

# The Learned Academic Meets The Scientific Musician

by David Shavin

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## **Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician**

by Christoph Wolff

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The overriding impression left by this work, is that of the famous *New Yorker* cartoon, whereby a woman is pictured coming out of a theater, and inquiry is made of her: “Mrs. Lincoln—aside from the ending, how did you enjoy the play?” Only here, the assassination in Professor Wolff’s opus is perpetrated at the onset.

To his credit, Christoph Wolff, perhaps the pre-eminent Bach scholar of the academic world today, has kept his lifelong passion for Bach alive even into his years as Dean at Harvard University. His revision and expansion of the letters and documents of Bach’s life (*The New Bach Reader*, originally compiled and edited by Hans David and Arthur Mendel) was published in 1998, and is invaluable for English-reading students of Bach’s life. Wolff’s lifelong pursuit of the missing music library of the famous Berlin Singakademie, a passion from his graduate school days, was rewarded with success just recently. Further, he is no deconstructionist or relativist. He even attempts to situate Bach as a thinker, a musical scientist. However, in attempting to address the genius of Bach, he displays a remarkable gaffe, characteristic of the pathetic, ideological blinders of even the best of modern academia.

His opening chapter, “Prologue: Bach and the Notion of ‘Musical Science,’” begins by properly defending Bach from the attacks made upon him in his day, that Bach had pushed music beyond entertainment, that he needlessly complicated matters. Rather, Bach fought for truth, and hence developed music. Here, Wolff cites Bach’s dedication of some music (part of which would later be incorporated into his *B-minor Mass*), as an example of Bach’s scientific view of music: “To your Royal Highness [the Elector of Saxony] I submit in deepest devotion the present small work of that science which I have attained in ‘musique.’” Unfortunately, Wolff then

identifies that science: “Bach’s music—his search for truth—was affected more, both subconsciously and consciously, than that of any other contemporary musician by the spreading culture of Newtonianism.” Wolff develops this line with two illiterate whoppers:

1. “Newton by 1750 represented the undisputed paradigm of the scientist as genius.”

2. Newton “was especially revered in Leipzig, whose university had in Bach’s time become the center of Newtonianism in Germany.”

Even the contemporary proselytizers of Newtonianism, could not have managed these illiteracies. First, the “undisputed paradigm” of 1750 was much disputed. The undisputed and lazy image of our modern world, regarding both Newton and science, is the unfortunate product of the wrong side of those intense disputes in Bach’s time. For the last two decades of Bach’s life, Maupertuis and Voltaire were manufacturing those disputes against the actual science of Gottfried Leibniz, as a way of trying to promote Newton. And Bach was more than aware of this. In 1747, with his *Musical Offering* to Frederick the Great, he personally intervened in defense of Leibniz’s method, against the Newtonian.

Second, Wolff’s proof that Leipzig University was the German center of Newtonianism is, according to his footnote, as follows: “The Leipzig periodical *Acta Eruditorum* published in 1714 one of the most important early reviews of Newton’s principal opus, with a careful collation of the 1687 and 1713 editions of the *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*.” Even deeper into the swamp sinks Herr Professor. Not only was the *Acta Eruditorum* known by one and all as the premier scientific journal of Leibniz’s works, from the time of its founding in 1682 by Leibniz’s collaborator, Otto Mencke, but also, the 1714 collation, in particular, was famous for displaying the 1713 alterations made in Newton’s 1687 *Principia*, by way of exposing the empty spaces of Newton’s thinking. The actual school of geometrical physics, from Kepler, Roberval, Fermat, Desargues, Huyghens, Leibniz, and Bernoulli, had managed to develop quite well throughout the 17th Century without Newton’s so-called methods. And in the 26 years between the two publications of *Principia*, Leibniz’s “*analysis situs*” methods continued to

predominate throughout scientific circles in Europe. The 1713 republication of *Principia* was part and parcel of a war declared against the scientific and political genius of Bach's world, Leibniz. The 1714 *Acta* publication on Newton's editions was the center of the opposition to the marketing of Newton. None of the readers of the *Acta* in Leipzig, or elsewhere, could have thought otherwise.

That Wolff cites the 1714 *Acta Eruditorum* review of Newton's work, as the proof that Newton "was especially revered in Leipzig," is more than a little distressing. Not only did he evidently not read the Leipzig review himself, but he seems to have relied upon an incompetent source to summarize it for him. (If Wolff has misread his source—likely his colleague, I. Bernard Cohen, unfortunately—it would be a misreading that is coherent with the thrust of Cohen's adulation of Newton.)

To attribute this matter to monumental levels of ideological blindness and illiteracy on, at least, Wolff's part, is the charitable interpretation. This "ideological blindness and illiteracy" theory is supported later on, when, in one of the only two sentences in the book using Leibniz's name, Wolff commits a similar, though minor, illiteracy. He makes reference to a supposedly Leibnizian theory of "preestablished harmony." If one assumes this reference is to the idea of a "pre-established harmony," then one can infer Wolff's lack of familiarity with Leibniz, or his nervousness in dealing with him—or, likely, both.

So, in the spirit of Mrs. Lincoln's cartoon interlocuter, after that messy beginning, how was the rest of the book?

Reading the following 98% of the work was a somewhat bizarre experience. Wolff wants to explain the genius that attracts him to Bach's contrapuntal music, and to use Bach's life to elucidate the obvious power of Bach's mind, and of his moral passion. So, the evidence that Wolff has pulled together is undoubtedly useful. We shall deal with this, and then re-examine how the bricks that he gathers for his structure, all fall down.

Wolff based this book upon his extensive work on *The New Bach Reader*, which appeared two years earlier, in 1998—Wolff's re-editing of the Hans David/Arthur Mendel collection of Bach documents and letters. If the reader has to choose one of these efforts by Wolff, the basic documents are to be preferred to the story that he makes of them. Further, included in the *Reader* is the Arthur Mendel translation of Johann Forkel's loving 1802 biography of Bach—the first and the best, though only 64 pages. In Wolff's work, almost ten times longer, he has carefully built around the framework of letters and documents of Bach's life, an extended (if flawed) argument for Bach's music as a mental and moral passion.

## Some Bach Gems

Bach studied Latin and Greek, reading Virgil, Cicero, Theognis, and the New Testament in the original languages. He also studied math, physics, and German poetry by the age

of 17. Bach had the benefit of using Andreas Werckmeister's 1698 work on organs, *Erweiterte und verbesserte Orgelprobe*, and also of working out the concepts on the machinery of the organ—as it were, under the hood.<sup>1</sup> Wolff calls Werckmeister, "the premier German musical scientist and speculative theorist at the end of the 17th Century"—even though he fails to mention that Werckmeister was explicitly following Johannes Kepler. (Later, Wolff again omits Kepler's name, writing: "Since 17th-Century scientists had demonstrated that the planets and the Earth were governed by the same laws, the relationship between cosmic harmonies and audible music appeared more strongly unified.")

Bach's first organist position, in 1703, at 18 years of age, was for the newly-completed Wender organ in Arnstadt, tuned to Werckmeister's new "well-tempered" tuning system. The town was just then rebuilding its organ, after the destruction in the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), and had chosen to put a major effort into both organ and organist. In 1705, Bach walked to Hamburg, making an extended visit to hear and learn from Werckmeister's colleague, the organist Buxtehude, whom Wolff calls "the strongest public advocate of Werckmeister's new system of temperament." Also happily, Wolff points out that a passacaglia from this period ("Meine Tage" from BWV 150) was not only in part due to Werckmeister's tuning, but was also chosen by Brahms almost 200 years later, as the passacaglia theme of the "Finale" of his Fourth Symphony! (See **Figure 1**.) In fact, Wolff includes more than a few gems. He identifies the ostinato bass line from Bach's 1741 *Goldberg Variations*, as being identical with the theme of George Frederick Handel's *Chaconne avec 62 variations*. And he shows that this work had been published circa 1732 in Amsterdam by one Witvogel, who had been in touch with Bach.

Wolff even makes the provocative suggestion that the result of Bach's month-long imprisonment in November 1717, might well have been his historic work, *The Well-Tempered Clavier!* Wolff cites E.L. Gerber, whose father had been a student of Bach, to the effect that *The Well-Tempered Clavier* had been written "in a place where ennui, boredom, and the absence of any kind of musical instrument forced him to resort to this pastime." If Wolff is right in attributing this reference to Bach's imprisonment, it would certainly testify to Bach's stubbornness, his concentration, and his Leibnizian optimism. Bach's arrest by Duke Wilhelm Ernst had been in retribution for his stubborn insistence on leaving Wilhelm Ernst, to go to the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, who became Bach's favorite prince. The widow of this Leopold, Princess Charlotte Friederica Wilhelmine, later married Count Schaumburg-Lippe—whose son was the lifelong employer of Bach's son, Johann Christian Frederick Bach.

Wolff also makes the well-considered observation that

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1. A better appreciation of Bach's connections with Werckmeister can be found in Jonathan Tennenbaum, "Bach and Kepler: The Polyphonic Character of Truthful Thinking," *EIR*, June 23, 2000.

FIGURE 10

## Opening of fourth movement of Brahms' Symphony No. 4

Allegro energico e passionato

thinking about his music, originate from this period. Again, at the threshold of his plunge into intensive teaching, he described his *Orgel-Büchlein* (“Little Organ Book”) as a work “in which a beginner at the organ is given instruction in developing a chorale in many divers ways, and at the same time in acquiring facility in the study of the pedal since in the chorales contained therein the pedal is treated as wholly obbligato.”

Wolff’s treatment of Bach’s approach to the theological issues of the day, as reflected in his choice and treatment of chorales, and in his rigorous and thorough program for church music, is worth mentioning. First, regarding the chorales, Bach would treat chorales associated with traditional Lutherans and with Pietists, enriching them both, taking them up to a higher level. The 1736 *Musicalisches Gesangbuch* (“Musical Songbook”), the first music published by the famous Breitkopf firm, explains in its preface, that “the melodies to be found in this musical songbook have been in part quite newly composed and in part improved in the thorough-bass by the most noble Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach.” The collection was notable for

“Bach’s use of Andreas Werckmeister’s term ‘well-tempered’ (“*wohl temperiert*”) indicates his preference for [not equal temperament, but] a slightly modified system of tuning with ‘all the thirds sharp,’ enabling him to play in all 24 keys without losing the characteristic features of individual keys.” (Wolff was referring to Bach’s student, J.P. Kirnberger, who reported that Bach had tuned with “all the thirds sharp.”) Bach united the musical space of 24 major and minor keys, in such a fashion that did not blur out or homogenize the unique character of each one, but built upon such. Bach finished *The Well-Tempered Clavier* as he prepared to launch his vast teaching career at Leipzig’s Thomas-schule in 1723. He also published *Upright Instruction* at that point, “wherein the lovers of the clavier, and especially those desirous of learning, are shown a clear way not only 1) to learn to play clearly in two voices but also, after further progress, 2) to deal correctly and well with three obbligato parts; furthermore, at the same time not only to have good inventions but to develop the same well and, above all, to arrive at a singing style in playing and at the same time to acquire a strong foretaste of composition.” Several of his rarely recorded comments, referring to his

its ecumenical approach. It included poets connected with the Pietists, such as Freylinghausens and Salomo Franck. Wolff counters the traditional view that Bach got caught up between the controversies of Pietists and Lutherans, writing that a “large number of the cantata texts later set by Bach reflect the absorption of Pietist language and ideas and, in fact, the cross-influence of Pietist and orthodox [Lutheran] tendencies.” As background for the development of the cantata, he references the innovative sacred poems of Erdmann Neumeister, “closely related to the prescribed lessons throughout the ecclesiastical year.” Set to music by J.P. Krieger in 1700, they reflect the influence of madrigals and Italian secular cantata. Various such texts and settings appeared before Salomo Franck’s collection in 1715, entitled *Evangelisches Andachts-Opffer* (Evangelical Devotional Offering) and set by Bach. Wolff refers to Bach’s lifelong drive to establish “a well-regulated church music,” and stresses Bach’s amazing outburst of compositions in the first few years in Leipzig—including the *Magnificat*, the *St. John Passion*, the *Easter Oratorio*, the *St. Mark Passion*, and the *St. Matthew Passion*. All this took place within his first four years there, and was

over and above the weekly cantata-sermons! Bach's developed power of communication was uniquely appropriate for healing the religious and theological disputes of the previous century. Even Wolff comes close to expressing what he would like to prove: "Bach's compositions may epitomize nothing less than the difficult task of finding for himself an argument for the existence of God—perhaps the ultimate goal of his musical science."

### **Leibniz's Influence in Leipzig**

The story of Bach's career in Leipzig, for his last 27 years (1723-50), suffers somewhat from Wolff's Newtonian bias. He does recognize that Bach has joined a circle in Leipzig that approaches science and human nature from a rather broad standpoint, and whose members think that investigations of the world will have a coherence with investigations into human nature; that the human mind and the human emotions have a relationship that is addressed in Bach's music. Wolff's closest approach to Leibniz's Leipzig is: "Philosophy, understood in the broadest sense—ranging from logic, poetics, and philology to mathematics, physics, metaphysics, and theology without sharp disciplinary borders, as the careers of some of Bach's Leipzig faculty colleagues illustrate—represented the core of the liberal arts curriculum that Bach's students were exposed to and that Bach had to mirror in his own teachings." He notes that Bach even uses a new term in Leipzig, "*Grundsätze*" ("principles," e.g., of the thorough-bass), that had been recently coined as his translation of the Greek word "axiom," by the man who became famous for presenting a watered-down version of Leibniz, Christian Wolf.

At this point, we should interpolate a bit of Bach's connections to Leibniz's world, and to, specifically, the Leibnizian background on Bach's Leipzig, before returning to Wolff's treatment. First, Bach never worked in any court or city that was bereft of Leibniz's influence. He was schooled in Lüneburg, where Leibniz was the leading political and intellectual force, and where Leibniz spent time working at the nearby library. The daughter of Leibniz's patron, Count Anton Ulrich, oversaw cultural matters in Arnstadt, where Bach first worked as an organist. In fact, the physical assault made upon Bach in 1705, was on the occasion of his walking home from the Neideck Castle of Auguste Dorothea, the daughter. Her father, Anton Ulrich, had given Leibniz the assignment of unifying the Protestant denominations, and then all of Christendom. In Bach's short time in Mühlhausen, he had to put some of this into practice, to avoid falling into the Pietist versus traditional Lutheran brawls there. In Weimar, his close work with Salomo Franck, developed the cantata along the lines of Leibniz's ecumenical offensive. And even during his period in Cöthen, he composed his "Brandenburg" Concerti for the Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg, the brother-in-law of Leibniz's most attentive student, Queen Sophie Charlotte of Prussia.

Leipzig's history with Leibniz can be summarily sketched as follows. Prof. Otto Mencke of the University of Leipzig had met with Leibniz in 1681, on the planning of the scholarly journal, *Acta Eruditorum*. Hence, from 1682 to 1716, Leipzig became the center of the publishing of whatever small portion of Leibniz's vast writings that was actually published during his lifetime. During this time, Leibniz's half-brother, Johann Friedrich Leibniz, taught at the Thomas-schule, until his death in 1696. He was quite active politically with the top leaders of the Pietist movement (and was likely a collaborator of Salomo Franck and of Freylinghausens, whose works Bach later set to music). Leibniz's sister, Anna Catharina, had married the archdeacon of the Church of St. Thomas, Simon Löffler, and their son, Friedrich Simon Löffler, earned his masters in theology from the University of Leipzig in 1689.

When Bach arrived in Leipzig in 1723, the Rector of the Church of St. Thomas, J.H. Ernesti, had been at that post since 1684. Undoubtedly, Ernesti had worked with both Leibniz's brother-in-law, the archdeacon, and Leibniz's half-brother, the schoolmaster at the Thomas-schule. Ernesti's wife stood as godmother, in 1724, to Bach's first child in Leipzig. However, an evaluation of the extent of Leibniz's influence over the Leipzig circles as of 1723, must take into account the chilling climate of repression of Leibniz's works, and even his name, since his death in November 1716.

King George I of England, ruler of Hanover, had ordered the seizure of all of Leibniz's writings and personal library, despite protests and legal filings by the Leipzig graduate and clergyman, Friedrich Simon Löffler. (The case was carried on by the Löffler descendants, and was not won until King George III, in the midst of the American Revolution, had to settle with the four grandchildren of Löffler. One of them was likely Josias Friedrich Christian Löffler, a collaborator of Moses Mendelssohn, and the editor of Mendelssohn's famous translation of the Old Testament into German. Ironically, his portion of the settlement might well have contributed to his ability to further the Mendelssohn ecumenical policy of his relative, Leibniz.) In 1723, Leibniz's collaborator, Eckhart, who had been working for seven years to edit some of Leibniz's papers, fled Hanover under pressure. When Bach arrives in Leipzig in 1723, Löffler is there, a clergyman in the midst of legal filings on behalf of his uncle, Gottfried Leibniz.

### **Bach's Circles**

Hence, one must read between the lines of Wolff's otherwise useful discussion of Bach's collaborators in Leipzig to ascertain clues as to what may be going on. Wolff makes a case for their being an interesting group, and is more helpful in this regard than the classic biography of Bach by Spitta. However, the reader would miss that Bach was at the center of a group of collaborators, who were apparently integral to the cultural and political developments that crested with the



*The close associates of both Gottfried Leibniz and J.S. Bach: Left, St. Thomas School Rector (1684-1729) Johann Heinrich Ernesti; and right, St. Thomas School Rector (1730-34) Johann Matthias Gesner.*

German literary renaissance and the American Revolution. We shall meet here four of Bach's collaborators, and amplify upon what Wolff omits.

The conrector at the Thomas-schüle during 1724-31, J.C. Hebenstreit, then held positions at the university in theology, Hebrew, and Oriental languages. He collaborated with the Mendelssohn/Itzig group of Jewish thinkers in their project to lift Jews, and hence Christians, out of feudal bonds. In 1742-43, close relatives of both Moses Mendelssohn and of the Itzig family, published Moses Maimonides' works for the first time in 150 years, and followed that with the first publication of an astronomical work by David Gans, the Jewish associate of Johannes Kepler in 1600. Hebenstreit was selected to compose the Latin introduction for the latter work. His wife was godmother to one of Bach's daughters.

The rector who succeeded J.H. Ernesti in 1730, J.M. Gesner, was a strong supporter of Bach, writing about him (in a 1738 work on Quintilianus) that Bach composed "the most various and at the same time mutually agreeable combinations of sounds in orderly procession, this one man taking in all these harmonies with his keen ear and emitting with his voice alone the tone of all the voices. Favored as I am of antiquity, [yet] the accomplishments of our Bach appear to me to effect what not many Orpheuses, nor twenty Arions, could achieve." Gesner left Leipzig in 1734 to found the philosophy department for the new Göttingen University, where his emphasis upon Classical philology established the basis for Göttingen's groundbreaking work in math and science. (Abraham Kästner would follow Gesner from Leipzig to Göttingen two decades later, where he would late in his career become the teacher of Karl Friedrich Gauss.) Similar to Ernesti and Hebenstreit, Gesner was close enough to Bach that his wife stood as god-

mother for one of Bach's children: Elisabeth Caritas Gesner was godmother to Johann August Abraham Bach.

Friedrich Mentz had been on the university's philosophy faculty since 1711, but, during Bach's years in Leipzig, he would also hold positions as professor of poetics and of physics. His publications feature works on Plato. When Bach examined some of Mentz's vast library, including a 1597 manuscript with an enigmatic canon by Teodoro Riccio, he proceeded, circa 1740, to write out for Mentz an augmented resolution, called *Resolutio Canonis Ricciani*. The fourth figure, J.H. Winckler, was recruited by Gesner to the university in 1729, and was also an instructor at the Thomas-schüle during 1731-39. He concentrated in Greek and Latin, but also wrote the libretto for Bach's 1732 cantata, "*Froher Tag, verlangte Stunden*" (BWV Anh. 18), to which the music has since been lost. In the 1740s, he became more and more involved in experimental work on electricity, publishing on that subject in 1744. (Kästner, Christlob Mylius, and his cousin, Gottlieb Lessing, were also involved in the Leipzig electrical experiments of the 1740s.) Winckler also published a treatise in 1765 on acoustical phenomena, where he refers to his old friend Bach as a "musical connoisseur" whose ears can "differentiate between innumerable tones."

Wolff identifies Winckler as a "German Newtonian," although Wolff's credentials on this score must not be relied upon. Not having read Winckler's works, this reviewer cannot assess this particular claim of Wolff. However, ignoring Wolff's previously-cited "illiterate whopper" regarding Leipzig as a center of Newtonianism, still there certainly was a concerted effort to destroy Leibniz's influence, and to promote Newton in Germany, centering around the efforts of Voltaire and Maupertuis in the 1730s and 1740s. Some circles

around Bach submitted to these operations, but not many of them, and not while Bach was alive. Bach personally led the offensive for Leibniz—against the 1746–47 Berlin Academy contest against Leibniz, arranged by Voltaire, Maupertuis, and Leonhard Euler—with his 1747 *Musical Offering* project for Frederick the Great. (This reviewer’s treatment of this appeared in *Fidelio*, Winter 2000, “‘Thinking through Singing’—The Strategic Significance of J.S. Bach’s *A Musical Offering*.”) If Winckler succumbed to the Newtonian operations, he would be the only one this reviewer is aware of, while Bach was still alive.

Curiously, Wolff mis-steps again, when he ventures the theory that Bach’s visit to Frederick was part of a peace mission, coming a few months after the “Dec. 25, 1746” Peace of Dresden that ended Frederick’s warring against Bach’s Saxony. The content of Bach’s intervention with the King, to take the King’s thinking and policymaking a qualitative-step upward, certainly would have been key to the type of statecraft needed to pre-empt future wars. But Wolff mis-dates the Peace of Dresden (which was actually Dec. 25, 1745), and, not having provided any larger, more substantial evidence, his well-intentioned guess is undercut by his mistaken date.

War had been declared upon Frederick’s mind, however, with the assault upon Leibniz in 1746–47. The Leipzig Leibnizians around Kästner, Lessing, and Mylius were energized around this fight, and escalated their collaboration with the Berlin Leibnizians. This resulted most famously in the lifelong partnership of Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn, and the uplifting of Christian and Jewish culture, of Western civilization—that is, of the capacity of man to hold sustained ideas, and to wield their power in art, science, and the deliberations of public policy. A not unimportant feature of this, was the Mendelssohn family’s personal role in reviving the works and performance of Bach.

### **Wolff’s Systematic Shortfall**

While a reading of Winckler’s works could likely settle Wolff’s particular claim here, the more telling case is that of one of Bach’s students, Agricola. Wolff makes much of a pro-Newton quote from Agricola, in August 1750, shortly after Bach’s death. So, let us give, as it were, the devil his due, regarding the strongest of the claims of Newtonianism around Bach. Voltaire had just arrived on the scene to join with Maupertuis in a new war against Leibniz. They appear to have gained the upper hand with Frederick the Great, now that Bach, the successful defender of Leibniz, had just departed the scene. In this adverse situation just after Bach’s death, Agricola makes the mistake of defending Bach from one side, by throwing him into the other. That is, Agricola responded to an attack (made by an Italian opera singer upon the deeper complexities of Bach) by writing that Bach “denies his music the effect of pleasure for the listener who would not savor such difficult harmony. Yet, assuming the

harmonies of this great man were so complex that they would not always achieve the intended result, they nevertheless serve for the connoisseur’s genuine delight. Not all learned people are able to understand a Newton, but those who have progressed far enough in profound science so they can understand him will find the greater gratification and real benefit in reading his work.” Wolff seizes upon this crucial evidence: “Here, for the first time, a parallel is drawn” between Newton and Bach.

Here are a few more parallels, but between Agricola and Wolff. Were Agricola’s only point, that working hard is necessary for the higher pleasures that are appropriate for humans, then Wolff’s argument for Bach as a scientific genius might also hold. However, both Agricola and Wolff have been too willing to appeal to a prevailing, phony image, falling short of the reconstruction of the compositional process, or the problem-solving process of their hero. Bach did not flinch when he saw the Newton image being substituted for the hard, but human, work of Leibniz. Agricola obviously never understood Leibniz’s profound science, nor was his grasp on the internal compositional process of Bach firm enough, for him to provide a better argument against merely pleasure-seeking music. And as much as Bach needed a biography that would defend his musical genius as scientific genius, Wolff’s illiteracy on science and on the epistemological battles of Bach’s time, ensured that he would fall short. Agricola, despite working with C.P.E. Bach on an early biographical sketch of J.S. Bach, accomplished little else. Most of what we have and know of Bach comes through the efforts of those who knew of, and shared, Bach’s passionate defense of Leibniz’s scientific methods: the Itzigs, the Mendelssohns, Kimberger, and Frederick the Great’s sister, Anna Amalie. Perhaps fighting evil has a part to play in spurring creativity and making the world better than it otherwise would have been—if anything, a Leibnizian point. Certainly, adjusting to, or cutting a deal with, evil is more characteristic of Newton’s method. Provided that this much has been established in this review, then the reader is armed for the following, limited endorsement of Wolff’s work.

There is a joke about a poor, rustic fellow, who takes his wife to a psychiatrist because she thinks that she is a cow. The psychiatrist is entranced with his subject, and after an investigation, consults with the husband, explaining that the wife can be helped, but it may take many sessions. When the husband balks, the doctor even offers to cure the wife, no matter how many sessions it takes, for the price of only one session. The fellow answers: “Well, that is very kind of you. But, you see, our family needs the milk.”

The shame of it is, that there is presently no better full-length, biographical study of Bach in English. But that doesn’t mean we have to adjust to such. It is indeed a crazy situation, but perhaps one day soon, we can separate the humans from the cows, and look back at the days when we had to resort to such crazy devices.