint, whoever is the better reader and the better teacher, is the better philosopher, and by this measure Unzer may have been a better philosopher than any of her academic counterparts.

## Conclusion

All this sheds a new light on the popularization and feminization of Enlightenment philosophy and its relation to aesthetics at the moment of its foundation, a tradition that has long been overshadowed by Kantian aesthetics and has only recently stirred new interest. It also helps to measure Unzer's philosophical ambition. Despite her modesty, she takes an active part in this debate, as a philosopher rather than as merely a popular translator: for her, this opposition does not make sense. Challenging an all-too narrow and all-too mathematical conception of practical philosophy as wisdom, she advocates a dynamic and erotic model of philosophy as a love of wisdom, ascribing priority to practical world-wisdom over theoretical speculation and carving out a novel space for a philosophy of beauty, poetry, and aesthetics. Fundamentally, these are ancient and mostly Platonic ideas: within the Halle constellation, Unzer stands out as a modern Diotima. But on account of their particular and modern premises, these ideas likewise take a particularly modern shape. They not only illustrate a certain turn of the early Modern debate on mathematics, method, science, and heuristics, they also show the humanist stakes of the newly founded aesthetics, clearly laid out in Meier's new educational programme, and they announce themes and concerns which will shift to the centre-stage of the later Enlightenment. Unzer's efforts will be perpetuated by popular philosophers such as Spalding, Mendelssohn, Abbt, Garve, and by Kant himself who will elaborate on the dialogical dimension of reason as they work toward a new conception of the public space.

<sup>72</sup> See Gottsched, *Discurs des Übersetzers, von Gesprächen überhaupt (Vorrede zu Gespräche der Todten und Plutons Urtheil derselben von Bernard de Fontenelle)*, in particular p. 21.

<sup>73</sup> Unzer, *Weltweisheit*, §122.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, § 43, see also § 261. 'Ein Frauenzimmer, welche im Stande ist, philosophische Gespräche zu führen, oder schriftliche Aufsätze dieser Art zu machen, kann gewiss versichert sein, daß es nur auf ihren Willen ankomme, sich völlig zu einer Philosophin zu machen.'