

IV An Impartial Intellectual and the Taste of God

... I am certain that I have been acting in a Christian and reasonable way when I have avoided public office; not out of love of idleness nor convenience; rather because I could then, so much more unhindered or so to speak so much more publicly, be told the truth, from the father of light, from the history of former times, and from living experience, and pass them on to the whole world ... (The introduction to Dippel's medical dissertation, 1711; Eröff II, 1747, 126)

There is a strange tension in Dippel. On a series of points, he emerges as a classic representative of central ideas of the Enlightenment – even an early and seminal such representative.

He was a consequent supporter of liberty, full religious toleration and freedom of the press.³¹⁰ He was a scientific optimist: you can understand the world by the use of experience and reason. He insisted on a fallibilist epistemology: the empirical world is so complex that research will commit errors which can only gradually be contained. He was a consequent critic of clerical institutions and their political role. He rejected the idea that revealed books or texts exist and may function as direct sources of truth; such books are always human constructions. He was a skeptic against metaphysical dualisms, between this world and a beyond, between body and soul, extension and thinking. He was an activist intellectual eager to reveal political error and support the repressed. He was a publicist who – in contradistinction to his idols among mystics – insisted on an ongoing presence in the public sphere, as a researcher, a philosopher, and a polemicist. He was an author using the vernacular insisting that theology, philosophy, and medicine be discussed openly and critically, often using humor and satire. He was a critic of political governments by absolutist princes who should be replaced by a self-organized movement of awakened individuals oriented to-

310 Late in life, Dippel seems to have discovered Locke's famous *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689). In yet another polemic – now against the vicars Wollgemüth (believed to be J.U. Schwentzel) and Neumeister, who had attacked *Vera demonstratio* – he recommends, in 1731, a writing, “nemlich von dem berühmten Engelländer *Johannes Lock* von der Religions-Toleranz. In diesem unvergleichlichen Scripto werden sie gewißlich mehr Religion und Christenthum, mehr Weisheit und Vernunft, mehr Staats-Klugheit und Erkänntuß des gemeinen Bestens, antreffen, als bey dergleichen Secten-Meistern, die nur ihr eigen Kalb wollen angebethet wissen, und die unter dem Namen GÖttes, ihr Eigenes suchen, ja allezeit suchen müssen” (Eröff III 27). So, Dippel even adds that the wise English Queen ought to erect a statue of Locke besides “Neuton und Clarque” for their eternal memory. Otherwise, we have primarily seen Dippel referring to Hobbes, but now he praises not only English toleration but also English physics. If determinism is the large stumbling block to Dippel in early enlighteners, then religious tolerance, a critical stance against churches and support for press freedom, by contrast, are issues in which Dippel forms part of Early Enlightenment.

wards a better world. Dippel almost appears as an Enlightenment philosopher of the first water. This aspect of him comes through clearly when he, late in life, looks back and describes himself: In my attacks against foolishness, he says, "... I have no respect for any sect, yea, not even for any single human being, but I write the pure truth even if it would, from time to time, hit myself, as I am not always as humble with respect to essential truth as I ought to be ..." ³¹¹

But at the very same time, he is radically religious; you seldom read many lines of a Dippel text without the Christian GOD being invoked, often in capital letters, and personal revelation, to him, is as valid a source of knowledge as historical and scientific investigation. The author of the first book on Dippel's life, Wilhelm Bender, summarized this doubleness in his title of 1882: *The Freethinker of Pietism: A Contribution to the Origin of the Enlightenment*. ³¹² But a standard picture of the Enlightenment is that many of the central enlighteners were not religious at all; they were agnostics or atheists and, if indeed they were religious, they would typically be deists and celebrate some version of a rational, natural religion opposing established Christian confessions and churches. Enlightenment did not have many roots in the large Christian confessions, Catholicism, Lutheranism, or Calvinism which most often ignored or even fought science and went actively against tendencies in the direction of freedom of faith, political liberalization, and democracy. But Dippel's example shows that "enthusiastic" traditions on the margins of Protestantism, outside of established churches, at an early point might contribute to the Enlightenment with an anti-authoritarian and tolerant spirit of freethinking and pursuit of truth, such as can also be found in the next generation with Edelmann who was radicalized in the same spiritualist tradition – plus of course by Dippel.

If you look closer, Dippel is even a representative of many of the ideas which recent intellectual history characterizes as *radical enlightenment*. Research in the field is realizing, to a larger degree than earlier, that the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries contained a much broader range of variants than earlier assumed. Margaret Jacob introduced the notion in her 1981/2006 book *The Radical Enlightenment*; Jonathan Israel (2001; 2006) is known for his ideal-typical tripartition of the main positions of the period: *radical enlightenment*, *moderate enlightenment*, and *counter-enlightenment*. He defines these positions metaphysically as well as politically. Radical enlightenment is metaphysically *monist*: there is only one world, and dualisms like sacred/secular, this world/the next

³¹¹ Eröff III, 640.

³¹² *Der Freigeist aus dem Pietismus. Ein Beitrag Zur Entstehungsgeschichte Der Aufklärung*, Bender (1882).

world, body/soul, matter/thought, and so on must be relativized or given up completely. On the political level, it is democratic, liberal, or republican in different combinations and versions. The political power of princes and churches should be given up completely and give way for new political structures based on the freedom and participation of common human beings. Counter-enlightenment, by contrast, strives to sustain and preserve both the metaphysical dualisms and princely-clerical power, such as they dominated Europe far into the eighteenth, even the nineteenth century. The intermediary position of moderate enlightenment, then, is interested in developing political, religious, and scientific reform, but insists that this should take place with respect for the established dualisms and in various compromises with princes and churches. Individual enlighteners, of course, may be radical on some points and moderate on others – but Israel's observation is that most of the great, "classical" Enlightenment philosophers in intellectual history are predominantly moderate: Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Newton, Thomasius, Voltaire, Hume, Montesquieu, Kant. But this picture has emerged also because more radical voices of the period often had to keep a low profile in order to avoid persecution and Israel's enormous work is devoted to excavating many of these radicals from oblivion. Israel's main line of radical enlightenment comprises, among numerous others, characters like Franciscus van der Enden, Spinoza, Pierre Bayle, the British deists, Diderot, d'Holbach, Condorcet, Tom Paine. Dippel plays no great role in Israel's detailed charting of a radical panorama of hundreds of contributors. The German parallel to Israel is Martin Mulsow who charts the many early German Enlighteners already in the decades around 1700 and points to how many freethinkers may be religious dissidents, mystics, alchemists, magicians, historians of philosophy, book printers, journalists, pranksters, scholars, scientists, artists, and much more. He sums up such characters by means of an alternative distinction: they are members of a "precariat", characterized by risking acute political problems if they express what they really mean – in contrast to writers constituting a "bourgeoisie of knowledge" because they have positions and ideas that give them unproblematic access to the public sphere. Dippel is an obvious example of a "precarious" writer.

Both Israel's and Mulsow's efforts are strong contributions to understanding the detailed role of Enlightenment in the origin of the modern world, and the intellectual history categories of the former may coexist with the social conceptions of the latter, because of throwing light upon different aspects of Enlightenment. Dippel was, indeed, both *radical* and *precarious*.

But what is radical enlightenment in the case of Dippel? As we saw in his criticism of early determinist enlighteners, he is a monist, in the sense that there is one world only – which involves holy and secular aspects, to be sure. The soul has a material aspect, even God has a material basis – actually, all things have

material as well as spiritual aspects. Already in this world, the awakened pietist may purify the soul of sin, and then he or she simply becomes part of the deity. Dippel's metaphysics is religious, but it is a monism rather than a dualism. Also, politically, Dippel is radical. Churches should be abolished and disappear and, increasingly, he finds that princes abuse their power and should, in fact, also disappear. This may take place already in the Millennial Kingdom which is imminent and may take its beginning any day and most definitively by the Day of Judgment which Dippel interprets as a final showdown among human beings, where God remains in the background. Dippel is obsessed with freedom of the press and of expression, not only for deviant religious doctrines like his own, but also in general, as when he tells Senckenberg that "... the Dutch French newspapers are continuously translated from Belgium where they are initially authored. They no longer reason as freely as they used to, for they are monitored and now they are strongly integrated into alliances with different courts".³¹³ Dippel refers to free media in French printed in the Netherlands which was busy becoming a European hub of press freedom at the time and which he obviously tracked. Dippel is not a democrat in the sense that he develops detailed procedures for free, controlled elections – that proved a task for later Enlighteners – but he insists that in the Millennial Kingdom coming any day now, all human beings will be equal and, after the Final Judgment, even the wicked and the infidel will be converted and saved.

Both metaphysically and politically, Dippel is thus much more radical than Voltaire in the next generation who would eloquently attack the Catholic Church but did not think that ordinary people were capable of Enlightenment, and that absolutist princes just needed proper guidance from philosophers like himself.

But what the *Case against Dippel* in Altona may add to the picture of Dippel as an enlightener is exactly his character of being *intellectual*. It is in the eighteenth century that the concept of the intellectual was developed and sophisticated – "philosophe" in French which was not a professional or academic philosopher but one who, without necessarily having office, intervened in many issues with an informed voice – exactly Voltaire, one generation later, came to typify the intellectual as a new public social role. It is not a particular philosophical doctrine, rather a

313 "... die holländische französische Zeitungen werden alzeit ex belgico übersetzt darinnen sie erstlich geschrieben werden. Sie raisonniren aber nicht mehr so frey wie sonst, denn man gibt ihnen auf die finger acht, v. sie sind jetzt starck verkoppelt mit vielen höffen in alliancen", Senckenberg's diaries, vol. II, 394. During and after the Danish Press Freedom period of 1770–73 more than a generation later, the Danish court made strong efforts to put pressure on the leading francophone papers in Holland to make them write about Danish matters in a way conforming to the viewpoints of the Danish government, cf. Langen and Stjernfelt (2022).

certain social practice and a new possibility to understand and act using one's intelligence in social and political matters, also facilitated by freer conditions of publication, of postal communication, and of traveling. The intellectual, as Sartre much later quipped, is one who interferes in things that are none of his business. It is a free person, not acting out of office at a court, in a church, or a university, but who publishes and acts without being obliged to by an appointed position. This was what Dippel did all through this 40 years career. If we take Steve Fuller's criteria of an intellectual:³¹⁴ (1) the observation of things from several sides, but with regard to passing judgment and participating actively; (2) the capacity to communicate in many different media; (3) a sense of grey zones; (4) an effort that counterbalances given powers; (5) a willingness to bow to facts – then Dippel lives up to all of them, maybe a bit weaker, though, on bullet (3).

In Altona, this came to a peak, for it was exactly his activity as an intellectual that he was accused and convicted of. It was activities outside the view of the public, as a self-appointed judicial advisor for persons he saw as suppressed by a dysfunctional or corrupt judiciary. It was also activities within the system, such as the writing letters of complaint and supplications to relevant authorities. And it was his function as a public intellectual, in publications with an explicit target, such as the satirical piece against Dean Fleischer, and with more implicit address, such as the long political theology preface to the Grammendorf book in which the attack against the Reventlows unfolds without mentioning their names. It was all this activity which so offended both the City Council and the powerful Reventlows and which led to the case, sentence, and punishment of Dippel. The Reventlows thought that they had hired a pious gold-maker only to realize that they had also gotten a heretic, a philosopher, an intellectual.

So, Dippel belongs, to a large degree, to radical enlightenment, I would say. Not only because of the metaphysical and political ideas he develops – but also because of his specific, public, and political behavior. He is a traveling cosmopolitan citizen of the world – he uses that word about himself – who had the special luck that the *zeitgeist* allowed him to behave like a fish in the water among the many pietists and sympathizers all over the European map who were ready to offer him company, accommodation, money, political support, publicity, and assistance of many kinds. Wherever he appears, he attempts to intervene in local problems and discussions, political, clerical, or medical, with pinprick actions like letters, supplications, pamphlets, and pasquils. It takes place with the core word of radical pietism: “impartially”, he is acting critically, but not on behalf of any given “sect” or predefined or established identity group that he sides with beforehand. It is the activity of a

314 Cf. Fuller (2005).

free intellectual, and it connects the impartiality of radical pietism to the universalism of the Enlightenment. It is far from granted, of course, that Dippel was actually always capable of acting impartially, maybe he could be led astray and favor fellow believers, not to speak about himself. But he articulates the impartial ideal and strives to realize it, and skepticism regarding real motives even the most determined universalist must live with.

All of it takes place in a sharp and provocative language, often with striking word play and images. I do not claim he approaches the brilliant wit of Voltaire here, the undisputed master of the one-liner – but Dippel often brings into play a witty play of words, even in Latin: substitute one letter, then the orthodoxy of the orthodox becomes the hellish teachings of the orthodox: *OrCodoxia Orthodoxorum*, or add a single *u* to make fate mutate into foolishness: *Fatum Fatuum*. It was rare to unite higher theological and philosophical ambitions with bold language – this was probably the main teaching Dippel took from Luther, even if he did not inherit the reformer's enthusiasm with fecal expressions.

Dippel's activities as an intellectual develop in parallel with his chemical investigations, his medical practice, and his authoring large metaphysical and theological treatises. My argument, therefore, is not that Dippel was *primarily* an intellectual – he continuously bases his intellectual interventions and exclamations on his ambitious theological-metaphysical world view that he feels obliged to continuously correct, market, and develop. My argument is rather that the activist side of his radical enlightenment has been overlooked but comes out especially clearly in the *Case against Dippel* in Altona, focusing directly on his intellectual efforts to defend persecuted *Neben-Menschen*, fellow human beings, extremely provocative as seen from the viewpoint of the Altona City Hall and eventually also from the Chief President couple.

It can also be added that the *Case against Dippel* illustrates, better than many arguments, how despotic, arbitrary, and cruel exercise of power could still be in the absolutist states of the time in which germinating intellectuals had to navigate. The skilled, ambitious, and furious Reventlows proved able to machinate both the judiciary and government of Denmark and push through their very own punishment of their intellectual critic – against ever so insisting attempts of the government in Copenhagen to stick to certain principles of rule of law. The *Case against Dippel* in Altona shows better than anything the need for intellectual criticism of uninhibited, corrupt exercise of power. In the perspective of Dippel's life, you can add that the many theologically motivated persecutions that he suffered did nothing but confirm his image of the "whipping papacy" of Lutheranism rather than the truth of its dogma – just like his treatment under several absolutist princes invalidated the idea that they should harbor a special authority invested with divine powers, not to speak about being guarantees of rule of law.

But which features in Dippel's radical view of the world would it be that favored his activity as an intellectual? The doctrine from his criticism of the determinists in *Fatum Fatuum* may throw a bit of light on this. Dippel has his own version of empiricism in his epistemology: the living conviction about objects received in perception is handed over to reasoning imagination forming pictures which may, again, be investigated by means of inferences. Such reasoning may never, however, yield a completely evident result without fear of error because the particularities of sense experience are almost inexhaustible and do not constitute a simple axiom or universal rule which does not admit exceptions in the course of increasing experience. This sounds like fallibilism, as in Peirce or Popper in later times – but it also calls for curiosity in the investigator, for new insights are needed to improve the errors committed. Even in theology, this holds for Dippel: divine truths are impossible to grasp without danger of errors, so even theology is a sort of empirical discipline, just like the deity is part of the empirical world. So, pure rationalists, by contrast, are mere conjurors with no use in the real world. Such ideas take Dippel in the direction of engagement with issues and problems of this world.

But most decisive is probably Dippel's insistence on *freedom*. His crucial disagreement with early enlighteners remained focused upon determinism which he found not only in the protestant reformers but also in the already mentioned line from Hobbes over Descartes and Spinoza to Malebranche – later continued with attacks on Leibniz and Wolff. All of them are “dumme Gäuckler”, stupid tricksters, in Dippel's rude expression, and it is obvious that Dippel finds a decisive tension in Early Enlightenment between scientifically inspired determinism on the one hand and the emphasis on religious, scientific, and political liberty on the other.

This tension remains contentious to this day – there is still no general agreement how to solve it: some claim that determinism is true and that this fact both can and must make all actual institutions built on ideas about personal freedom and responsibility into dangerous illusions to be dismantled, while others find that some sort of compatibility can be developed between determinism and personal freedom, and still others think that the existence of personal freedom makes necessary a relativization or even a falsification of determinism. It is a deep and principal discussion of modernity which Dippel helped to found with his general attack on determinism. Even in this attack, however, it became clear that he has a special axe to grind with Spinoza, maybe also because of the Dutch Jew's early political insistence on freedom of religion, on democracy, and on freedom of thought, and on skepticism vis-à-vis churches and organized religion, all of them political ideas not far from Dippel's own. It is indeed correct, as Grunwald (1898) says, that Dippel did not fight anyone as hard as Spinoza; on the other

hand, this intensity may go to prove that he was also more challenged and obsessed with him than the other determinists he was struggling with. We can see from Dippel's references that he knew about both the political Spinoza of the *Tractatus* (1670) and the metaphysical Spinoza from the *Ethica* (1677). Like many others, Dippel mocks him as a "thornbush" (Latin "spina" meaning thorn), when he attacks his version of God as the first moving cause:

This thornbush or Spinoza has immediately claimed that it could be the same to make creatures that have no movement of their own and are only subjected to the fatal government of the first moving cause, and to declare the first moving cause itself to be the essence of all creatures created in this way, so that nothing is seen or exists but the very GOD and his essence such as it is modified or appears on the scene in various ways. For if this does not go against the essence of GOD, that is, to be an origin of this confusion through the first movement, then it was clear that all could be ascribed to the essence of God without any fear of ungodliness.³¹⁵

This is Dippel's version of a central argument in Spinoza's determinist metaphysics. It is certainly correct, with Bell (1984, 11), that Dippel "failed to see how in Spinoza's system necessity is reconciled with a higher kind of freedom, on which a coherent moral system is constructed". Dippel does see, however, that Spinoza could not completely take away freedom from God; he had to admit to God a freedom which he was able to communicate to certain creatures who, on their side, possess the possibility of apostasy – which did not fit into the "atheist clockwork". This was why he had to assume that God, with both of the Cartesian qualities of thinking and extension contained in his essence, had to continuously modify himself from eternity, as well as in the present now and in all eternity so that all is created in an *Actum transeuntem*, an ever-ongoing activity – so that essential parts of both thinking and extension are merely external dispositions and figures on the surface of the always freely changing divine being. This is Dippel's version of the *natura naturans*/*natura naturata* distinction. God is the cause of all things indeed, but no longer as a first, effective cause, rather as a constant, immanent cause. This implies that different parts of the divine being that have erroneously

315 "Diese Dorn-Busch oder Spinosa, habe alsbald, daß es gleichviel gesagt würde seyn, Creaturen zu machen, die keine eigene Bewegung haben; und nur leidende unter der fatalen Direction der ersten bewegenden Urtsach stünde; und die erste bewegende Ursach selbst, als das Wesen aller so gemachten Creaturen anzugeben; so daß nichts zu sehen und zu finden wäre, als GOTT und dessen Wesen selbst, wie es sich auf unterschiedene Weise modificiret, oder auff dem Theatro zum Anschauen stellet: Dann wann das andere dem Wesen Gottes nicht entgegen lauffet, nemlich ein Uhrheber aber solchen Confusion zu seyn, durch die erste Bewegung, so war es klar genug, daß dem Wesen Gottes selbst alles konte ohn einige Furcht der impietät heimgeschrieben werden ..." (144).

been taken to be substances, now must be thought of as created, because the act of creation takes place in all eternity and has never begun or will cease. This is why false religion can be fantasies and the fraud of regents – and why even the apostles and other divine witnesses may have been sincere but still were themselves deceived.³¹⁶

The decisive problem in Spinoza's doctrine, then, is that "... the stupid Spinoza made the bindings of his fatal machine so tight that there could no longer be found a corner in it which was not full of God and his essence – even if there is still room for deceit and error – which means that *God himself is deceit and error*."³¹⁷

Spinoza's system remains, according to Dippel, both the most sincere and the most straightforward even if it places both theology and moral in a completely new situation. For he alone has had the honesty of sincerely presenting what he believes may be inferred by those who doubt there exists any "second cause", that is, causes secondary to God's initiating cause, functioning in the world and in humans themselves.

So, Dippel thinks that if Spinoza had improved his system and shown how something in it may be in a mode which was not simultaneously thought or experienced in the being itself, or that the divine essence, constantly modifying itself, could not always know itself rightly and gets lost in the ideas of understanding, then it might be possible that one with a sound reason who has tasted nothing of real divine objects, could be persuaded by that system.³¹⁸ Dippel considers that Spinoza's system might function if it allowed for certain free lacunae in the overall structure, making possible human error and apostasy – but of course, Dippel ends by preferring "the taste of God" such as it emerges directly and perspicuously in revealed knowledge to the radical pietist. Here, of course, is also the limit of Dippel's participation in radical enlightenment which would never acknowledge revelation as a valid source of knowledge.

You couldn't say that Dippel solves the issue of which place freedom – which Spinoza himself defined as the possibility of a thing to act on the basis of its own essence, that is, as the lack of hindrance to exert its potential – could have in a determinist system, and why Spinoza might identify freedom with the rational pursuit of self-interest. But Dippel clearly realizes the character of the problem and then emphatically decides to make of freedom a metaphysical foundation of his own system: God has the freedom to create beings who are free to fall from

³¹⁶ Christianus Democritus (1709, 143).

³¹⁷ Christianus Democritus (1709, 144).

³¹⁸ Christianus Democritus (1709, 149).

God, to sin, and to commit errors, but who also preserve the freedom to return to God. This is the theological expression of Dippelian freedom, but that would also translate into liberties of the political field, resulting to Dippel in a demand for full freedom of faith and expression without which his fallen human being cannot work on achieving understanding, of scientific, medical, political, divine, or other subjects.

The deepest reason that Dippel's radical religion may foster radical enlightenment and intellectual activism is that he shares Spinoza's ambition to become radically *monist*. There is only one world, and freedom and necessity, sacredness and apostasy, god and creation, body and soul, life and death, sin and atonement, must be understood as parts or aspects or modifications of this one world. Already in this world, the large battle between good and evil takes place, and God is not at a remote distance of his creation but rather forms a proper part of it; even in a direct proportion to the number of true pietists who manage to cleanse their souls, for when they do so they simply become parts of the deity. This, then, is why political and intellectual activism are constantly relevant to Dippel: they are roads to realize, already here and now, the highest good that should not just passively await the Day of Judgment.

There is no doubt that Dippel's insistence on seeing this highest good in the process of realization every day in his own as well as other peoples' actions also opens the gate to a galloping moralism which probably contributed to the fact that many otherwise sympathetic persons might run afoul in their dealings with Dippel, even ending up as his sworn enemies. That intellectuals no less than others may commit errors, that they are not necessarily paragons of truth in each single case, that they may often spread their activity far beyond their knowledge and competences and that they may conceal, more or less unaware, their own agendas under their idealism, is no secret.³¹⁹ That Dippel himself gradually discovered such dangers himself the hard way is testified by his mature irony of his own youthful arrogance.

But without such hubris, we would probably be left without the radical and impartial showdown with sects of all stripes.

319 As argued, e.g., by Sowell (2012).

