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Valentin Weigel and Anticlerical Tradition

Andrew Weeks
Prof. emer., Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois, Vereinigte Staaten
caweeks@ilstu.edu

Abstract

Paracelsus, Valentin Weigel, and Jacob Böhme are not only linked by a clear chain of influence and borrowing; they are all deeply rooted in the Protestant Reformation. However, the tendency to assign Paracelsus to medicine or the Renaissance and to subsume Weigel and Böhme under the anachronistic heading of "German mysticism" has obfuscated their kinship as well as their significance in German intellectual history. Their relegation distorts the breadth of the reform set in motion after 1517. They share an anticlerical tendency and a determination to expand the Reformation beyond doctrine and devotion to encompass other spheres of life and learning. Their reforming antiauthoritarianism found expression both in the nature philosophy of Paracelsus and in the mystical impulses of Weigel and Böhme.

Keywords

Reformation – Renaissance – anticlericalism – mysticism – Paracelsus – Valentin Weigel – Jacob Böhme – German intellectual history

The worldwide celebrations of the 1517 Reformation quincentenary did not encompass every facet of that epoch. Under Luther's impact, a neglected tendency arose in the theological polemics composed by Paracelsus in Salzburg in 1524 and 1525. This Lutheran-Paracelsian impulse inspired an antiauthoritarian reforming current in the dissent of Valentin Weigel (1533–1588) and Jacob Böhme (1575–1624) and in the appeals for a "universal reformation" of the Rosicrucian manifestoes. Though this forgotten reformation was inspired by Luther and driven by theological dissent, it differed from the mainstream or radical reformations by extending to philosophy, science, and medicine. This and its sweeping challenge to authority are its defining features. Its sources,

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ramifications, and implications merit more attention than they have received. To provide context, I will recapitulate the findings of my publications.[1] The recapitulation can also draw a balance of my completed researches in the field.

Our conference title, "The Forgotten Reformation," promises to establish the shared context of Paracelsus, Weigel, Böhme, and the Rosicrucians in intellectual history. We can think of them as beads on a string. Without their thread, they fall through the cracks of intellectual history. Paracelsus, a major figure by any account, is absent in Wellbery's *New History of German Literature*.[2] The influential but eccentric Böhme has been marginalized to such a degree that no proposal for a critical edition of his work has ever been deemed worthy of funding. The idiosyncratic Weigel lacks context. Efforts to incorporate him into the history of Lutheran theology, Pietism, or philosophy tend to distort his many-sided non-conformism.[3] The content of the Rosicrucian writings has been overshadowed by the mystery of their authorship and the mystique of their symbols.

It is only when these outsiders are associated as reformers in a basic sense that they converge with the wider domain of intellectual history, thereby extending its parameters and reconfiguring its main outlines.[4] Scholarly specialization with its labels and sub-categories has cast selective spotlights on the Protestant, Lutheran, magisterial, and radical reformations, excluding what is anomalous. Only when the categories are set aside do the outsiders find their place in the transformation begun in 1517. Their affinity highlights marginalized themes of German Studies. Since, in contrast to the mainstream reformers and radical Anabaptists, the forgotten reformation was both antiauthoritarian and sweeping in scope, its scope and sequence drive a topical wedge into the Reformation Century as commonly understood.

Since Valentin Weigel is a lynchpin and central link in our forgotten reformation, an overview of his work with its sources and implications is instructive. Weigel, who lived from 1533 until 1588, was a Saxon Lutheran pastor who wrote heterodox treatises which were religious in character yet sufficiently speculative to make him a key figure in early modern German philosophy.[5] After the posthumous publication of his writings, he was denounced as one of the most notorious heretics of the late Reformation. Centuries later, the profundity of his thought gained recognition. His writings have only recently

1 Weeks, 2000; idem, 1997; idem, 1993 idem, 1991; Weigel, 2003.

2 Wellbery, 2004.

3 See Weeks, 2017.

4 On the intellectual affinities of these figures, see Weeks, 2003: 283–302; idem, 2008b; idem, 2013c; idem, 2019.

5 See Wollgast, 1988.

become fully accessible. In incorporating him, we need to address simultaneously the content of his work and the misconstrued context into which it does not otherwise readily fit.

Until recently – that is, prior to the editorial work of Winfried Zeller, Siegfried Wollgast, and Horst Pfefferl[6] – it was possible to conceive of Weigel as an unknown center in German intellectual history, unknown because his writing was unfamiliar and only incompletely edited, yet central to those who understood his sources and impact. We knew that Weigel explicitly transmitted the contents of Meister Eckhart, Tauler, the *Theologia deutsch*, and Paracelsus; and that his influence was in turn spread further by Johann Arndt, Jacob Böhme, and the Pietists in a tradition that extended from ancient and medieval roots to the flowering of Idealism and Romanticism. Weigel stands at midpoint in a half millennium of German intellectual history. Omitting Paracelsus, whose reforming iconoclasm is discussed elsewhere in this volume, Weigel's tradition is referred to as "German mysticism." The term is an anachronism, useful as an ideal type, yet counterproductive insofar as it diverts attention from literary content and context. Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Valentin Weigel, or Jacob Böhme did not call themselves mystics. In medieval or early modern times, the adjective "mystical" (*theologia mystica, sensus mysticus*) denoted something which was still integral to theological tradition. Only more recently has "mysticism" been substantivized to denote a special knowledge opposed to reason or tradition.[7]

We know for certain that both Eckhart and Paracelsus exercised a seminal influence on Weigel; and that Paracelsus and Weigel influenced Böhme. What was the context that nurtured these diverse thinkers from Eckhart to Paracelsus to Böhme so that they could flourish in a soil fertile for the spread of their thought? What was it in the German world that gave rise to these peculiar thinkers and made others receptive to their meaning and message? How does their tradition fit into the broader weave of intellectual history? I will argue that by integrating them, we not only fill a *lacuna* in literary history; we also shift our perception of its overall contours. That shift, however, must be approached in the broadest possible context.

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6 Valentin Weigel. *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Horst Pfefferl, 14 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1996–2016) (References in the text to this addition cite it by volume and page). Valentin Weigel. *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Siegfried Wollgast (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1977); Valentin Weigel. *Selected Spiritual Writings*, transl. by Andrew Weeks (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).

7 "'Mysticism' as a noun is a fairly recent creation, the product of early 17th-century France, as the researches of Michel de Certeau have shown." McGinn, 2000: 266–267.

The recent 1000-page compendium by the Heidelberg Germanist Dieter Borchmeyer, *Was ist Deutsch? Die Suche nach einer Nation*, is well organized and invaluable; however, one blind spot among its otherwise thorough representations of *What is German* is the neglect of what we call mysticism. Borchmeyer discusses Madam de Staël but ignores her striking dictum: "De toutes les nations, celle qui a le plus de penchant au mysticisme, c'est la nation allemande."[8] The *Personenregister* does not include Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Hildegard of Bingen, the *Theologia deutsch*, Paracelsus, or Weigel, and Böhme only in a trivial citation. By contrast, the Heidelberg Germanist devotes a large section to the impact of the German university from Kant through the nineteenth century. Borchmeyer is surely right that the institutional revolution which began with Kant's *Streit der Fakultäten* shaped both the self-perception and image of Germany in the world.[9] German scholarship helped mold even my humble midwestern university where our school hymn is sung to an old Haydn melody better known as the *Deutschlandlied*.

But for every thesis an antithesis. If the German has meant *the academic*, it has also meant the opposite: it has meant *the lay* in a sense that contrasts both with the clerical and the academic. In the Middle Ages, *clerical* and *learned* were subsumed in the common root of English "clerk" and "clergy," just as *geistig* and *geistlich* bear the same root.[10] In a once bitter opposition, an anticlerical, antiacademic lay tradition evolved.[11] It overlapped with so-called German mysticism, the tradition of Weigel. What we call mysticism made itself odious, not by claiming knowledge of or mystical union with God or by equating the Godhead with nothing. These were commonplaces of a negative, apophatic theology in the canonical tradition of Dionysius.[12] It was provocative because it challenged the authority of church and university by re-defining theology in

8 De Staël, 1867: 578. It should be noted that de Staël's characterization of German mysticism is generalized, encompassing not only Tauler but Luther, Klopstock, and "l'idéalisme en philosophie" (579).

9 Borchmeyer, 2017. See ch. 9 ("Deutsche Universität und deutsche Philosophie – Glück und Ende einer Wechselbeziehung"): 678–726.

10 See "Clerk." In *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* ("Learning in the Middle Ages being mainly confined to the clergy, the word came to express 'scholar'"); cf. "geistig" (1), Grimm, 1991 ("Die geschichte des hochd. wortes ist ziemlich merkwürdig, namentlich in seinem verhältnis zu *geistlich*, durch welches es lange mit vertreten wird").

11 How old and widespread this anticlerical, antimonastic tradition was can be surmised by comparing a Reformation satire broadsheet *On the Source and Origin of Monks* (1545), of devils defecating monks, with the same motive of friars swarming from the Satan's sphincter in hell found in The Summoner's Prologue of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

12 On non-heretical sources of mystical tradition, see McGinn, 2000: 157–182 (Dionysius the Areopagite).

terms as accessible or inaccessible to the lay as to the learned. At its most radical, mystical writing placed the laity in militant opposition to the church and university. The full scope of this conflict of the lay with the learned and the clerical has been neglected.[13] As intellectual historians, we explain phenomena in the manner of the cookbook. Take a portion of Neoplatonism, add some exotic Paracelsism, season it with esotericism, apply mystical heat, and what comes out is Weigel or Böhme. Our predilection for generic labels ascribes to these authors a mindlessness which is the inverse of our presumed cleverness. The better question is, for or against what did the forgotten reformation militate? The question calls for a textual interpretation that goes beyond the popular but misleading devotion to "mysticism" to consider what the mystics favored and opposed. An inventory of dichotomies of interest to Germanists attests to the oppositions of medieval to modern, courtly to burgher, female to male, or religious to secular. No less influential is the opposition of the lay to the clerical or academic. An anticlerical animus informed much late medieval and early modern literature. Examples include Boccaccio, Chaucer, and the Old French *Fabliaux*.[14] The same opposition arises in mystical literature and plays a role in both Paracelsus and the Reformation.[15] Anticlericalism is at times reflective or speculative, at times vicious and anti-intellectual.

The most influential German "mystics" fall into three categories: the assertive laymen (Böhme is preeminent); the women who are excluded by gender from attaining clerical authority (Mechthild of Magdeburg and the medieval visionary or ascetic nuns); and the educated clergy who wrote or preached for and from the vantage of women and lay people. Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and Weigel himself belong in this third category. They preached and professed an inner direct access to God, unmediated by the church or university, *lay* therefore in the double sense of non-academic and non-clerical. Only those beguiled by esoteric formulae can fail to notice how little in the language of the German "mystics" points to any uniquely identifiable psychological experience shared with other mystics but unknown to conventional devotion. Yet much in the context and content of their work asserts a knowledge gained independently of clerical-institutional authority. The inner spirit, the

13 See Brückner, 1974. Though the index (see "Kleriker" etc. and related headings) indicates a diffuse inclusion of anticlerical themes, the Table of Contents typically has no heading for them. Recognition was accorded to our theme by Lucke, 1974: 9–10. Relevant materials are included in Jäckel, 1983.

14 Burrows, 2005; Eichmann, 1982. The anticlericalism of Boccaccio's Decameron is notorious. On that of Chaucer, see note 11 above.

15 On anticlericalism as an essential element of the Reformation, see Goertz, 1987; Dykema, Oberman, 1993; Scribner, 1987; Dipple, 1996.

inner word, spiritual illumination, and mystical immediacy are not psychological descriptions but assertions that certainty does not depend on external hierarchical-institutional guarantees. The coherence and continuity of Weigel's work manifest themselves as an elaboration of his anticlerical defense of lay authority against quarreling theologians ("die falschen Theologen" – 1:31). His opposition is blunt in demanding that the teaching of the *Theologia deutsch* be taken directly to the people (1:97). His sources have a commensurate origin in German intellectual history beginning with Eckhart.

Meister Eckhart (1260–ca. 1328), whom Weigel quotes early and by name, was among the preeminent scholastic minds in Paris.[16] He was directed to preach to less educated congregations. His sermons translated scholastic thought into the language of the people. His paradoxes drew upon the antinomies of a monotheism reduced to its ultimate consequences. If God is all in all, we are nothing; yet in embracing our nothingness, we are god in God. Mystical interiority does not refer to anything physically interior. *Inner* signifies independence from official or academic authority. Through absolute obedience to God and poverty of the spirit, the believer becomes autonomous, one might almost say *gottunmittelbar* in analogy to the *Reichsunmittelbarkeit* of the free imperial city. Religion is simplified and divested of academic theology and hierarchical order. To attain mystical immediacy, one need only deny self and surrender to God. The surrender does not abandon the practices and teachings of the Dominican order served by Eckhart. We can leave the assessment of his orthodoxy to the theologians and church historians; but there is no evidence that he intended to break with his church or order, or promoted a doctrine intended to deviate from their teachings. Scholars have annotated his mystical sermons and shown that even some of his most daring assertions reference traditional sources.[17] His paradoxes intensify the contradictions manifest in an eternal, limitless being evoked in the language of time and finitude. The enigma of a Being that transcends all being places the lay and the learned on an equal footing. Mystical unknowing resembles in its humility the Socratic wisdom of knowing that one does not know, a wisdom attainable by the lay and the learned alike. Mechthild of Magdeburg displays an early militant anticlericalism; but Eckhart, Seuse, or Tauler are not overtly hostile to the institutions of the church. It is mainly after the church institutions come under assault in the Reformation that the shift of authority to the laity acquires an aggressive edge in the Protestant dissenter-mystics.

16 Weeks, 2013a: 617–627.

17 Steer, Sturlese, 1998.

At the dawn of the Reformation, simplification and lay emancipation were preeminent features of two so-called mystical writings encountered by Luther at key junctures: the *Theologia deutsch* and the *Basel Tauler* (1521/22),[18] both cited by Weigel. The former is a masterpiece of simplification. The latter begins with a programmatic shift of authority from master to layman and incorporates sermons by Eckhart. Did Luther derive his theology from such sources? The question is misleading, since it is rooted in a false reification of mysticism which is at root a construct. Similar questions of mystical "influence" arise for German Idealism. They can be mooted by focusing on themes and their relation to traditional authority. Luther was forging his path from his adherence to the tradition-bound church hierarchy of his early years to his *sola scriptura, fide, et gratia* and to what he called in 1520 the universal priesthood of the baptized. Before he elaborated the terms of what would become his new theology, he was drawn to the simplicity and immediacy of mystical discourse.

Looking ahead, we know that the new theology would not lead to consensus, but to conflicting readings of the Bible and eventually to religious war. For the magisterial reformation, this resulted in retrenchment of official doctrine, so-called neo-clericalism. For the spiritualist dissenters, it reaffirmed the inner over the outer, spirit over letter. It also incorporated the nature theory and "lay theology" of Paracelsus. The aggressive inner orientation is pronounced in Sebastian Franck and Weigel; the outwardly directed militant nature theory or Paracelsism in Weigel and above all Böhme. The inner word and the light of nature are complementary facets of an authority asserted on the basis of an extended interpretation of divine omnipresence. Weigel in his Eckhartian mode makes denial of self and submission to the divine will the precondition of an immediate relationship or union with God. The nature mystic finds in diversity a varied expression of a single, underlying divine will. Böhme's synthesis allows him to affirm diversity. However, we should not exaggerate his tolerance: he was an anticlerical Lutheran whose envisioned harmony was at best utopian.

The impact of religious discord helps us understand such contradictions. Weigel and Böhme stress denial of self and affirmation of a divine being who encompasses and deifies the human. They defend individual authority against the official church and learned clergy; and they approach tolerance by condemning condemnation. Diversity is affirmed without abandoning core doctrines. Both reject religious discord and hatred: Weigel by anchoring the inner human being in the divine and Böhme by projecting an ongoing creation in which sundry divine spirits are equally necessary to the divine whole. Weigel's

18 Tauler, 1522.

interiority and Böhme's diversity are therefore two sides of a reaction to the oppressive course of the late Reformation. Tolerance is a defense of spiritual freedom against oppression.

The confluence of these factors in Weigel – his reaction to religious controversy, his rejection of church and university, his defense of the laity, and his reception of Eckhart and Paracelsus – can be documented in his seminal works of 1570 and 1571. He alludes to the synergistic controversy, one of the Gnesio-Lutheran quarrels in which his Wittenberg patron, Paul Eber, tried in vain to intercede to restore harmony (1:15). Weigel's earliest writings leave no doubt that he was angry at the theological quarrels, the *Zank* and *Disputiren* of the academic theologians. His writings propose to take religious thought in a new direction, guided by the complementary impulses of synthesis and simplification, by synthesis with Paracelsism and simplification in the Eckhartian tradition of the *Theologia deutsch*.

Already in his *Gnothi seauton* of 1571, Weigel elaborates the standard elements of his thought. In response to religious discord, he proposes a new point of departure for theology: self-knowledge. He proclaims natural as well as divine reason and argues for the mental agency of Paracelsian sidereal spirit as the font of knowledge. This appears to defy common sense. We need to ask how it is possible that all skill, knowledge, and even scripture could lie within us. Skills are acquired from a master and scripture from a text. Weigel, it seems, defends the laity while ignoring what every lay person knew. Instead of the usual shoulder-shrugging response that he is after all a mystic, we need to confront the interpretive challenge of his work as we would that of any other literary text.

Weigel sought a theoretical grounding of common experience. What we receive from the stars is *aptitude* for the art, the condition of having the art within us. That the art *qua* aptitude stems from the stars implies that it is not handed down from father to child, unlike the station of the peasant or noble. Burghers were the most diverse and mobile social group. Weigel and Böhme both transcended their social origins. Moreover, in ascribing knowledge to the stars, they echoed a common Lutheran embrace of astrology. Robin Barnes' prize-winning study of *Astrology and Reformation* has shown that Lutherans with their almanacs and calendars were more in awe of the power of the stars than Calvinists or Catholics.[19] Medical astrology, moreover, recognized the influence of the planets which included the sun and moon. Their impact on birth and life was obvious to any peasant or burgher. For us, thinking is justified by the very act of thinking, obviating any need for abstract justifications. We no

19 Barnes, 2016: 14, 134–135, 173–192.

longer need to recite the Cartesian *cogito* or Francis Bacon's idols of the tribe, cave, marketplace, and theater to justify independence of mind or embrace experimental results. We are not the ones taking the first perilous step beyond traditional authority. We should not wonder if, in navigating unchartered waters, our precursors projected chimerical powers and invoked divine and stellar guidance.

Skill in the arts is from the stars; but the key to understanding scripture lies within us. Weigel's era was developing an advanced biblical exegesis. His older contemporary, Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575), is considered a pioneer of hermeneutics.[20] Flacius's *Clavis* or *Golden Key* maintained that scripture is its own interpreter: the key therefore lies in the *object*. Weigel's *Golden Grasp* posits that our "grasp" of scripture lies in the *subject*. Privileging subject over object and spirit over letter, Weigel argues that our grasp of literature is at root self-knowledge. Without the inner spirit, the outer letter is dead. The inner and the outer approaches to exegesis evolved *mutatis mutandis.* In the hermeneutics of Dilthey, textual understanding is linked to the interpreter's historical situation.[21] For Weigel, the human condition encompasses what we might call the hermeneutic circle of the divine within the human, a realignment of object with subject. The subjective or objective interpretations correlate with the scholarly or personal readings. The scholar relies on a received, thus in a basic sense, *objective* body of *traditional* knowledge; the lay reader on *subjective* experience, empathy, and hence *self*-knowledge.

Weigel was not concerned with historical conditions, but with God, eternity, and creation. If we know what lies within, that is, within our experience as the epistemological *microcosm*, thus described by Hugh of St. Victor whom Weigel cites in *Gnothi seauton* (3:50–51), we know God from god within. Weigel's early *Zwei nützliche Traktate* cite a passage from Eckhart linking the creation of all things with the inner knowledge of God: "Ein groser Meister Spricht … Do ich aus Gott floss, do sprachen alle ding, Gott der ist …" ("A great master says … When I flowed out of God, all things spoke: God indeed is…" – 1:58). All creatures bear witness to their Creator; however, the emergence of every creature with all others does not actualize self-knowledge. This only arises through human self-abandonment and breakthrough as cited from Eckhart (*Inn dem durchbrechen, da Jch ledig stehen will, Jnn dem Willen Gottes* – 1:59). Eckhart's evocations climax in breakthrough: "Jch entpfahe Jnn diesen durchbrechen, daß ich vnd Gott Eins seindt" (I receive in this breakthrough that God and I are one" – 1:59). The emanation of all creatures from God parallels and transcends

20 Thouard, 2005: 265–280.

21 Dilthey, 1906.

the putatively non-mystical Lutheran doctrine of divine ubiquity. For Weigel, divine omnipresence secures a human-divine origin and a capacity for knowledge which self-abandonment and breakthrough can then actualize. Divine origin annuls worldly hierarchy; breakthrough spiritual hierarchy. Weigel's apparent non-sequiturs address matters vital to the self-assertion of a spiritual layperson who might have asked, who am I to think for myself and judge by my own lights?

The paradoxes of creature and Creator are vivified in complex metaphors of the image or shadow which only has its being by virtue of its source; the seed that conceals in itself the plant and fruit, and the spiritual poverty that divests itself of self and God to be reborn as god in God. Paradox results from thinking in absolutes: If God is all in all, then the human being is both nothing and God. Weigel's later writings, *On the Place of the World* (*Vom Ort der Welt*, 1576) and *The Golden Grasp* (*Der güldene Griff*, 1578), situate a paradoxical divine reasoning beyond human understanding in a hierarchy of knowledge rising from sensory experience to the unity of creature with Creator. An inner eternal unity subsumes and annuls external worldly distinctions. In effect, the highest becomes the innermost.

In privileging the personal breakthrough over the incrementalism of scholarly learning and in contrasting the human with the divine reason, Weigel projects interpenetrating realms, as did Paracelsus[22] and Luther each in his own way. *Gnothi seauton* explains, "Why the human being should be recognized in two ways: as natural and supernatural" (*Warumb der Mennsch auf zwayerlay Weege zuerkennen furgenumen werde als Naturlich vnnd vber Natürlich* – 3:52). Illumination and union with God are attained, not by good works or academic learning, but by turning inward to God. Like much else in the Reformation, this has a strong resonance with the theology of Saint Augustine.

The inner architecture of knowledge looks back to Eckhart and Paracelsus while anticipating Böhme. Weigel's synthesis is mystifying only insofar as we focus on the labels and ignore the active ingredients. As the above citations of Eckhart by Weigel may suggest, the disjuncture between nature philosophy and mysticism is a chimera of academic categorization. To render Paracelsus compatible with *Medizingeschichte*, scholars ignored his fierce rants against the university and its traditions and his unscholarly claim of divine inspiration. To render Weigel respectable for *Kirchengeschichte*, they ignored his disdain for the church. Mystics should play nice. The cookbook approach provided euphemisms, *Renaissance* or *empiricism* for Paracelsus, *Pietism* or *mysticism* for Weigel and Böhme. This has had the effect of rendering them

22 See Gantenbein, 2018: 166–196.

incoherent and placing them into distinct disciplinary sub-specializations. *Nur keine Zusammenrottung!*

Their usurpation of authority thunders in the scatological and obscene rants of Paracelsus and Weigel's denunciations of his clerical opponents as Antichrist. Antiauthoritarianism motivates their writing and structures their vision. The inner and nature are not opposites but complementary aspects of an anticlerical, antiacademic authority based on an intense or universal divine presence. In Paracelsus, Weigel, and Böhme, this intensification universalizes authority. Only like can know like. Paracelsus and Böhme recognize spirit in nature on the authority of the Holy Spirit. Weigel teaches the layperson versed in the "inner word" to vanquish all the scholars and theologians (8:7).

Subject and object are united in the divine seed from which everything sprouts. God created everything out of nothing but himself ("gott besitzet alle Dinge in ihm selber" – 8:10); hence, all things are in all ("vnnd bleibt eins in dem andern"). The divine spirit is the core unfolding in all the particulars of the world. All creatures bear the seed of the eternal and are likenesses of spiritual transformation: "Woraus einer ist, dasselbe hatt vnnd treget er auch in ihme, die birne ist aus dem baume, der kern aus der birne" etc. (8:11). The knowledge that renounces self is transformative. It effects rebirth and supersedes external injunctions. Since the knowing faculty is innate, human beings bear a knowledge of all arts, crafts, languages, and worldly wisdom within. This inner knowledge assumes that we inherit a capacity to know nature from the stars and to grasp Scripture from God. God and the stars sow gifts without regard for academic-clerical training or station of birth. By the same token, individuality and diversity are two sides of the omnipresent, omnipotent immediacy of the God who is all in all. The paradoxical divine power acts both by limiting and extending. As in Hugh of St. Victor, Cusanus, or Leibniz, the human being is an epistemological microcosm.

Creation, birth, and engendering are concepts that presuppose temporality. Under the aspect of simultaneity, they correspond to outer and inner, elemental and spiritual, mortal and eternal, letter and spirit. Harmonizing the creation in Genesis with the Prolog of the Gospel of John, Paracelsus and Böhme recognize that the seed of the eternal being in the temporal creature contains divine forces imparted to nature by the divine Word of John and expressed in nature's interiority and multiplicity. The coherence of this vision anchors the continuity of their tradition. Thanks to Pfefferl, we know of Weigel's reception of the Paracelsian writings[23] edited by Gantenbein who has also documented the Paracelsian influences elaborated in Böhme's concepts of nature and

23 Pfefferl, 1995: 151–168.

metaphysics.[24] In Weigel, themes are present in a nutshell which blossom in Böhme's *Aurora* (1612) and *Von den drei Principien Göttliches Wesens* (*Three Principles of Divine Being* – 1619). The organic growth metaphor places the contemplation of God within an accessible lay experience, while rationalizing evil as a perverted growth trajectory.

What I want to emphasize is that their writings can be described in terms of intellectual themes and historical contexts; and that the themes stand in a meaningful relation to the contexts. This is so obvious in intellectual history that one hesitates to dwell on it. But it is necessary because such related authors as Paracelsus, Weigel, or Böhme have been segregated by disciplinary boundaries, by neglect of context, or by the anachronism *mysticism*. The German equivalent term occurs in the terminological variants of *Mystik* and *Mystizismus*. Like the distinction between *Dichtung* and *Unterhaltungsliteratur*, the contrast smuggles a status distinction into a subject matter which one claims to approach in a value-free sense.[25] The substantives *Mystik* and *Mystizismus* are post-medieval coinages that differ from the medieval *theologia mystica* or *sensus mysticus* or the Baroque-era title cited by Martin Zemla: *Philosophia Mystica*. As we have noted, the concept of mysticism is useful as an ideal type, but it has a distorting anachronistic effect with Böhme and other so-called mystics. The notion of "mystical experience" leads to a drastic distortion. Böhme's "illumination," about which we have little psychological insight, was not an alternative truth, but the full and final truth, heralding the impending end of creation. Since the world did not end in his time, we must either recognize the historical limits of his illumination or distort its meaning by treating it as an alternative mystical truth in our modern anachronistic sense. Though many in Germany prefer the latter, mystical themes are undeniably rooted in literary tradition and in non-mystical historical conflicts that pit the lay against the learned and the clerical.

Because what we call mysticism is not a separate access to truth but part of a universal tradition of speculative themes and premises, we can conclude that the question whether Luther's Reformation or the beginnings of modern science derive from mystical sources is misleading. The transition from the medieval authority of the Church to that of the new Protestant faith, much like the transition from a medieval to a modern scientific worldview, was a leap into unknown territory. In transitioning to a new, uncertain principle of authority, appeals to intuition, inner certainty, esoteric tradition, or secrets of nature could be expected. Ignoring this contingency introduces invalid divisions into

24 Paracelsus, 2008. See also n. 22 above.

25 See Weeks, 2015: 217–232; also Weeks, Andersson, 2018: xii–20.

intellectual history by relegating figures in accordance with anachronistic criteria as "mystical" in the one case and rational or normal in the other, thus making similar figures appear unrelated and makeshifts essential.

Consider Lessing. He was hardly what we would call a mystic, yet he and Böhme pursued the same antiauthoritarian ends in similar terms. As Lessing states in reply to Pastor Goeze: "The letter is not the spirit, and the Bible is not the religion" (*Der Buchstabe ist nicht der Geist, und die Bibel ist nicht die Religion*). Lessing's un-mystical stance is hardly Weigel's or Böhme's; yet they all maintained loyalty to Lutheran precepts while defending the laity against Lutheran officialdom. Lessing advises: "*even good* Lutheran theologians long ago drew [the distinction] between Holy Scripture and the Word of God … Why hasn't Pastor Goeze first taken issue with them, instead of making it a crime for the poor layperson to follow in their footsteps" (auch gute *Lutherische Theologen* [*haben*] *schon längst zwischen der Heiligen Schrift und dem Worte Gottes* [*die Unterscheidung*] *gemacht… Warum hat Hr. Pastor Goeze nicht erst mit diesen angebunden, ehe er einem armen Laien ein Verbrechen daraus macht, in ihre Fußstapfen zu treten?*).[26] Notwithstanding our imputed oppositions of orthodox versus enlightened, mystical versus rational, Lessing, Weigel, and Böhme had more in common with Luther himself than meets the eye. Like the dissenters, Luther could shun the "historical faith."[27] His Latin Genesis commentary allowed for the principle of nature theology: "*Sic verba Dei res sunt, non nuda vocabula*" (God's words "let there be" etc. are the created things, no mere *vocabula*).[28] What impedes recognition and integration of such relations is an academic territorialism that segregates so-called mysticism from Orthodoxy and Enlightenment, ceding theology and religious history to the recognized Evangelical and Catholic university faculties and ignoring anomalous and outsider voices. As academics, we impose our academic order on things.

This tends to obfuscate a distinctive pattern of German intellectual life. German universities were founded later than the Italian, French, or English ones and not the first model of intellectual life. Cusanus, Paracelsus, Winkelmann, Goethe, Alexander von Humboldt, Engels, or Schliemann were not molded by academic careers. The Reformation and Romanticism elevated lay authority, and, with it, elements associated with mysticism. Intuition as *Anschauung*, microcosm and macrocosm, the inner light and the light of nature – all these concepts uphold the capacity for a knowledge of ultimate things attainable

26 Lessing, 1967: 424.

27 Luther rejected what came to be called the "historical faith" (*fides historica*) most influentially in point eighteen of his early influential *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* (1520).

28 Luther, 1911, WA 42: 17 (lines 22–23).

without learned Latin, academic training, or tradition. Hildegard of Bingen reacted against scholasticism in the twelfth century, Paracelsus and Luther in the sixteenth. Böhme distanced himself from Calvinism, Leibniz from Cartesian dualism, and Herder from Kant by addressing the complexity and variety of nature or culture which transcend academic categories. Moses Hess, a self-taught Jew who introduced Marx to the ideals of Communism, read and took notes on Böhme.[29]

So did Schopenhauer at a key moment in the development of his metaphysics of will.[30] He and Nietzsche challenged academic culture with an intuitive speculation that was visionary and attuned to the inner life. Schopenhauer considered his intuitive method antithetical to the empty concepts of his academic competitors. His antiacademic animus penetrates to the core of his thought and qualifies his disdain for deduction, his hostility to the university, and his veneration of "illuminism." As for Nietzsche, no small measure of the heroic status accorded to him derives from his abandonment of a promising academic career for the uncertain status of a nonacademic thinker and visionary seeker after what we might call spirit over letter. Hegel hailed Böhme as "the first German philosopher."[31]

The contrast of the lay-intuitive and learned-academic mentalities configure the work of German intellectuals where least expected: Engels was the nonacademic author whose *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844) spoke to plain sense and observation; Wilhelm Weitling (1808–1871) a working-class communist who appropriated elements of radical Christianity into his opposition. How did the incorporation of their less theoretical opposition into the sophisticated Hegelian dialectic of the far more academic Marx shape the international workers' movement?[32] When "mysticism" is resolved into these broader currents, its integration influences not only the details but the larger picture. Drawing on my recent work, I will offer a final example of the professional narrow-mindedness of *Germanistik* and, in a career-concluding remark, generalize from the case in point.

Borchmeyer with his academic inclination discusses Faust as an archetype of German identity. His discussion is insightful yet limited in disregarding mystical and anticlerical contexts. Consider the motif of space flight in the 1587 *Faustbuch*. In medieval cosmology, God was literally up above. The

29 Silberner, 1966: 19.

30 Weeks, 1992: 7–17; idem, 2008a: 19–30.

31 Hegel, 1971: 91–119.

32 Knatz, Mariske, 1989: 189. Marx distinguished between Weitling and his ilk and his own more philosophical Communism, defined as "a necessary consequence of New Hegelian philosophy" (though he also counted Hess among adherents of the latter).

cosmic perspective therefore approached divine knowledge. The flight of the god-forsaking Dr. Faustus thus reveals only darkness, as if he were flying "in ein finsters loch."[33] This striking detail is one variant in a symbolic discourse. Weigel's *On the Place of the World* claims that from a cosmic vantage there is no above or below, no celestial hierarchy ruled by the King of Heaven: God and heaven lie within. When Böhme's *Aurora* inherits Weigel's trope of "the place of the world," the celestial realm becomes an invisible reality or "birth" behind the outer elemental world. The symbolically articulated background of Weigel's *Place of the World* and the 1587 *Faustbuch* lay beyond Borchmeyer's scope, who, in fairness, could not be expected to encompass such details in his broad survey. Still, there are limits to the openness of German scholars for variant approaches to the archetypally German *Faustbuch*.

Faust's damnation is traditionally read as the verdict of Lutheran orthodoxy against a budding truth-seeker, a reading that flatters us as academics. In the afterglow of Goethe's *Faust*, his transgression casts theology as irrelevant. Yet the 1587 Faustus is introduced as a Wittenberg "Doctor Theologiae." His errors and dalliances with the devil were thus not theologically unaffiliated. This struck Protestant clerics as an insult to their authority.[34] Nor was there anything new in accusing a Lutheran theologian of satanic heresy. By 1587, the theologian Andreas Osiander was believed to have betrayed Luther in complicity with the devil in the guise of satanic dogs. The hardline Lutheran Matthias Flacius Illyricus reviled Osiander as a demonic "dog doctor" who paid the Faustian price of being torn into hell.[35] This was only one of many demonizing denunciations of Protestants by other Protestants. Lay people became disillusioned with the rancor and hypocrisy of their divided church and would have had reason to consign all theologians to the devil. Janssen compiled extensive

33 Füssel, Kreutzer, eds., *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*, 2006: 57.

34 See the reaction of the first commentator, the Melanchthonian Lutheran August Lercheimer, in Binz, 1888: 77–79.

35 Matthias Illyricus Flacius [Carolus Azaria Gotsburgensis]. *Wider den schnöden Teufel* [Magdeburg: Rödinger, 1549]. Cf. Digital: http://www.controversia-et-confessio.de/id/f0a1a136-d6a8-4d40-8f3b-d282351a7f82 (accessed April 6, 2017); Matthias Illyricus Flacius. *Wider die Götter in Preussen. Das nur eine einige wesentliche gerechtigkeit Gottes sey/ die nemlich/ so in den Zehen gebotten offenbaret ist* [Magdeburg: Rödinger, 1552] Digital: http://www.controversia-et-confessio.de/id/f147635e-7db9-48a6-b75e-43b4f1444881 (accessed April 6, 2017); Matthias Illyricus Flacius. *Auff die Vermanung Julii des Bepstlichen Bischoffs/ darin er die Evangelischen vermanet/ das sie sich wider zur Bepstlichen Synagoga bekeren wolten. Antwort M. Flacij Illyrici* (Jena: Rödinger, 1554), Cij^{v}; Matthias Flacius Illyricus. *Verlegung des vnwarhafftigen vngegründten berichts Hansen Funckens/ von der Osiandrischen Schwermerei* [Magedburg: Rödinger, 1554] Digital: http://www.controversia-et-confessio.de/id/fbede997-80ca-4e6a-909b-405c209fcf4d (accessed April 6, 2017). On the last unnumbered page, Flacius thunders "widder den hundtarzt/ seine Propheten vnd Götter/ die so meisterlich von der inwonung Gottes schwermen."

evidence of popular anticlericalism in the late sixteenth century, much of it directed against arrogant scholar-theologians.[36] Frank Baron has documented that the *Faustbuch* had an immediate popular appeal but that it was opposed by the Protestant pastorate itself, which could hardly have sought to silence its own verdict.[37] Faust's demise is therefore at the very least ambiguous.

We cannot know the intention of an anonymous author. Was he closer to Weigel or Flacius? The errant doctor and archetypal German was in any event less likely the victim of Lutheran obscurantism than a target of popular disdain for the academic-clerical elite. The archetypal Faust and the obscure Weigel reflect the same background of cosmic polarization. The *Faustbuch* author and the dissenting theorist were in dialog with their contemporaries. The mystics were not uttering ineffable obscurities but taking part in a general conversation. Faust's demise, whatever else it may have meant, echoes the popular antiacademic and anticlerical impulse which has perennially nourished originality and dissent in German intellectual history. This rings off-key from Borchmeyer's archetypal German-as-academic.

My reading was dismissed out of hand by Germanists in Germany.[38] Even a quite recent German approach to the *Faustbuch* still conforms to the hoary cliché of a conflict between the "Autorität der Orthodoxie" and a new transgressive knowledge. The work's structural peculiarities are attributed to this prejudged content.[39] As if to confirm that the Germanist establishment is more important than the tradition it claims to cultivate, a seminal work of world literature is degraded to *Unterhaltungsliteratur*. No thought is given to the possibility that its flaws are those of uncertain, unfinished or fragmentary, sources from the pre-Socratics to the present. How can we know that the unknown author considered the condition in which the book has come down to us to be final rather than in progress? Why should a work which has given rise to such richly varied adaptations not have been ambiguous at its inception? Faust is a Rohrschach cum litmus test for craven conformism in *Germanistik*. Conformism reinforces the insipid image of German culture propagated by German academics to impress their colleagues but of less interest to the world at large. The time-honored rejections of *Fachidiotie* which one could hear as a student in Hamburg in 1968 are long forgotten.[40] More generally, academic

36 Janssen, 1894: 412, 413, 415, 416, 417, 431, 439, 440.

37 Baron, 1992: 52–57.

38 Müller, 2014.

39 Ibid.: 61–62. This completely conventional analysis also reissues the received version of Paracelsus which rests on a one-sided cliché, challenges to which are routinely ignored. See Weeks, 2013b: 89–113; and Weeks, 2016: 91–123.

40 As an exchange student at the University of Hamburg in the academic year 1967–1968, I assumed the term *Fachidiot* was an invention of my generation, and that earlier critical

self-referentiality and overspecialization are engrained in the arid language and obeisant mentality of much recent humanities scholarship in Germany or the US.

As voices from a distant era of oppressive conformism, Weigel and his radical tradition exemplify a less obeisant, more critical and self-critical impulse in German intellectual history, as well as a fresh answer to the question *Was ist Deutsch?*

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voices had been concerned only with such matters as war and fascism. I was surprised to learn that, fifty years prior, one astute observer understood German militarism itself as a manifestation of *Fachidiotie.* See Kessler, 1996: 220 ("Ludendorff sinkt zum genialen Fachidioten, der gleichzeitig ein rücksichtsloser Vabanquespieler war, herab; das militärische Äquivalent des 'deutschen Professors', der jede ethische Bindung abstreift, ja den Verstand verliert.").

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