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Priscilla Hayden-Roy

Sensate Language and the Hermetic Tradition in Friedrich Christoph Oetinger's *Biblisches und Emblematisches Wörterbuch*

THE RISE OF RATIONALISTIC MORAL theology in the 18th century reflects the prevailing assumption of Enlightened thought that moral concepts were the privileged hermeneutical telos of the "coarse" or sensate language in the Bible and Christian dogma. The theological school known as neology supported this view and proposed an exegetical strategy for extracting the "pure" moral sense from the "coarse" or sensate text. In 1772 the Berlin neologist Wilhelm Abraham Teller (1734-1804) published a programmatic guide to this exegetical strategy, a dictionary entitled *Wörterbuch des Neuen Testaments zur Erklärung der christlichen Lehre*.¹

I would like to discuss here a critical response to Teller's dictionary, written by the Württemberg pietist, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782). Oetinger, a member of the clergy in Lutheran Württemberg, was a leader of the speculative wing of Württemberg pietists who were influenced by Jacob Böhme, the cabala, alchemy, and even Swedenborg.² In the following I will discuss the background and implications of Oetinger's notion of sensate language, its connection to hermetic and theosophical traditions of the 18th century, and its polemical function as an alternative to the rational discourse of moral philosophy. I will then draw some parallels to developments in late 18th-century aesthetic philosophy.

Oetinger's theology directs a polemic against all "idealist" privileging of spirit over body,³ particularly the philosophies of Leibniz and Wolff. Originally a

¹ Citations are from the 5th edition (1792); references to this edition hereafter as *WB*.

² Oetinger published the first German translation of Swedenborg's works: *Swedenborgs und anderer irrdische und himmlische Philosophie ...*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, Leipzig: Garbe, 1765).

³ "Daß das Fleisch in ein ewiges Leben versezt werden kan, und doch körperlich bleibt, daß die Fülle der Gottheit in Christo körperlich werden kan, und daß der Geist zu einem Körper werden kan, ist auch daraus klar, wiewol es den Idealistischen Wissern nicht in Kopf will. Plato hat den Grund zu dem Idealismo gelegt, indem er vorgegeben: was körperlich seye, habe kein wahres Wesen." Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, *Biblisches und Emblematisches Wörterbuch* (1776; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1969) 100. References to this work hereafter as *BEW*.

disciple of these men, he was led to his anti-idealist position as a student, through his extra-curricular reading of Jacob Böhme, whose works the powder miller in Tübingen urged him to read. His convictions were strengthened through extensive study of alchemy and the cabala — the latter study undertaken under the tutelage of Jewish rabbis in Frankfurt and Halle.⁴ At the center of Oetinger's thought is a dynamic notion of God's progressive self-corporealization in creation and history, which occurs through the interaction of mutually opposing, life-generating forces — the ten sephirot in the cabala.⁵ These forces within nature drive all things toward their perfect end, "Geistleiblichkeit," or flesh imbued with spirit. Oetinger incorporates this theosophical process within the framework of Christian salvation history. He conceives of the fall as a disruption of the originally harmonious interaction of divine forces, whereby individual forces are unleashed from their submission to the whole, setting flesh in opposition to spirit. Christ, conceived in cabalistic terms as the "Zaemach,"⁶ or lively substance within all things, initiates the restoration of original harmony through his death and

⁴ Oetinger relates his intellectual development in his autobiography, printed in *Friedrich Christoph Oetingers Leben und Briefe, als urkundlicher Commentar zu dessen Schriften*, ed. Karl Chr. Eberh. Ehmann (Stuttgart: F.J. Steinkopf, 1859). See also Martin Weyer-Menkhoff, *Christus, das Heil der Natur: Entstehung und Systematik der Theologie Friedrich Christoph Oetingers, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Pietismus*, Vol. 27 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

⁵ Oetinger modifies the cabalistic ten sephirot by identifying the first three with the trinity and ascribing to them a special status restricted to the godhead, while the latter seven emanate into creation. Thus Oetinger most commonly refers only to the "seven spirits," as they are the vehicle of God's corporealization in creation. Sigrid Großmann has noted that Oetinger vacillates in his explication of the trinity, at times employing cabalistic terminology which equates the parts of the trinity with forces or principles, at other times espousing the orthodox teaching of the three persons of the trinity. (*Friedrich Christoph Oetingers Gottesvorstellung: Versuch einer Analyse seiner Theologie*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Pietismus, Vol. 18 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979] 277 ff.)

⁶ Oetinger draws the expression from Zecharia 3:8, 6:12; it is a messianic title meaning "branch" or "shoot." The conception of Christ as "Zaemach," or an organic, enlivening principle, is the point of contact to many other sources Oetinger eclectically appropriates. Notably he interprets Paul in this light: "Paulo beliebt, nach creatürlichen Art, unter dem Bild des säens und erndtens, vom Geist zu reden, weil der Geist in Wahrheit ein vegetabilisch Gewächs und ein Baum des Lebens ist [...]. Siehe, mein Knecht heißt Zaemach, 'das gewächsliche Leben'; unter ihm wird es wachsen (Zach. 6,[12]). Geist ist also die gantze gewächsliche Verfassung des treibenden Göttlichen Lebens" (*Die Lehrtafel der Prinzessin Antonia*, ed. Reinhard Breymayer, Friedrich Häussermann, 2 vols. [Berlin, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 1977] 1: 193). The Böhonian and alchemical concept of "tincture" is also seen in connection with "Zaemach": "Folglich ist die Tinctur das Haupt-Instrument alles Wachsens, davon JESus Zaemach heißt, denn unter ihm wird alles wachsen" (BEW 622). Oetinger draws on the French medic Claude-Nicolas LeCat's (1700-1768) notion of a "fluide des nerfs" in discussing the presence of this tincture, or lively substance, within living organisms (*Lehrtafel* 1: 100; BEW 620). With all these concepts Oetinger's purpose is to designate a substance or principle capable of mediating between the spiritual and material realms, so that he can explain that concept most central to his theology, *Geistleiblichkeit*.

resurrection. His blood, possessing the transmuting power of an alchemical “tincture,”⁷ begins the revivifying process by being poured out on the earth. His resurrected body is the guarantor of the restoration of harmony in all creation, when, in Pauline terms, Christ becomes “all in all,”⁸ that is, when the glory of God is manifested fully in corporeal form.

Oetinger’s biblical hermeneutics applies this same principle of corporealization to the text. The words of Scripture yield meaning in the same manner that spirit emanates into bodies: their fundamental structure is a “generative order” that unfolds as the plant from a seed. The image of the seed suggests both semantic plenitude and nexus within plenitude: Oetinger calls the words of Scripture “pregnant,”⁹ ramifying outward into a vast nexus of sensate meaning. This contrasts with the exegetical approach of those theologians influenced by rationalism, who project onto Scripture a “geometrical order,” as Oetinger calls it, whereby an abstract concept constitutes the hermeneutical center of the Bible.¹⁰ These exegetes, argues Oetinger, “peel off” (“abschelen”) the pregnant, sensate meaning of Scripture. By reducing the words to abstract concepts they make Scripture “overly distinct” (“überdeutlich”), and ultimately construct an arbitrary or idiosyncratic system of doctrine that fails to grasp the whole of

⁷ “Die Tinctur des Bluts Christi wird uns die Gestalten der Dinge im Geist darstellen. Es wird wirklich gesprengt, wie seine Bluts-Tropfen auf die Erden gefallen, und schon einen Theil des Fluchs hinweg nahmen.” (BEW 80).

⁸ The phrase “Alles in Allem” ($\tauὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν$), found in numerous places in the Pauline epistles (I Cor. 15:28, Eph. 1:23, Col. 3:11) was a favorite among the speculative pietists in Württemberg and was usually found in tandem with the heterodox teaching of the “Wiederbringung aller Dinge” ($\deltaιποκατάστασις πάντων$), to which Oetinger also subscribed. See Friedhelm Groth, *Die “Wiederbringung aller Dinge” im württembergischen Pietismus. Theologiegeschichtliche Studien zum eschatologischen Heilsuniversalismus württembergischer Pietisten des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Pietismus, Vol. 21 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984).

⁹ “Die Worte der Schrift sind prägnant, d.i. vielbegreifende Worte, wie die Ebräische Sprache.” (BEW 285)

¹⁰ “Die heil[ige]. Schrift bedient sich einer Methode, welche mehr mit der Entstehung der Dinge übereinkommt und nicht so gar sehr auf die Conciinnität der Begriffe ausgeht. Die geometrische Ordnung nimmt ihren Ausgangspunkt von irgend einem abstrakten Gedanken, die generative Ordnung aber geht, wie es beim Samenkorn der Fall ist, vom Ganzen aus, und entfaltet dieses gleichmäßig bis zum Kleinsten.” Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, *Die Theologie aus der Idee des Lebens abgeleitet und auf sechs Stücke zurückgeführt, deren jedes nach dem sensus communis, dann nach den Geheimnissen der Schrift, endlich nach dogmatischen Formeln, auf eine neue und erfahrungsmäßige Weise abgehandelt wird*, tr. Julius Hamberger (Stuttgart: J. F. Steinkopf, 1852), 35.

truth.¹¹ We can see here a clear inversion of valuation as Oetinger marks that goal of Wolffian hermeneutics — distinctness — with a negative valence.

Oetinger found a prime example of the “overly distinct” exegesis of the “geometrical order” in Teller’s *Wörterbuch*. In 1776, four years after Teller’s dictionary appeared, Oetinger published his anonymous¹² response, the *Biblisches und Emblematisches Wörterbuch*. In his foreword he writes that the assumption of Teller and other theologians that the sensate language in Scripture was mere “Jewish word games” is the chief error of his day.¹³ Biblical language is sensual and “massive” by intention, argues Oetinger: “die Sinnlichkeit der Schrift [ist] die Hauptabsicht GOttes” (*BEW*, Vorrede [6v]). Teller’s “disrobing” attenuates and distorts meaning,¹⁴ says Oetinger, for spirit is not an abstraction or naked moral truth, but rather an “enveloped” vital principle whose meaning consists in the unfolding (“Auswicklung”) of the seed-like, dynamically ramifying spirit.¹⁵ For this reason the Bible’s fundamental concepts are not to be understood with precise, univocal definitions, argues Oetinger, but by viewing the plenitude of sensate images or emblems (“Sinnbilder”) employed in the Bible to illustrate the concept. On the concept of righteousness, for example, Oetinger writes:

Gerechtigkeit wird in heiliger Schrift nie mit Definitionen erklärt, wie sich überhaupt die Schrift wenig bedient, sondern durch alle Sinnbilder der Natur, und durch unzählige Beziehungen Subjectorum und Praedicatorum erläutert (*BEW* 260).

¹¹ “Wer nun auf geometrische Art mit den Worten der Schrift umgehet, da man einen gewissen Theil dieses prägnanten Sinns abschelet, in gewisse Ueberdeutlichkeit stellt, und daraus ein ganzes System von Lehr-Säzen durch rechte Schlüsse heraus spinnt, der hat den rechten Griff sich selbst eigensinnig zu machen gegen der ganzen Warheit” (*BEW* 285).

¹² Due to sharply critical reviews outside Württemberg of the Swedenborg book, the Württemberg Consistory curtailed Oetinger’s publishing activity by requiring that he submit all his works to the Consistorial censure. Oetinger continued publishing, however: friends and relatives agreed to have the works published in their names outside Württemberg, or he had them published anonymously. See Gunther Franz, “Bücherzensur und Irenik,” *Theologen und Theologie an der Universität Tübingen: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Evangelisch-Theologischen Fakultät*, ed. Martin Brecht (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977) 178–181; Ernst Benz, *Swedenborg in Deutschland: F. C. Oetingers und Immanuel Kants Auseinanderersetzung mit der Person und Lehre Emanuel Swedenborgs* (Frankfurt/M: Vittorio Klostermann, 1947) 37 ff.

¹³ “Da sind die sinnliche Vorstellungen lauter jüdische Wortspiele; und diß ist der Hauptirrrhum unserer Zeit. Man muß ganz anderst denken, und den wörtlichen Ausdruck Christi in den Prophetn [sic!] nicht von der Sinnlichkeit ausleeren.” (*BEW*, Vorrede [6v])

¹⁴ “Herr Ober-Consistorial-Rath Teller nimmt sich viel heraus seinen Haß wider alles Sinnliche zu äussern. Er leert nicht nur die Worte der Schrift aus, sondern er verdreht sie. Das Fundament ist, daß er das Sinnliche vor Einbildung hält.” (*BEW* 67)

¹⁵ “Geist ist etwas eingewickeltes, Sinn ist eine Auswicklung, Auseinanderlegung dessen, was aus dem innersten Punct sich ausbreitet.” (*BEW* 28)

This nexus of sensate meaning is precisely what Oetinger misses in Teller's dictionary:

Teller will eine leichte Gerechtigkeit einführen, er will die Religion von den falschen Vergnügungen der Einbildungs-Kraft an sinnlichen Bildern los machen, aber er sieht nicht hinaus, daß das Sinnliche der Schrift die Hauptsache ist. (*BEW* 260)

The contrast to Teller is indeed striking. In his foreword to the third edition¹⁶ of the *Wörterbuch* Teller writes that the biblical exegete should extract a general principle from the sensate language or tropes in the Bible:

Nun die Apostel wechseln so mit den bildlichen Darstellungen Christi ab, als eines Lammes, welches geschlachtet, als Opfers, welches dargebracht wird und des Priesters, der es darbringt; als einer trocknen Gabe; dann als eines Mittlers eines neuen Bundes, eines Haupts des Leibes, eines Hirten, Erzhirten, eines Königs, und vor Juden, die an alle diese sichtbaren Gegenstände nach der Einrichtung ihres Landes, ihrer Regierung und ihrer Gottesdienste gewöhnt waren, daß sie alle eine Einzige Hauptvorstellung von seinem Erlösungsgeschäfte übrig lassen, wenn man sie gehörig entkleidet: soll nun nicht diese die Wahrheit, jenes alles das Unwesentliche seyn? (*WB* 49)

Teller applies here the “accommodation theory” developed by the Halle theologian, Johann Salomo Semler, according to which Christ and the apostles accommodated the coarse, sensual understanding of the Jews by cloaking moral concepts in sensate imagery.¹⁷ The images constitute merely the *Lehrart* of the apostles and therefore are non-essential, while “truth” or *Lehrbegriff* is found by “disrobing” the images, reducing them to a general, moral concept. Interestingly, Teller justifies this abstracting strategy by drawing analogies to two harbingers of the modern world, the scientific method and a money economy:

Wenn die Apostel mit tropischen Ausdrücken und Vorstellungen so abwechseln, daß die Bedeutung von allen auf einen Einzigen Lehrsatz angewendet werden kann [...] so ist dieser Lehrsatz die allgemeine Wahrheit, und jenes Bildliche gehört zu ihrer besondern Lehrart nach Zeiten und Umständen. So urtheilt man in der Physik: man hält die Hypothese für die wahrscheinlichste, mit welcher die meisten Phänomenen übereinstimmen. (*WB* 48-49)

In the same passage Teller continues with another analogy:

¹⁶ This edition appeared in 1780; the forewords to all previous editions are included in the 1792 edition I am using. The foreword of the third edition, from which the quotations in my text below are drawn, is particularly useful here because of its reflections on the hermeneutical principles Teller applied in the *WB*. Although this edition appeared after Oetinger's *BEW*, I have cited from the foreword in outlining Teller's hermeneutical position, since it does not go beyond the hermeneutical practice of the first edition.

¹⁷ In the foreword to the third edition of the *Wörterbuch* Teller acknowledges his debt to Semler (*WB* 42).

Lehrart, das begreife ich sehr wohl, verschiedene Vorstellungsart der Religionsweisheit wird immer bleiben und bleiben müssen. Wer kann das gute edle Metall ohne Zusatz mit geringem verarbeiten und welcher Geldliebende hält nicht dem ungeachtet sein Gold wert? Aber wenn dieses Zusatzes zu viel wird, wenn dadurch die in einem Lande gangbare Münze über die Helfte des innern Werths verliert, daß wilder Streit darüber in Handel und Wandel entsteht, und Kenner die geringhaltige Münze doch durchaus für vollwichtig annehmen sollen; können und werden diejenigen, die noch ein Wort sprechen dürfen, sich nicht darüber laut beschweren? (WB 50-51)

Just as the scientist privileges hypotheses that can be most broadly generalized, and just as a money economy requires a universal monetary standard, so, Teller argues, correct exegesis must subject the plethora of sensate images to a universally valid language — that of moral philosophy. While Teller's employment of analogy to "illustrate" his point suggests to the modern reader that his own thought has remained suspiciously entangled within the nexus of sensate language,¹⁸ the analogies do serve to transfer the validity that science and commerce were acquiring in the 18th century, as privileged sites of truth, value, and power, to Teller's biblical hermeneutics.

While Teller supports his "geometrical" hermeneutics with the tools of modernism, Oetinger anchors the "generative" method in what by this time was a dying tradition of emblematics, and in the archaic hermetic sciences, particularly alchemy. Both emblematics and alchemy are closely linked in Oetinger's mind. He appropriates relatively few conventional emblems in the *BEW*, but rather is interested in the underlying emblematic assumption that correspondences exist between the physical and spiritual world. In the context of Oetinger's theology, biblical emblems serve to demonstrate the principle of *Geistleiblichkeit*: the plethora of emblems generated by biblical concepts is an expression of the drive of the spirit to specify itself in a manifold of physical forms. Biblical emblems need not even be strictly inter-biblical in their reference. At times the exegete must interpret them "aus der ganzen Analogie oder Aussicht in das System" (*BEW* 837), as is the case with Samson's riddle in Judges 14:14. Samson had killed a lion in whose carcass a swarm of bees subsequently nested and produced honey; he invented the following riddle based on this incident: "Out of the eater came what is eaten, and out of the strong came what is sweet." The riddle's meaning must be determined "aus der Analogie der Chemie [i.e. alchemy]" (*BEW* 838), states Oetinger: drawing honey from the lion corresponds to drawing sweetness from salt (an alchemical process), which corresponds to Jesus Christ drawing glory, life, and

¹⁸ Teller betrays a vague awareness of this entanglement at the conclusion of his discussion of the analogies: "Ich will mich ohne Bild erklären." (WB 51)

immortality from death.¹⁹ Understood from “the whole system” of Oetinger’s theosophy, the riddle presents in emblematic or sensate form the most central concern of alchemy: the principle of spiritual regeneration, which Oetinger believes is at work in the progressive corporealization of God throughout history.

Emblems thus have an eschatological perspective in Oetinger’s thought. Emblematic correspondences constitute physical connections generated by an eschatologically transmuting physico-spiritual life force within the world. The exegete of emblems recognizes the “form” within the “mass” and can anticipate to some degree how this form will be reembodied in the future world:

Die sinnbildliche Art zu reden läßt sich nicht allemal aus der vorliegenden Masse, sondern aus der Gestalt, so die Masse hat, denken. Nun ist die Form und die Masse an sich nur ein Ding, aber die Form muß man in Gedanken abziehen und denken, es werde in künftiger Welt die ganze Gestaltung der neu erschaffenen Dingen etwas anderst als jetzt dargelegt werden; alsdenn muß man die ganze Form der zukünftigen Dinge, so viel die Schrift davon zerstreut sagt, vor Augen haben und denken: Es müsse inzwischen sinnbildlich genommen werden, weil wir keine anschauende Erkanntniß von dem System der zukünftigen Welt haben und doch vieles davon im Glauben sehen, weil der Glaube eigentlich eine Darstellung der gehoften Dinge und eine Ueberzeugung von Geschäften, die im Unsichtbaren vorgehen, ist. (BEW 842-3)

Oetinger recommends abstracting from the emblem, not following the neologists’ assumption that ideas stripped of their sensate “cloaks” are true, but in order to discover the “form,” the generative “spiritual” kernel within the “mass,” or sensuous embodiment of the emblem. The believer can see these future things in faith, because the language of faith is emblematic; it signifies visible objects which, although as yet untransformed, nevertheless are connected to the future things through the generative kernel of divine life within them.²⁰ A parallel can be drawn here to discussions concerning natural vs. arbitrary signs in the latter half of the 18th century, and the growing sense that natural signs conveyed intuitive knowledge which was at once archaic and anticipatory²¹ — a key

¹⁹ “Es ist dieses Rätsel der Grund der ganzen Chemie, da man aus der schärfsten Bitterkeit die höchste Süßigkeit, aus dem Gift Arzney und aus dem Tod Leben zieht, wie JESus Christus aus dem Tot, Herrlichkeit, Leben und Unsterblichkeit hervorgebracht zur Versöhnung für unsere Sünden und zur Erhöhung deß Irrdischen ins Himmelsche.” (BEW 840) In the *Lehrtafel* this riddle is combined with the cabalistic sephirot: sweetness and bitterness correspond to Gedulah (or Hesed) and Gebura (Din), respectively (*Lehrtafel* 1: 92).

²⁰ On the forward perspective of Oetinger’s emblems, see Rainer Piepmeyer, *Aporien des Lebensbegriffs seit Oetinger*, Symposion 58 (Munich/Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1978) 84.

²¹ David Wellbery comments on this process: “In poetry those natural signifying procedures predominate which are at the origin of language and culture [...]. Enlightenment aesthetics — seeking perhaps a substitute for the lost Word of revelation — isolates poetic language as a privileged form of linguistic representation, an ideal transparency. In so doing, it ascribes to poetic

development in the rise of aesthetics and the subsequent valorization of poetic language.

Oetinger expanded the notion of biblical emblems to encompass all of reality: the book of nature, too, is an emblem book which must be interpreted according to the same generative method as Scripture, and with the same assumptions concerning its eventual *Geistleiblichkeit*. Oetinger called this all-encompassing science “*theologia emblematica*.” This science, an eclectic combination of alchemy, Böhme, the cabala, and emblematics, is both ancient and eschatological knowledge. Practiced by the ancient philosophers and the Old Testament priests, it was all but forgotten as the geometrical method asserted itself, says Oetinger, but was entrusted to a line of alchemical adepts — “Melchizidechan priests” — and seemed to be reemerging in Oetinger’s own day. Oetinger reports enthusiastically about the alchemical experiments being performed by a Rosicrucian society in Amsterdam²² and believes they represent partial disclosures of the coming *theologia emblematica*. In its perfected form in the “golden age,” or millennium, Oetinger believed the *theologia emblematica* would bring about the unification of all sciences.²³ At once a science of nature and a universal hermeneutics, the *theologia emblematica* constitutes a polemical response to the specialization and particularization of learning that Oetinger was observing in his own time.²⁴

According to the *theologia emblematica* the whole nexus of reality, including all the sciences and theology, is grasped simultaneously and intuitively. Thus the generative structure of Oetinger’s hermeneutics requires a corresponding genera-

semiosis a double significance, at once archaic and utopian: poetry at once recuperates the immediacy and richness of the origins of culture and anticipates the culture’s ultimate goal.” (*Lessing’s Laocoon: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984] 83, 84.)

²² “Sie können regenerationem Plantarum und die 6 Tagwerke im Glas zeigen.” Oetinger prays for them: “GOTT gebe ihnen einen Sinn, daß sie die neutestamentliche Grund-Begriffe mit ihrer hohen Wissenschaft verbinden, und zur Theologia emblematica das Ihre beitragen” (BEW 837). Reinhard Breymayer has brought this connection to the Amsterdam Rosicrucians, identified in the BEW only as “eine Société in Amsterdamm,” to light; see “Fr. Chr. Oetingers Theologia Emblematica,” *Lehrtafel* 1: 9 ff.

²³ “Das Jus wird aus der Theologie fliessen, und die Medicin wird nichts seyn, als eine Theologia emblematica, nemlich, man wird an Seelen und Leibern, an Kräutern, Thieren und Steinen die Abbildungen aller Kräften der Wesenheiten in dem einigen Grund, woraus alles geht, sehen.” Fr. Chr. Oetinger, *Die guldene Zeit oder Sammlung wichtiger Betrachtungen von etlichen Gelehrten zur Ermunterung in diesen bedenklichen Zeiten zusammen getragen*, 3 vols. (Frankfurt, Leipzig, 1759-1761) 1: 85.

²⁴ “Die Priester alten Testaments waren Juristen, Medici und Theologi zugleich, jetziger Zeit aber sind die Wissenschaften zerrissen, so daß kein Priester neuen Testaments an die Wissenschaften der alten hinreicht.” (BEW 474) “Denn die Zerreissung der Wissenschaften ist eine Folge der verderbten Zeit, die Vereinigung der Wissenschaften gehört zur Vorbereitung auf die guldene Zeit.” (*Guldene Zeit* 1: 14)

tive epistemology. Oetinger theorized about a human faculty capable of perceiving according to the generative method; he called it the *sensus communis*.²⁵ The *sensus communis* knows through the senses — both the five senses and an “inner sense” — rather than through the reason; it knows simultaneously and intuitively rather than analytically and logically. In defining this concept Oetinger was in step with contemporaries who advocated as a corrective to Wolff the faculty of feeling, or *Empfindung*, as an independent faculty of the soul.²⁶ The privileging of sensate over rational cognition signals the rise of philosophical aesthetics in the latter half of the 18th century; again we can see parallels between Oetinger and anti-Wolffian intellectual currents that flowed into the aesthetic philosophy of the Romantics.

Teller’s hermeneutics is based on a polarity light versus dark, of reason versus the senses, where the latter pole must systematically be excluded from proper exegesis. The contrast to Oetinger is striking: applying the model of cabalistic dynamism to his hermeneutics, the forces of darkness and light interact within the word, from which arises its semantic vitality:

Es werden bei den Sinnbildern viele Contraaria, wie Licht und Schatten angebracht [...] da der Schatten das Licht erhöhen muß. Daher muß man die Dissonanz zur Consonanz bringen, wie in der Music oder wie in der Perspectiv-Kunst, da der Schatten die Sache viel natürlicher, als wenn alles einerley wäre, vorbildet. Folglich muß der Bezug der Verschiedenheit oder Diversité in eine Conformité ausgehen, da muß nicht einerlei zu einerlei, sondern vielerlei mit viel Gegensätzen zu einer Einförmigkeit gebracht werden. (BEW 843)

Teller’s exegesis, on the other hand, strives for this univocal “einerlei zu einerlei” rejected by Oetinger, where ratio meets rational meaning in specular, sexless²⁷

²⁵ Oetinger’s most thorough treatment of this faculty is in his *Inquisitio in sensum communem et rationem* (1753; Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 1964); see also Oetinger’s *Die Warheit des SENVS COMMVNIS oder des allgemeinen Sinnes, in dem nach dem Grundtext erklärten Sprüchen und Prediger Salomo* [...] (Tübingen: Fues, 1781). Gadamer takes up Oetinger in his *Wahrheit und Methode* as an advocate of a kind of cognition outside the domain of rational thought, and places him along with other advocates of the *sensus communis* (Vico, Shaftesbury) in a tradition which leads to the understanding of aesthetic experience as a source of truth (*Gesammelte Werke*, 7 vols. [Tübingen J.C.B. Mohr, 1986-1991] 1: 32 ff).

²⁶ Guntram Spindler has suggested Oetinger was familiar with Johann Georg Sulzer’s treatises on the faculties of the soul, and that they might well have influenced him in writing his “Gedanken von den zwei Fähigkeiten zu empfinden und zu erkennen, und dem daraus zu bestimmenden Unterschiede der Genien” (Frankfurt/M, Leipzig, 1775), which Oetinger submitted to the Berlin Academy in answer to the prize question, formulated by Sulzer in 1773, “Examen des deux facultés primitives de l’âme, celle de connoître et celle de sentir.” (“Oetinger und die Erkenntnislehre der Schulphilosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts,” *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 10 [1984]: 43-46.)

²⁷ We can sense something of Teller’s distaste for sexual imagery. Under the entry “Braut, Bräutigam,” Teller writes: “Man sollte also Jesum nicht in das Spiel mängen, welches man zuweilen mit der Kirche, als seiner Braut, treibt. [...] Ich bestimme diese Anmerkung besonders

contemplation. Oetinger's exegesis of the "pregnant" word, by contrast, is predicated on the attraction and repulsion of opposites by which spirit becomes incarnate. The science of the reason, logic, thus is inadequate in interpreting the *geistleiblich* word:

Gott will nemlich die syllogistische Ordnung der Gedanken nicht aufheben, sondern beleben. Gal. 3,21. Dazu hat er die Anstalt der Gnade im Evangelio gegeben Röm. 4,21. Die Logic ist nicht die Anstalt dazu, sondern nur ein Gesez, nach welchem Niemand Consequent wandelt. In etlichen Stücken bringt sie eine Maschinen mäsig Form der Gedanken zuwegen. Aber im Evangelio muß jeder reeller Gedank nicht nur geformt, sondern gebohren werden. (BEW 282)

The "real thoughts" of the Gospel are *born*, not formed, says Oetinger, suggesting that meaning arises not through deduction or analysis, but through the interaction of divine forces at work in the process of life itself.

In formulating a hermeneutics in opposition to Wolffian rationalism, Oetinger aligned himself with thinkers and traditions outside the mainstream of the Enlightenment. While the mainstream typically discredited Jewish scriptures and practices as being sensual, servile or impure,²⁸ Oetinger considered the sensate quality of the "Ebräische Sprache" the mark of its divinity, and sought out Jewish scholars to assist him with his biblical exegesis. The same can be said of his interest in alchemy, Jacob Böhme, emblematics, and such unusual figures as Swedenborg: in each case Oetinger was drawn to a system of thought that configured the relationship between spirit and flesh as a dynamic unity, rather than dualistically, as in Leibnizian or Wolffian philosophy.

Oetinger represents a vital undercurrent of thought within the 18th century that responded critically to tendencies within the Enlightenment, and which emerged in a new, but recognizably similar form in the natural philosophy and aesthetics

Lehrern der Gemeinen, die solchen Tändeleyen mit gewissenhaften Ernst entgegen arbeiten sollten, und nicht die Einbildungskraft ihrer Zuhörer mit Bildern anfüllen, die von vielen gar zu leicht auf eine anstößige Weise erweitert werden können, und sehr oft, auch von ganzen Gemeinen, sind erweitert worden." (WB 118)

²⁸ Accommodation theory presupposes that the Jewish mind was bound to sensate representations, in contrast to the Enlightened age, where rational truths in "pure" form could be grasped. Teller's diction underscores this point. For example, ascribing affective qualities such as wrath to God, says Teller, occurs as a "Bequemung nach den Begriffen eines zu mehr geistiger Denkungsart noch nicht erhobenen Volks" (WB 43). The introduction of Christianity as a religion "des Herzens und des Wandels" served to do away with "solche knechtische Gottesdienste" of the Jews (WB 124). Under his entry on "faith" Teller concludes: "die Apostel, indem sie das Christenthum selbst den Glauben nannten, [thatten] es allezeit im Gegensatz gegen die jüdische Religion [...], die es mehr mit sinnlichen Gegenständen zu thun hatte" (WB 286). This application of a flesh/spirit dualism to Judaism vs. rational religion is widespread within the mainstream of the Enlightenment; Lessing's diction with respect to the Jewish faith in the "Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts" is a well known example (the Israelites of the Old Testament are "roh": §11, 16, 18, 20, 27; "unge-schliffen": §8; "verwildert": §8).

of Goethe and the early Romantics.²⁹ A range of fascinating parallels can be drawn to Oetinger's thought. His high estimation of sensate, intuitive cognition has its parallel in the developing science of aesthetics as it arose in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Oetinger's generative method also bears similarities to the organic understanding of the artwork put forward by Herder, Goethe, and the Romantics. Thus we can find suggestive similarities between, for example, the Goethean symbol, Schelling's view of the artwork, Hölderlin's poetic theory, and Oetinger's generative method, their common assumption being that certain linguistic forms manifest the same nexus and semantic plenitude that is found in nature. Goethe, the Romantics and Oetinger also all drew on hermetic traditions in formulating a unified view of the world that stressed the interaction rather than the opposition between spirit and the physical world.

I cannot treat the very complicated question of influence in this limited context. In order to do so one must consider not just intellectual parallels, but the social and political setting of Württemberg pietism, which on closer examination presents a number of significant obstacles that would have hindered the mediation of this thought to, for example, the young seminarians Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling studying in Tübingen.³⁰ I believe it is most helpful, however, to place Oetinger within a tradition of hermetic and theosophical thought to which many intellectuals in the second half of the 18th century turned to find a corrective to the rationalistic Wolffian philosophy of the German Enlightenment, a tradition that the Romantic generation would also find useful in "overcoming" Kant. Oetinger is one example of a highly original application of this thought within the intellectual parameters of Württemberg pietism. Others came to similar insights, drawing at least in part on the same intellectual traditions, and sharing Oetinger's concern to rehabilitate sensuality. The relationship between "late pietism," as

²⁹ Rolf Christian Zimmermann (*Das Weltbild des jungen Goethe: Studien zur hermetischen Tradition des deutschen 18. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. [Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1969, 1979]) makes repeated reference to Oetinger as a source of hermetic thought for the young Goethe. A number of studies have argued, I believe too strongly, that Oetinger's speculative theology directly influenced Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin in the formulation of their philosophies: Robert Schneider, *Schellings und Hegels schwäbische Geistesahnen* (Würzburg-Anmühle: Konrad Triltsch, 1938); Ulrich Gaier, *Der gesetzliche Kalkül: Hölderlins Dichtungslehre*, Hermea, N.S. 14 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1962); Gaier later qualified Oetinger's importance, "Zur Tradition von Hölderlins 'kalkulablem Gesetz,'" *Schwäbische Heimat* 4 (1969): 293-301; Meinhard Prill, *Bürgerliche Alltagswelt und pietistisches Denken im Werk Hölderlins: Zur Kritik des Hölderlin-Bildes von Georg Lukács* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983); Walter Dierauer, *Hölderlin und der spekulativen Pietismus Württembergs: Gemeinsame Anschauungshorizonte im Werk Oetingers und Hölderlins* (Zurich: Juris, 1986), see my review, *Suevica* 4 (1987): 123-127.

³⁰ In my study, "Hölderlin in the Context of Württemberg Pietism" (Diss. Washington U, 1988), I discuss the problems involved in asserting the influence of Württemberg pietism on Hölderlin. See also my article, "New and Old Histories: The Case of Hölderlin and Württemberg Pietism," forthcoming in *CLIO*.

Martin Brecht³¹ has termed it, and intellectual currents in late 18th-century Germany, has yet to be fully articulated. That such disparate conclusions as Oetinger's christocentric, alchemical eschatology and the Romantics' view of the autonomy of art could be drawn from common intellectual premises is indicative of the tremendous shifts occurring at this time in the configuration of the spiritual and secular realms.

³¹ "Der Spätpietismus — ein vergessenes oder vernachlässigtes Kapitel der protestantischen Kirchengeschichte," *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 10 (1984): 124-151.