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RHETORIC IN AN ESSAY ON THE
BEAUTY OF THE HUMAN BODY
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The movement of the so-called *philosophical physicians* was formed at the Prussian University of Halle in the middle of the 18th century as a medico-philosophical approach outside of the structure of university genres both in medicine and in philosophy. Being professional physicians, they read metaphysical texts relating to the status of body, to the living or to the relationship between soul and body and introduce the elements of new philosophical discourses such as Wolffianism into the field of medical theory outside of academic discourse. In this context, the objective of the paper is to identify and describe the argumentative features of E. A. Nicolai's 'An essay on the beauty of the human body'. Nicolai builds his reasoning *more geometrico*, referring directly to the works of Christian Wolff and Alexander Baumgarten. However, Nicolai's use of Wolffian terminology and form of reasoning is systematically ambiguous; for instance, he comes to anthropological conclusions which seem quite consistent with a theory of physical influx totally denied by Wolff discussing the soul-body problem. Moreover, the style of many passages of 'An essay on the beauty of the human body', saturated with philosophical terminology, is obviously ironic. Departing from Nicolai's medico-philosophical approach, the paper lead to a reflection on the configuration of the disciplinary textual spaces and on the borders of academic medicine in the social dimension of the 18th century.

Keywords: Philosophical physicians, Christian Wolff, Early Modern medicine, University of Halle, more geometrico, physical influx, anthropology and aesthetics.

JEL Classification: Z.

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The interaction of philosophy and medicine, since the establishment of the relevant faculties in the first European universities, has never completely ceased but its various forms have changed dramatically. In the second part of seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, a new impetus for the mutual interest of these fields of knowledge was given by Cartesian philosophy, in which the human body is approached primarily within the framework of metaphysics in connection with the question of the interaction of substances. Although a whole series of medical and physiological postulates of Descartes must have looked archaic even to seventeenth-century physicians, the spread of the mechanistic approach to natural science made this new philosophy an attractive subject of study also for them. Since within the framework of the Cartesian system the difference between the living and the lifeless is nearly absent, physiology should be simply included in the field of physics, considering the human body by analogy with a mechanism. Formally, recognition of the mechanistic approach to natural science would have deprived medicine of its subject and its theory but the continuity of the discipline was maintained institutionally due to *curricula* of medical faculties at the universities. By the middle of the 18th century, various ways of solving the problem of psychophysical dualism as well as understanding the heritage of Descartes as a whole led to the formation of some new philosophical currents, one of which, called Wolffianism, is associated with the works of Christian Wolff (1679–1754).

The intellectual environment that developed at the University of Halle in the first half of the eighteenth century is perhaps the most illuminating example of the interaction of philosophers and physicians.³ At approximately the same time, the

³ In recent decades, specialized works have gradually come to stress the importance of the University of Halle in the history of science and medicine of the eighteenth century, so the book series “Hallesche Beiträge zur Europäischen Aufklärung” was established by *Walter de Gruyter* Publishing House. On “philosophical physicians” at the University of Halle, see especially: *Košeniina A.* Ernst Platners Anthropologie und Philosophie: der “philosophische Arzt” und seine Wirkung auf Johann Karl Wezel und Jean Paul. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1989; *Heinz J.* Wissen vom Menschen und Erzählen vom Einzelfall. Untersuchungen zum anthropologischen Roman der Spätaufklärung. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996; “Vernünftige Ärzte”. Hallesche Psychomediziner und die Anfänge der Anthropologie in der deutschsprachigen Frühaufklärung / Hg. C. Zelle. Tübingen: Walter de Gruyter, 2001; *Van Hoorn T.* Dem Leibe abgelesen: Georg Forster im Kontext der physischen Anthropologie des 18. Jahrhunderts. Tübingen: Walter de Gruyter, 2004.

most prominent representatives of the main opposing systems, explaining the interaction of mental and physical phenomena, and the authors of the most influential medical theories of that epoch worked there. Apart from Christian Wolff, who taught there from 1706 to 1723 and from 1740 to 1754, Friedrich Hoffmann also gave lectures from 1695 to 1708 and from 1712 to 1742 and Georg Ernst Stahl from 1694 to 1715. Wolff and his disciples such as Alexander Baumgarten and Georg Friedrich Mayer advocated the metaphysical theory of pre-established harmony, grappling with the soul-body problem; Hoffmann, alongside his famous Dutch colleague Herman Boerhaave, was an adherent of the Cartesian mechanistic tradition in medicine; Stahl was the founder of medical animism. Thanks to their efforts and the teaching activities of their students and disciples in the 1740s, a circle of “philosophical physicians” was formed at the medical faculty of the University of Halle. Their significance within the framework of the larger narrative of the historical formation of philosophical anthropology or the history of medicine in modern times usually comes down to the fact that their approach to “human nature” outlined the middle path between mechanism and animism, which became the so-called “vitalism”. However, I argue that the views of “philosophical physicians” were formed under the influence of a complex system of intellectual currents and social expectations from the medical discourse of the eighteenth century. Since the university medical *curriculum* remained conservative in the period considered, the introduction of elements of new philosophical discourses into the field of medical knowledge occurred outside of academic discourse. In order to define the concept of philosophical physician (philosophischer Arzt)⁴ used in German studies since 1970s (in the researches by H.-J. Schings, A. Košenina, J. Heinz, C. Zelle, T. van Hoorn), my paper examines

⁴ The term *philosophischer Arzt* is also interpreted as “physician-philosopher” and “philosophical doctor” which seems more ambiguous in the context of the epoch. We follow the English terminology as approved by Carsten Zelle, see: Zelle C. Experiment, Observation, Self-observation. Empiricism and the ‘Reasonable Physicians’ of the Early Enlightenment // Medical Empirism and Philosophy of Human Nature in the 17th and 18th Century / Eds. C. Crignon, C. Zelle, N. Allocca. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014. P. 131–148.

‘An essay on the beauty of the human body’ of Ernst Anton Nicolai (1722–1802), which was published in 1746⁵.

In the research, the lists of persons who are classified as “philosophical physicians” vary. The German phrase “philosophische Arzt” was coined by Melchior Adam Weikard who used it as the title of his treatise, which gained great popularity in the second half of the eighteenth century. The work was first published in four volumes in 1775–1777 and had a significant impact on his future. The Russian Empress Catherine II liked the treatise, so Weikard was offered the position of court physician in St. Petersburg, where he moved in 1784. The most famous figure among “philosophical physician” is Ernst Platner (1744–1818). He was a professor of Philosophy and Medicine at the University of Leipzig, with which his entire academic career was associated from 1762. Platner’s renown is associated with his work ‘Philosophical aphorisms with some principles for a history of philosophy’, first published in 1776 and repeatedly reprinted throughout the eighteenth century (1776, 1782; 1784; 1793, 1800). Many contemporaries of this philosopher and physician used it to teach philosophical disciplines (history of philosophy, metaphysics, natural philosophy) and references to this work are found in the heritage of Kant, Reingold, and Fichte, who are canonical figures in the history of philosophy. Another medical and philosophical work by Platner ‘Anthropology for Physicians and Philosophers’ (Anthropologie für Ärzte und Weltweise) is mentioned by Odo Marquard in his brief review of the anthropological projects in the early Modern epoch, which were implemented primarily within the framework of the “German school philosophy” (deutschen Schulphilosophie). The phenomenon of “philosophical physicians” is often considered in the context of anthropology in the period between the sixteenth- and eighteenth centuries, since it contributed significantly to the process described by Odo Marquard as: “... under the name of A. [anthropology] school philosophy

⁵ Nicolai E.A. Der Arzneygelahrheit Doktors Abhandlung von der Schönheit des menschlichen Körpers in einem Glückwünschungsschreiben an Herrn Christ. Fried. Truppeln, als Derselbe die Doktorwürde in der Arzneygelahrheit auf der Universität zu Halle erhielt. Halle: Carl Hermann Hemmerde, 1746.

emancipated from the theologically oriented metaphysics and took up the question: how is man to be determined, if not through metaphysics (already) and not through mathematical-experimental natural sciences (yet)?”⁶

The essay by Nikolai, analyzed in this paper, was written much earlier than the works mentioned above, so it is necessary to clarify the reasons for associating this author with the “philosophical physicians”. Summarizing the studies, we can distinguish two approaches to the concept of “philosophical physician” in the context of eighteenth-century intellectual history. The first one relies on an author’s self-identification (the treatise ‘Der philosophische Arzt’ of Weikard is a typical example). The second one relies on the social environment which influenced an author's world view, that is, on the analysis of how in the process of learning medicine or by means of personal acquaintance with philosophers certain philosophical ideas were absorbed by “philosophical physicians”. I argue that these approaches should be supplemented and an author can be characterized as a “philosophical physician” due to his or her orientation to the form of reasoning specific to philosophical genres.

Before turning to the analysis of Nicolai’s treatise, it should be mentioned that the social request for a new balance between the theoretical and practical dimensions of medical discourse in the middle of the eighteenth century was reflected in the article “Artzeney-Kunst” in the second volume of the illustrious Zedler lexicon, published in 1732, i.e., shortly before Nikolai's treatise. The Lexicon says that medical art, originally based on the data of experience, needs the formation of a theoretical apparatus that would provide more detailed and accurate knowledge.⁷ This statement is particularly noteworthy against the background of the processes of the institutionalization of medical knowledge, since in the early

⁶ *Marquard O.* Anthropologie // Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie / Hgg. J. Ritter, K. Gründer. Bd. I. Basel: Schwabe, 1971. Sp. 363: «unterm Titel A. [Anthropologie] emanzipiert sich die Schulphilosophie aus der theologisch orientierten metaphysischen Tradition und stellt sich der Frage: wie ist der Mensch zu bestimmen, wenn nicht (mehr) durch Metaphysik und (noch) nicht durch mathematisch-experimentelle Naturwissenschaft?»

⁷ *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexikon Aller Wissenschaften und Künste* / Hg. J. A. Franckenstein. Bd. II. Halle; Leipzig: Johann Heinrich Zedler, 1732. Sp. 1742–1743.

seventeenth century there were already professorships of theoretical medicine (Professur der theoretischen Medizin) at German universities. More significantly, as a full professor of theoretical medicine in 1758 Nicolai moved to the University of Jena, where he took over the professorship of clinical medicine and chemistry the following year.

Rhetorical features of Nicolai's treatise and its involvement in the salon culture of the Enlightenment are apparent already in the full title of the work: 'Ernst Antons Nicolai, habilitated medical doctor, an essay on the beauty of the human body in a form of congratulatory message to Herr. Christ. Fried. Troopers, who is received his habilitation in medicine at the University of Halle' (Ernst Antons Nicolai Der Arzneygelahrheit Doktors Abhandlung von der Schönheit des menschlichen Körpers in einem Glückwunschungsschreiben an Herrn Crist. Fried. Truppeln, als Derselbe die Doktorwürde in der Arzneygelahrheit auf der Universität zu Halle erhielt). The author explains the choice of the topics for the treatise:

Now I must open to you the motives for which I chose this topic and not another for my research. But since I cannot do it without mentioning what seemed to me deserving of reproach in your composition – I mean the inaugural disputation – then I want to ask you in advance not to be angry, but patiently and calmly listen to my confession. You, in your essay, talk about emptying the bowels (von der Öffnung des Leibes) and on every page, in every line you discuss all kinds of unappetizing things. I really do not know and cannot understand why you chose for an inaugural debate a theme in relation to which almost all five feelings have a natural disgust but which, nevertheless, should have been very pleasing to you, if your choice fell on it.⁸

⁸ Nicolai E.A. Abhandlung von der Schönheit des menschlichen Körpers... P. 10: "Ich muss Ihnen nun die Bewegungsgründe entdecken, warum ich diese und keine andere Materie zu meiner Betrachtung erwählt habe. Weil ich aber dieses nicht tun kann, ohne dass ich nicht zugleich desjenigen Erwähnung tun sollte, was mir an Ihrer Schrift, ich meine an Ihrer Inaugural-Disputation, tadelhaft geschienen, so will ich Sie im voraus gebeten haben, dass Sie dieses mein Bekenntnis nicht übel aufnehmen, sondern geduldig und gelassen anhören möchten. Sie reden in Ihrer Schrift von der Öffnung des Leibes, und in jedem Blatte, ja fast in jeder Zeile beschäftigen Sie sich mit lauter unflätigen Dingen. Ich weiß in der Tat nicht, und kann es auch nicht begreifen, warum

Nikolai directly quotes the following writings of Christian Wolff: ‘Psychologia rationalis’, ‘Psychologia empirica’, ‘Philosophia prima sive Ontologia’, ‘Elementa architecturae civilis’. In addition, he refers once to ‘Metaphysica’ of Wolff’s disciple Alexander Baumgarten. After many rhetorical digressions, referring to the *topoi* of salon culture of the Enlightenment (such as *consequentiarius* and *je ne sais quoi*), the author proceeds to the subject of his essay:

As I was taught, feelings are given to us to be a means to achieve the cognition of many things, and yet it seems to me that those things that affect our feelings most strongly are not known to us. In fact, I do not know if I should consider it a benefaction of Nature or its flaw that the closest thing to our feelings are those which better should have been far-off from us, if only they could be clearly discerned. Perhaps, Nature wanted to replace the vividness of sensual cognition with the weak progress that we usually achieve in the clear knowledge of things.⁹

In this passage, Nikolai follows Leibniz and Wolff following Aristotle's distinction between what is “best known and first for us” and what is for us most immediate and most easily accessible¹⁰.

Nikolai builds his reasoning *more geometrico*, starting from the nominal definition of concepts with which he works. Looking for basic elements of reasoning such as simple (or clear) definitions, he refers to the works of Wolff. In the history of philosophy, Wolff is often represented as the upholder and popularizer of Leibniz's philosophy but this is an extremely simplified assessment.

Sie zu Ihrer Inaugural-Disputation eine solche Materie erwählt haben, dafür fast alle fünf Sinnen einen natürlichen Abscheu haben, die Ihnen aber doch gleichwohl muss gefallen haben, weil Sie sie erwählt haben.” German quotations are given in normalized spelling.

⁹ Ibid. P. 13: “Ich habe mich belehren lassen, die Sinnen wären uns deswegen gegeben, dass sie ein Mittel sein sollten, zu der Erkenntnis vieler Dinge zu gelangen, und gleichwohl kommt es mir vor, als wenn diejenigen Dinge, welche uns am stärksten in die Sinne fallen, uns am allerunbekanntesten wären. Ich weiß in Wahrheit nicht, ob ich dieses für eine Gütigkeit oder für einen Fehler der Natur halten soll, dass sie diejenigen Sachen am meisten den Sinnen genähert hat, welche doch weiter von denselben entfernt sein sollten, wenn man sie deutlich erkennen sollte. Vielleicht hat sie durch diese lebhaft sinnliche Erkenntnis den schlechten Fortgang ersetzen wollen, den wir in der deutlichen Erkenntnis der Dinge zu machen pflegen.”

¹⁰ Aristotle. Posterior Analytics. II.19.

It is well known that Wolff had a significant impact on the development of German philosophy as he became the first author who systematically wrote philosophical treatises in German and also as around him a real philosophical school developed. In addition, works relating to all areas of metaphysics belong to him, including the so-called ‘German Metaphysics’, first published in 1720 and subsequently repeatedly republished with various additions and corrections by the author. It became one of the most authoritative *compendia* of the eighteenth century, which served as a prototype for textbooks on metaphysics not only in Germany but also beyond its borders. One of the reasons for such influence and popularity is the style chosen by Wolff: in the spirit of the basic Cartesian rules, he systematically expounds some of the provisions of Leibniz's philosophy, significantly supplementing and modifying them. Imitating the style of Wolffian philosophy, Nikolai gives the definition in the first paragraph of his treatise that beauty is nothing but perfection, can be perceived by our senses¹¹.

Then Nikolai writes:

In this definition, I agree with many philosophers of my epoch and can refer, among others, to the greatest philosopher, the world-famous Hr. Baron von Wolff and the most excellent Hr. Professor Baumgarten. The former in his Latin work “The Elements of Civil Architecture” in the tenth paragraph gives the following definition: *Beauty or pulchritude is veritable or appearing perfection, insofar as it is sensated or perceived*; the later in his “Metaphysics” in § 662 defines beauty as follows: *pulchritude is perfection of appearance, or perfection observable to taste in the broader sense* – which completely coincides with my definition. Since by the word *phenomenon* he meant everything that can be represented indistinctly by our senses (see § 425 of his “Metaphysics”), hence he wants to say nothing more than beauty is perfection, because it is known sensually. Based on what I said above, you can determine

¹¹ *Nicolai E.A.* Abhandlung von der Schönheit des menschlichen Körpers... P. 14: “[Schönheit des menschlichen Körpers] ist nämlich nichts anders, als eine Vollkommenheit, die durch unsere Sinnen empfunden werden kann.”

what an ugliness is. It is the opposite of beauty and since the latter is perfection perceived by the senses, ugliness is imperfection represented through the senses.¹²

Following the chosen method, Nikolai constantly refers to the philosophical definitions given by himself and Wolff. From a stylistic point of view, such an attempt to ensure consistency of the philosophical terminology saturates the narrative with tautologies. In addition, he, at first sight, describes only what is accessible to the perception of the senses. However, the use of such a philosophical apparatus becomes comical when not metaphysical entities but trivial and self-evident things are described. For instance, Nicolai writes:

Since the position of the external members of the human body according to consistency makes a great contribution to its beauty (see my § 6), I believe that it will not be in vain to look more closely at the external members of the human body. A person is completely different in the front and in the rear, and anyone who does not want to believe it should closely examine himself or someone else and he finds out that there are eyes, nose, mouth, ears and hands in front; and there are none behind them. In short, on the front side of the human body, there are instruments of sense perception, representing the noblest of its members, but there are none at the back.¹³

¹² Ibid. P. 15: “Ich habe in dieser Erklärung die Übereinstimmung vieler Weltweisen auf meiner Seite, und ich kann mich unter andern auf den allergrößten Weltweisen, den weltberühmten Herrn Baron von Wolff und den vortrefflichen Herrn Professor Baumgarten berufen. Der erstere hat in den lateinischen Anfangsgründen der bürgerlichen Baukunst in dem zehnten Absatze eben diese Erklärung, denn er sagt: *Venustas seu pulcritudo est perfectio, sive vera, sive apparens, quatenus sentitur, seu percipitur*, und der letztere erklärt in seiner Metaphysik in dem 662 Absatze die Schönheit also: *perfectio phaenomenon seu gustui latius dicto observabilis est pulcritudo*, welches mit meiner gegebenen Erklärung einerlei ist. Denn durch das Wort Phänomenon versteht er alles das, was sich durch die Sinnen auf eine undeutliche Art vorstellen lässt, (§ 425 seiner Metaphysik) und er will also dadurch nichts anders sagen, als dass die Schönheit eine Vollkommenheit sei, insofern sie sinnlich erkannt wird. Aus diesem, was ich hier angeführt habe, lässt sich nun ferner bestimmen, was die Hässlichkeit ist. Diese ist der Schönheit entgegengesetzt, und da diese eine Vollkommenheit ist, die durch die Sinne erkannt wird, so muss die Hässlichkeit eine Unvollkommenheit sein, die durch die Sinne vorgestellt wird.” On Wolffian concept of perfection, see: *Hüning D. Christian Wolffs “allgemeine Regel der menschlichen Handlungen”// Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik / Annual Review of Law and Ethics. 2004. Vol. 12. P. 91–113.*

¹³ Ibid. P. 25: “Weil die Stellung der äußeren Teile des menschlichen Körpers nach der Wohlgerimtheit vieles zu seiner Schönheit beiträgt, § 6. so glaube ich, dass ich keine vergebliche Arbeit tun werde, wenn ich die Lage der äußeren Theile an dem menschlichen Körper etwas genauer betrachte. Ganz anders sieht der Mensch von vorne als von hinten aus, und wer es nicht glauben will, der darf nur entweder sich selbst oder einen anderen betrachten, so wird er finden, dass sich an dem vorderen Teile des Körpers die Augen, die Nase, der Mund, die Ohren und Hände befinden, an dem hinteren aber nicht. Kurz, man nimmt vorne an dem menschlichen Körper die sinnlichen Werkzeuge, welches seine edelsten Teile sind, wahr, hinten aber nicht.”

Reasoning in this way, Nicolai comes to anthropological conclusions which seem quite consistent with a theory of physical influx as it was formulated by Wolff. In 'Psychologia Rationalis', Wolff describes three distinct theories explaining the relations between soul and body¹⁴. The theory of physical influx is based directly on his understanding of the Aristotelian notion of efficient causality and it claims that soul and body function harmoniously since each can exercise genuine efficient causality upon the other. It should be mentioned that, according to Wolff, this theory cannot be proven either by experience or by a priori deduction from the nature of the soul and the body, moreover, it seems to be contrary to the order of nature, so he claims that Leibniz's doctrine of pre-established harmony is merely the most logical hypothesis for solving the soul-body problem. In spite of numerous references to 'Psychologia Rationalis', Nicolai argues:

As you should know, it is generally accepted that based on facial structure, namely, the figure, position and properties of the facial parts, one can make a very likely and, I would even say, certain conclusion about the properties of the human soul, its inclinations and affects... Experience can confirm this. You can try as much as you like to suppress the arising movements of the soul, you can apply all your art to strangle their manifestations or try to make them invisible and all this will be in vain. No, arising in the soul, they are immediately apparent on the one's face... I learned it from the philosophers that the changes in the face differ just like changes in the soul and each change in the soul is connected simultaneously with a movement of the nervous juice in the brain. If this is so, then when the soul has pleasant and unpleasant sensations, such changes, expressing pleasant or unpleasant ideas, must also take place in the face.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Blackwell R.J.* Christian Wolff's Doctrine of the Soul // *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 1961. Vol. 22. P. 339–354; *Watkins E.* From Pre-Established Harmony to Physical Influx: Leibniz's Reception in Eighteenth Century Germany // *Perspectives on Science*. 1998. Vol. 6. No. 1–2. P. 136–203; *Look B.C.* Simplicity of Substance in Leibniz, Wolff and Baumgarten // *Studia Leibnitiana*. 2013. Bd. 45. Heft 2. P. 191–208.

¹⁵ *Nicolai E.A.* Abhandlung von der Schönheit des menschlichen Körpers... P. 42–44, 56–57: "Es ist, müssen Sie wissen, eine ausgemachte Sache, dass man von der Bildung des Gesichts, das ist, von der Figur, Lage und Beschaffenheit der Teile im Gesichte einen sehr wahrscheinlichen, ja ich wollte fast gar sagen, einen gewissen Schluss auf die Beschaffenheit des Gemüts bei

In his essay, Nikolai does not explicitly refer to the causal ground of the connections described by him, however, some indirect arguments can be given that he implies it. In his previous treatise, Nicolai argued that sexual dreams can be caused by the pressure of the bladder on the nerves leading to the gonads, which become excited and communicate the idea of sex to the phantasy (Einbildungskraft).¹⁶ According to the doctrine of material ideas, which was accepted by Wolff, the working of the imagination is a physiological process; Wolff's theory of imagination is quite mechanical. He argues that the faculty of imagination (Einbildungskraft) organizes and stores impressions, but according to principle or "law" (Gesetz), as Wolff terms it, that we do not determine, namely, the law of association. A further consequence of the doctrine of material ideas is that impressions confuse our reasoning so it is easier to think rationally if one is not distracted by sensations. While the sense organs receive physical impressions or "apperception", in Leibniz's terminology, focuses the mind on the senses, distinguishing one idea from another or making them more or less intensive. Thus, the physical world acts on our minds by creating material impressions and that our mind works from a central internal point to create representations of the world; it remains a one-way process. But in the context of Nicolai's reasoning, the connection between sexual dreams that excite (erregen) a person and lead to ejaculation (sich die muskulöse Haut der Samenblasen zusammenzieht und den Samen herausschleibt) can be considered as a special case of the connection between a pleasant idea and changes in the body part. So the pressure of the bladder causes both of them mechanically.

einen Menschen, auf seine Neigungen und Affekten machen könne... Die Erfahrung kann dieses bestätigen. Man mag sich noch so viele Mühe geben, die entstandenen Gemütsbewegungen zu unterdrücken, man mag alle seine Kunst gebrauchen, ihren Ausbruch zu ersticken oder nicht sichtbar werden zu lassen, alles ist vergebens. Nein, sie schildern sich sogleich in dem Gesichte ab, sobald sie nur in der Seele entstehen... Ich habe mich von den Weltweisen belehren lassen, dass die Veränderungen im Gesichte verschieden sind, nachdem die Veränderungen in der Seele verschieden, und dass keine Veränderung in der Seele vorgeht, mit der nicht zugleich eine Bewegung des Nervensafts im Gehirn verbunden wäre. Wenn dieses sich nun also verhält, so müssen, wenn die Seele angenehme und unangenehme Empfindungen hat, auch solche Veränderungen in dem Gesichte vorgehen, welche die angenehmen und unangenehmen Vorstellungen ausdrücken."

¹⁶ Nicolai E.A. Wirkungen der Einbildungskraft in den menschlichen Körper aus den Gründen der neuern Weltweisheit hergeleitet. Halle: Carl Hermann Hemmerde, 1744. P. 32–33.

However, Nicolai could not be characterized as a pure mechanist and determinist since the idea of God is important for his reasoning concerning the human body. In Wolff's account of the soul-body problem, pre-established harmony between substances depends on God as its author since it is God who must have created each body and each soul in such a way that, although they do not causally interact, they harmoniously and naturally cooperate as though they did causally interact. Nicolai repeatedly stresses that nature and God have arranged so that the human body is perceived as beautiful, because the arrangement of the organs of perception is the best for this (correspondingly to Wolff's definition of beauty).

However, at the same time he keeps an ironic distance to all that he has said. For instance, Nicolai writes:

I do not know, dear sir, whether you believe me or not if I tell you that the front part of the human body is beautiful, and moreover more beautiful than the back if you consider both of them. At least it seems to me that you appear to me to be much more beautiful in the front than behind, and you should see that this is true not only with respect to your body but also regarding every human body in general.¹⁷

Finally, Nicolai claims that reasoning "according to the most rigorous method proper to mathematicians" (nach der strengsten Lehrart, die doch den Mathematikern eigen ist) in some recent medical treatises is nothing more than fashion; it is incoherent when applied to medical issues and, ultimately, does not lead to health benefits for patients. Stressing the irony of the passage, he concludes: "But if we take this matter seriously, I suppose that the mathematical

¹⁷ Nicolai E.A. Abhandlung von der Schönheit des menschlichen Körpers... P. 41: "Ich weiß nicht, Mein Herr, ob Sie mir es glauben werden, wenn ich Ihnen sage, dass die vordere Seite des menschlichen Körpers schön sei, und zwar noch schöner als die hintere, wenn man sie beide betrachtet. Mich deucht es wenigstens, dass Sie mir von vorne weit schöner vorkommen als von hinten, und Sie sollen sehen, das ich dieses nicht allein von Ihrem Körper, sondern überhaupt von dem menschlichen Körper erweisen werde."

method is very useful in the medical art. And, as for me, there would be nothing easier than proving it if the space allowed.”¹⁸

Thus, it might be suggested that in Nicolai's work there is a kind of synthesis of Wolffian model of metaphysical reasoning, a mechanistic approach to natural science, and moral philosophy in the context of non-academic forms of representing medical knowledge. The heterogeneity of the categorical apparatus, used by Nikolai, is explained by the fact that his text is addressed simultaneously to several different audiences (the professional corporation of practicing physicians, the university corporation well versed in Wolffian philosophy, the secular salon community), so that philosophical and special medical idiolects are mutually relativized. Consequently, the epistemological status of the synthesis is ambivalent: arguments that have a more or less weight in one communicative context reveal an ironic or even frankly parodic nature in others. Thus, the early treatise of Nikolai clearly shows that the work of a “philosophical physician” was oriented not only to narrowly professional and theoretical polemics, but also to the tasks of media presentation of physician who received training in the latest philosophical trends. Paradoxically, this not only promoted the productive appropriation of the conceptual means of rationalist philosophy by medicine but also created prerequisites for rethinking the social significance of medical knowledge.

¹⁸ Ibid. P. 76: “Aber im rechten Ernste von der Sache zu reden, ich halte doch davor, dass die mathematische Methode in der Ausübung der Arzneigelehrtheit großen Nutzen habe, und mir sollte nichts leichter sein, als dieses zu erweisen, wenn es nur der Raum verstattete.”

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