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Tempering the Marital Mind: Civic Regimens of Love and Marriage in German Mid-Eighteenth-Century Moral Weeklies

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This article contributes to the historiography of romantic marriage in the eighteenth century by analyzing discourses on marital love and happiness in the moral weeklies of the German writers Georg Friedrich Meier and Samuel Gotthold Lange. Meier and Lange raise overarching questions about why so many marriages are unhappy and argue that long-term marital contentment requires spouses to discover and confirm each other's qualities and abilities on a daily basis. Each must reflect and affirm the other while also practicing a kind of de-escalation in conflict situations, for instance by withdrawing and calming oneself before facing problems anew. I argue that this apparently modern therapeutic approach to marital relationships was part of a civic morality in the making, a morality that pointed forward to the emergence of a modern individual self while also being rooted in a long tradition of spiritual exercises and therapeutic regimens.

Introduction

Social and cultural historians have recently highlighted the eighteenth century as the century of romantic marriage.¹ Although the notion of an origin has been heavily criticized, the overall thesis that men and women increasingly both expected and valued marital love and happiness has been both upheld and further explored. Overall, the romantic marriage has been connected to large-scale processes such as the emergence of a broad and prosperous bourgeoisie; the associated formation of a civic, individual, and partly secular identity and sense of self; and the communication of this identity through the media forms of the emerging public sphere.²

¹Edward Behrend-Martinez, *A Cultural History of Marriage in the Age of Enlightenment* (London, 2020); Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York, 2006).

²Behrend-Martinez, *A Cultural History of Marriage in the Age of Enlightenment*; Coontz, *Marriage, a History*; Allan H. Pasco, *Revolutionary Love in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century France* (Farnham, 2009); Laura E. Thomason, *The Matrimonial Trap: Eighteenth-Century Women Writers Redefine Marriage* (Lewisburg, 2014). See also Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Cambridge, MA, 1986). The analysis of the romantic marriage can be linked to the larger field of research on the emergence of the modern secular and

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While social historians in particular have charted institutional and legislative contexts as well as the growing criticism of arranged marriages, cultural and literary historians have explored representations of passionate love and marriage in romantic novels, poems, advice literature, and correspondence, particularly in eighteenth-century England and France.³ In contrast to both these strands of research, this article contributes new insights by charting marital love and happiness in moral weeklies in mid-eighteenth-century Germany. Moral weeklies, largely neglected in this context, were pivotal to the production and communication of new norms and patterns of behavior in the preromantic period. Those charted in this article also provide unique insights into how discourses on marital love and happiness fit into the crafting of a new kind of civic (*bürgerliche*) morality.

Between 1748 and 1768 the philosopher Georg Friedrich Meier and the theologian Samuel Gotthold Lange used moral weeklies to pose, explore, and communicate questions about marital relationships. Why are so many marriages unhappy? How can one break negative patterns in a marriage and how should one go about nurturing marital love and happiness over time? These questions, I suggest, were framed within a new type of civic morality—in the sense of a morality explicitly directed at the reading bourgeoisie—in which happiness was the result of an ongoing effort to cognitively and morally improve the self. In line with this logic, marriage constituted a virtuous relationship in which both parties engaged and found joy and happiness in each other's perfections. While the notion of marital happiness as the result of ongoing work on the self and the relationship might seem astonishingly modern, in what follows I show that it took shape in relation to a long tradition of philosophical and Christian spiritual exercises—pursued to cognitively and morally cultivate and strengthen but also therapeutically temper and cure the mind—which early modern intellectuals sometimes referred to as *cultura animi*.

Enlightened authors of moral weeklies

German Pietism emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century as a broad and disparate Lutheran reform movement that emphasized a personal and sensual but also a strict and ascetic relation to God.⁴ Meier and Lange were forged in the intersection between this strand of Lutheranism and early Enlightenment

individual self. For a selection of studies emphasizing the eighteenth century in particular see Robert Scott Leventhal, *Making the Case: Narrative Psychological Case Histories and the Invention of Individuality in Germany, 1750–1800* (Berlin, 2019); Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2004); Jerrold E. Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 2005); J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1998); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

³For institutional and legislative aspects see particularly Rebecca Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2009); Margaret Hunt, *Women in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London, 2014); Thomason, *The Matrimonial Trap*; Luhmann, *Love as Passion*. For the romantic marriage see Behrend-Martinez, *A Cultural History of Marriage in the Age of Enlightenment*; Coontz, *Marriage, a History*; Christine Roulston, *Narrating Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (Farnham, 2010); Pasco, *Revolutionary Love in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century France*.

⁴The research on German Pietism is extensive and characterized by sometimes infected debates. For two broad overviews see Douglas Shantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn*

philosophy.⁵ On the one hand, they received their early education at the Pietist theologian August Hermann Francke's famous Orphanage, a large-scale educational institution in the Prussian town of Halle devoted to the disciplining and shaping of young children and students into pious Christians.⁶ Central to Francke's vision and to the Orphanage curriculum was the view that philosophy served to cultivate the intellect, whereas religious practices were to discipline, break, and replace the selfish will with a will to love and honor God.⁷ On the other hand, as students, Meier and Lange also discovered the Wolffian philosophy. At the time, Christian Wolff was a leading, if controversial, philosopher who in his writings strove to unify all science under a single rational method in which reason alone constituted the guiding principle that would lead man toward ever-greater cognitive and moral perfection.⁸

Having adopted parts of the Wolffian philosophy by the 1720s, Meier and Lange came increasingly under the influence of the Baumgarten brothers in the subsequent decade.⁹ Siegmund Jakob and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten were at the forefront of an intellectual endeavor to channel features of the Pietist and Wolffian strands of thought into a new revisionist theology, philosophy, and aesthetics revolving around the perfection of the intellectual and sensual self through theology and philosophy, but also through literature and poetry.¹⁰ While poets and

of *Modern Europe* (Baltimore, 2013); Shantz, ed., *A Companion to German Pietism, 1660–1800* (Leiden, 2015).

⁵Günter Schenk, *Leben und Werk des halleischen Aufklärers Georg Friedrich Meier* (Halle, 1994); Hans-Joachim Kertscher, "Georg Friedrich Meiers Platz im geistig-kulturellen Leben der Stadt Halle," in Gideon Stiening and Frank Grunert, eds., *Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–1777): Philosophie als "wahre Weltweisheit"* (Berlin, 2015), 25–41; Andreas Rydberg, "Practices of Friendship and Therapeutic Writing in the German Civic Enlightenment," *AMITY: The Journal of Friendship Studies* 7/1 (2021), 23–48. See also Lange's biography of Meier: Samuel Gotthold Lange, *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers* (Halle, 1778).

⁶For two informative but slightly different studies of the Orphanage see Peter Menck, *Die Erziehung der Jugend zur Ehre Gottes und zum Nutzen des Nächsten* (Halle, 2001); Kelly Joan Whitmer, *The Halle Orphanage as Scientific Community: Observation, Eclecticism, and Pietism in the Early Enlightenment* (Chicago, 2015).

⁷Menck, *Die Erziehung der Jugend*.

⁸Wolff's early Enlightenment philosophy brought him into conflict with the Pietists, who, by obtaining the support of King Friedrich I, succeeded in having Wolff expelled from Prussia in 1723. The expulsion was followed by a protracted debate that ended when the new king, Frederick the Great, reinstated Wolff as professor in 1740. For the Wolff affair see Johannes Bronisch, *Der Mäzen der Aufklärung: Ernst Christoph von Manteuffel und das Netzwerk des Wolffianismus* (Berlin, 2010); Albrecht Beutel, "Causa Wolffiana: die Vertreibung Christian Wolffs aus Preußen 1723 als Kulminationspunkt des theologisch-politischen Konflikts zwischen halleischen Pietismus und Aufklärungsphilosophie," in Ulrich Köpf and Rolf Schäfer, eds., *Wissenschaftliche Theologie und Kirchenleitung: Beiträge zur Geschichte einer spannungsreichen Beziehung für Rolf Schäfer zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen, 2001), 159–202; Carl Hinrichs, *Preußentum und Pietismus: Die Pietismus in Brandenburg-Preußen als religiös-soziale Reformbewegung* (Göttingen, 1971). For Wolff and his philosophy see Hans-Joachim Kertscher, "Er brachte Licht und Ordnung in die Welt": *Christian Wolff—eine Biographie* (Halle, 2018); Max Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulphilosophie im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Hildesheim, 1964).

⁹Schenk, *Leben und Werk des halleischen Aufklärers Georg Friedrich Meier*; Kertscher, "Georg Friedrich Meiers Platz im geistig-kulturellen Leben der Stadt Halle"; Lange, *Leben Georg Friedrich Meiers*.

¹⁰Schenk, *Leben und Werk des halleischen Aufklärers Georg Friedrich Meier*; Clemens Schwaiger, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten—ein intellektuelles Porträt: Studien zur Metaphysik und Ethik von Kants Leitautor* (Stuttgart, 2011).

writers initially gravitated toward topics of pious devotion, from the second half of the 1730s ancient philosophers and poets such as Epicurus and Anacreon became the new models. At the core of the so-called Anacreontic poetry was a *carpe diem* ideal: the sensual experience should be affirmed and celebrated, preferably in the convivial company of good friends.¹¹ The adoption of the ancient discourses of sensual friendship and happiness represented a departure from the instrumental and formalized friendship ideal of the nobility but also from the strict ascetic Pietism that many had experienced at the Orphanage and that Meier in particular believed was deeply damaging as it tended to degenerate into pure self-denial.¹² Barbara Rosenwein has introduced the concept of *emotional community* to capture “groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value—or devalue—the same or related emotions.”¹³ Applied to this specific German context, the Anacreontic movement can be understood as a deliberate attempt to control and channel a complex social, cultural, and intellectual landscape into the formation of a civic lifestyle that also constituted a specific emotional community. For Meier, Lange, and many others brought up in strict Pietism, this new lifestyle and community offered if not an outright secular perspective, then at least one less Christianly ascetic and more life-affirming, appropriate to the new privileges and opportunities that came with improved economic and material conditions.

While most proponents limited themselves to academic and literary genres, Meier and Lange were committed to communicating the new lifestyle to a wider readership, thereby making it into the core of a broader civic identity. To accomplish this, they adopted the new media forms of the public sphere, including

¹¹The new aesthetics and the associated Anacreontic poetry were important parts of the nascent culture of sensibility, the latter of which has been the subject of much research. The multi- and partly cross-disciplinary perspectives and approaches in combination with the extraordinarily complex and multifaceted historical nature of the phenomenon itself has fueled a protracted, lively, and partly infected debate. Some scholars have thus argued that sensibility was the logical consequence of the Pietist emphasis on a personal relation to God marked by intense feelings of pious love and religious enthusiasm. Others have suggested that although Pietism played a role, the turn to sensibility within philosophy, literature, and culture in fact marked the beginning of a process of secularization that was intimately connected to the emergence of a new bourgeoisie. Yet others have approved of the secularization hypothesis but instead of German Pietism and early German Enlightenment thought emphasized the impact of French and British empiricism. For this complex research discussion see Barbara Becker-Cantarino, *German Literature of the Eighteenth Century: The Enlightenment and Sensibility* (Rochester, NY, 2005); Manfred Beetz and Hans-Joachim Kertscher, eds., *Anakreontische Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 2005); Hans-Georg Kemper, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit*, vol. 6/1, *Empfindsamkeit* (Tübingen, 1991); Ernst von Borries and Erika von Borries, eds., *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 2, *Aufklärung und Empfindsamkeit Sturm und Drang* (Munich, 1991); Gerhard Sauder, *Empfindsamkeit*, vol. 1, *Voraussetzungen und Elemente* (Stuttgart, 1974); Wolfgang Martens, *Die Botschaft der Tugend* (Stuttgart, 1968).

¹²See, in particular, Georg Friedrich Meier, *Philosophische Sittenlehre: Anderer Theil* (Halle, 1754), 484–5, § 443. Meier’s critique should not be seen as a critique of Christianity as such but rather as part of the reform movement that historians have sometimes referred to as the Religious Enlightenment. See in particular David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton, 2008); S. J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester, 2003); Jonathan Sheehan, “Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization: A Review Essay,” *American Historical Review* 108/4 (2003), 1061–80.

¹³Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2007), 2. See also Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600–1700* (Cambridge, 2016).

both public collections of letters and moral weeklies. In 1746 Lange, together with his colleague and friend Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, published an edited collection titled *Friendly Letters* (*Freundschaftliche Briefe*). The goal was nothing less than “to introduce the language of the hearts and affection, instead of the language of coercion and flattery, among the correspondents of our Fatherland.”¹⁴ Featuring the authors’ own correspondence, the letters exemplified how to engage in and maintain sensitive friendships but also marital love and happiness. In particular, Lange’s own relationship with Dorothea, also known as Doris, was used to exemplify a marriage based on friendship and passion as well as mutual respect and virtue.¹⁵ The use of correspondence continued as Meier and Lange began to collaborate on moral weeklies in the late 1740s. This type of periodical had been adopted from England in the 1720s and featured short articles published first on a weekly basis and then as thick annual volumes.¹⁶ Editions were probably quite small but economically significant, especially for the publishers. Limited print runs did not necessarily mean that they reached only a few readers, as individual texts were often shared and read aloud in group settings.¹⁷ The articles typically addressed various aspects of civic life in a moral-educational yet entertaining and easily digestible way. Making heavy use of readers’ letters, reports, reflections, and other often absurd stories of eccentric persons with funny names (everything typically written by the editors), the moral weeklies gave the impression of involving a large number of people engaged in the various facets of civic life.¹⁸ In relation to their English counterparts, the German moral weeklies were marked by the Lutheran context and in particular by its tense relation to early Enlightenment thought.¹⁹ Those produced by Meier and Lange were furthermore—in contrast to the mainstream of sometimes rather superficial German weeklies—characterized by often initiated discussions and in particular by their own Enlightenment philosophy of perfection. Meier and Lange produced four moral weeklies over two decades: *The Sociable* (*Der Gesellige*, 1748–50), *Man* (*Der Mensch*, 1751–6), *The Realm of Nature and Morals* (*Das Reich der Natur und der Sitten*, 1757–62) and *The Blissful* (*Der Glückselige*, 1763–8).²⁰ In comparison to other moral weeklies, those of Meier and Lange reflected an underlying, highly systematized philosophy. Read alongside Meier’s extensive five-volume *Philosophical Ethics* (*Philosophische Sittenlehre*, 1753–1761), many contributions clearly emerge as popularized summaries, sometimes to the point where passages are reproduced almost verbatim.

¹⁴See the preface to Samuel Gotthold Lange and Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, *Freundschaftliche Briefe* (Berlin, 1746), n.p.: “die Sprache des Herzens und der Vertraulichkeit, an statt der Sprache des Zwangs und der Schmeichelei, unter den Correspondenten unsers Vaterlandes einzuführen.”

¹⁵While most names were anonymized, references to Doris remained. Overall, more than a third of the letters addressed Doris’s various pursuits, often in a positive, admiring, and sometimes courting tone.

¹⁶Martens, *Die Botschaft der Tugend*; Elke Maar, *Bildung durch Unterhaltung: Die Entdeckung des Infotainment in der Aufklärung. Hallenser und Wiener Moralische Wochenschriften in der Blütezeit des Moraljournalismus, 1748–1782* (Pfaffenweiler, 1995).

¹⁷Martens, *Die Botschaft der Tugend*, 108–23.

¹⁸Ibid. For an interesting study of authorship in English periodicals see Manushag N. Powell, *Performing Authorship in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals* (Lanham, 2012).

¹⁹Maar, *Bildung durch Unterhaltung*; Martens, *Die Botschaft der Tugend*.

²⁰Kay Zenker, “Zwei Jahrzehnte Volksaufklärung (1748–1768): Meier als Herausgeber und Autor moralischer Wochenschriften,” in Stiening and Grunert, *Georg Friedrich Meier*, 55–80.

This approach was a clever way of communicating about and spreading a civic morality that would otherwise have attracted few nonspecialist readers. While this might seem to have little to do with discourses of marital love and happiness, in the following section I will show that the civic ethics of perfection in fact constitutes a crucial context for Meier and Lange's rather specific views on the matter.

***Cultura animi*, perfection, friendship, and marital love**

The early Enlightenment philosophy of perfection took form in relation to a broad framework that ancient and early modern intellectuals sometimes referred to as *cultura animi*.²¹ Here philosophy provided a form of therapy aimed at tempering and calming the mind, relieving it of those tormenting passions and affectual distresses considered to be the very basis of human suffering. In the last decades of the seventeenth century, leading early German Enlightenment philosophers such as Samuel Pufendorf and Christian Thomasius drew explicitly on this concept when emphasizing in the context of natural law the obligation to know, cultivate, and cure the soul from the passions.²² Similarly, Wolff stressed that every person is obliged to perfect the self and particularly the soul.²³ Because the experience of becoming more perfect is pleasurable, it nourishes the pursuit of further perfection. Perfection is thus the very engine of happiness. Far from regarding this as a theoretical matter, Wolff provided detailed instructions on how to perfect oneself cognitively and morally through the practice of philosophy and science and through regular daily examinations of one's moral character.²⁴

The philosophy of perfection was further elaborated by the Baumgarten brothers, but it was Meier who, in *Philosophical Ethics*, provided by far the most extensive and practically oriented instruction on how to perfect the self cognitively and morally.²⁵ In addition to further elaborating the kind of therapeutic regimen that Wolff had advocated, Meier also suggested that one should carefully observe and document one's thoughts and actions in a moral diary, a history of one's own

²¹Sorana Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind: Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern Cultura Animi Tradition* (Chicago, 2011); Matthew Sharpe and Michael Ure, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: From Antiquity to Modernity* (London, 2021); John Cottingham, "Philosophy and Self-Improvement: Continuity and Change in Philosophy's Self-Conception from the Classical to the Early-Modern Era," in Michael Chase, Stephen R. L. Clark, and Michael McGhee, eds., *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns: Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot* (Malden, MA, 2013), 148–66; Andreas Rydberg, "Self-Observational Life in Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Intellectual History Review* (forthcoming). These works are heavily indebted to the French historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot's groundbreaking reading of ancient philosophy as a way of life: Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Malden, 1995).

²²Samuel Pufendorf, *De jure naturae et gentium libri octo* by Samuel Pufendorf: Volume Two The Translation of the Edition of 1688, trans. C. H. Oldfather and W. A. Oldfather (Oxford, 1934), 231–63; Christian Thomasius, *Institutes of Divine Jurisprudence: With Selections from Foundations of the Law of Nature and Nations*, trans. Thomas Ahnert (Indianapolis, 2011), 153–77.

²³Christian Wolff, *Vernünfftige Gedancken von der Menschen Thun und Lassen, zu Beförderung ihrer Glückseligkeit, den Liebhabern der Wahrheit mitgetheilet*, ed. Hans Werner Arndt, Christian Wolff Gesamelte Werke, Abt. 1, Deutsche Schriften, vol. 4 (Hildesheim, 2006), 11–12, § 12; 148, § 228.

²⁴For a particularly revealing passage see Wolff *Vernünfftige Gedancken*, 105–6, §. 173.

²⁵Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Ethica Philosophica* (Halle, 1740); Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten, *Unterricht vom rechtmäßigen Verhalten eines Christen, oder Theologische Moral* (Halle, 1738).

heart and mind.²⁶ Thus identifying progress and failure would make it easier to intervene and improve one's moral conduct. In relation to the heavier academic texts, the moral weeklies served the important function of communicating the ethics of perfection in a lighter, more digestible form to a broader readership.²⁷

Meier and Lange's civic ethics of perfection differs from its classical counterpart in one important respect. In the traditional *cultura animi*, desires and passions fulfilled an essentially negative function. Forces that constantly threatened to lure people to ruin, they were to be subdued and, if possible, eradicated by reason. While this predominantly negative view of the passions persisted in the writings of Pufendorf, Thomasius, and Wolff, the advent of aesthetics prompted a reevaluation.²⁸ Not only were the senses and affects believed to be of vital importance for the poet and writer, but cognitive and moral perfection more generally seemed to require these forces. Insofar as they contributed to one's perfection, for instance by enriching and reinforcing knowledge and wisdom, they should be affirmed as part of a virtuous and happy life rather than denied or eradicated.

Meier and Lange's ethics of perfection was applied to a large number of topics in the moral weeklies, including both friendship and marriage. On the one hand, Meier and Lange drew on the classical Ciceronian conception when arguing that friendships emerge when persons are attracted to and mutually commit to each other's virtuous refinement.²⁹ "It [the friendship] never becomes base and mean; it always finds and discovers new perfections, which it not only maintains, but also constantly increases through esteem. Friendship is constantly endeavoring to make its friend more agreeable, or to do it service, and to seek new friends."³⁰ A friendship is not a means to an end; rather, a true friend is someone who shares your joys and sorrows, your successes and failures, and who always has your best interests at heart. Friendships are, in other words, ideally egalitarian and altruistic

²⁶Meier devoted more than a thousand pages to duties to the self. For passages particularly relevant in this context see Meier, *Philosophische Sittenlehre: Anderer Theil*, 389–410, §§ 407–14.

²⁷The topic was discussed repeatedly in the moral weeklies. For particularly relevant contributions see Samuel Gotthold Lange and Georg Friedrich Meier, *Der Gesellige: Eine Moralische Wochenschrift herausgegeben von Samuel Gotthold Lange und Georg Friedrich Meier. Teil 3 und 4 (1749)*, ed. Wolfgang Martens (Hildesheim, 1987), part 107, 89–96; Lange and Meier, *Der Mensch: Eine Moralische Wochenschrift herausgegeben von Samuel Gotthold Lange und Georg Friedrich Meier. Teil 3 und 4 (1752)*, ed. Wolfgang Martens (Hildesheim, 1992), part 168, 321–28; Lange and Meier, *Der Glückselige, eine moralische Wochenschrift. Erster Theil* (Halle, 1763), part 4, 49–64.

²⁸While traditional studies of Baumgarten's aesthetics have often emphasized the purely epistemological dimensions, more recent work has highlighted precisely the ethical and moral–psychological aspects. See, in particular, Gabriel Trop, *Poetry as a Way of Life: Aesthetics and Askesis in the German Eighteenth Century* (Evanston, 2015); Simon Grote, *The Emergence of Modern Aesthetic Theory: Religion and Morality in Enlightenment Germany and Scotland* (Cambridge, 2017); Stefanie Buchenau, *The Founding of Aesthetics in the German Enlightenment: The Art of Invention and the Invention of Art* (Cambridge, 2013).

²⁹For Cicero's classical work on friendship see Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De senectute; De amicitia; De divinatione*, trans. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge, MA, 1992).

³⁰Samuel Gotthold Lange and Georg Friedrich Meier, *Der Gesellige: Eine Moralische Wochenschrift herausgegeben von Samuel Gotthold Lange und Georg Friedrich Meier. Teil 1 und 2 (1748)*, ed. Wolfgang Martens (Hildesheim, 1987), part 48, 397–8. "Sie wird niemals niederträchtig und gemein; sie findet und entdeckt immer neue Vollkommenheiten, welche sie nicht nur erhält, sondern auch beständig durch Hochachtung vermehret. Freundschaft ist unaufhörlich bemühet, sich dem Freund gefälliger zu machen, oder ihm Dienste zu erweisen, und neue Freunde zu suchen."

relations. On the other hand, to this they added that friendships are not only virtuous but also passionate in the sense they are and should be felt and experienced with the senses. "There is a sensitive delight in the heart when we see the expressions and gestures of those whom we hold in high esteem: when we hear their voice, so pleasant to us, our impulses are revived, and a friendly embrace, an affectionate kiss, has an extraordinary effect."³¹ Taking form in intimate connection with the ethics of perfection, the ideal of the virtuous yet sensual and passionate "Anacreontic" friendship was communicated in numerous works, including the moral weeklies.

The ethics of perfection applied also to marriage. Like friendship, marriage constituted a relationship in which both parties were committed to each other's cognitive and moral perfection. Thus it required that each possess a certain level of reason and virtue from the outset:

I presuppose that they are amiable persons who are in possession of some perfections: yes, I also require that they have sense and insight enough to recognize such in each other. These perfections have their place in the soul, and extend also to the body. The beauties of the spirit alone are the essential ones, and spread their splendor over the body also.³²

The happy marriage required a form of balance, in the sense that the parties must be cognitively and morally equipped and mutually recognize each other's qualities. As we will see later, however, this logic of equality sometimes clashed with a patriarchal order in which women were seen as inferior and subordinate.

If both parties had sufficient cognitive and moral constitutions, their marriage would unfold happily, according to the self-sustaining logic of the ethics of perfection. The mutual display and recognition of perfections produces a sense of pleasure and happiness which in turn reinforces the pursuit of further perfections. "Now, if two worthy persons are in a happy union, they will not only constantly admire new virtues in each other, but will themselves give each other the opportunity to increase more and more. This will be used to prevent coldness, weariness, and disgust, and will renew pleasure without interruption."³³ For Meier and Lange this pleasure was not only platonic but sensual and physically intimate. To underscore this, they often used examples where it unfolded as tender embraces and kisses. Lange's own marriage with Doris was sometimes presented as an ideal. In one

³¹Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 1–2, part 3, 31–2: "Es dringet eine empfindliche Ergötzung in das Hertz, wenn wir die Mienen und Geberden derer sehen, die wir hochachten: wenn wir ihre uns so angenehme Stimme hören, so werden unsere Triebe aufs neue belebt, und eine freundschaftliche Umarmung, ein treuer Kuß, thut eine ausserordentliche Wirkung."

³²Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 3–4, part 115, 154: "Ich setze zum Grunde, daß es liebenswürdige Personen sind, die sich in dem Besitz einiger Vollkommenheiten befinden: ja ich fordere auch, daß sie Verstand und Einsicht genug haben, solche an einander zu erkennen. Diese Vollkommenheiten haben ihren Platz in der Seele, und erstrecken sich auch auf den Leib. Die Schönheiten des Geistes sind allein die wesentlichen, und breiten ihren Glanz auch über die Körper aus."

³³Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 3–4, part 115, 156–7: "Wenn nun zwey würdige Personen in einer glücklichen Verbindung stehen, so werden sie nicht nur beständig neue Vorzüge an einander bewundern, sondern selbst einander Gelegenheit geben, immer mehr zuzunehmen. Dieses wird das gewohnt werden, die Kaltsinnigkeit, den Ueberdruß und Ekel zu verhüten, und das Vergnügen ohne Unterlaß verneuen."

contribution, the author thus describes the longing for marital happiness that arises in him as he “sees a Damon [Lange] sitting next to his Doris, and ... whispering some joke wittily in her ears, and she rewards him with a kiss, always saying: my child, my heart!”³⁴ Another case in point revolves around a happily married couple referred to as Aurelius and Concordia:

These two persons are the happiest of spouses because they both love each other unchangingly with the most tender fervor. All those who know this enviable couple marvel at the strength of this enduring love: but those who know their mutual character understand the possibility of a conjugal love that is as fiery in the tenth year of marriage as it was in the first week.³⁵

Meier and Lange were very clear in distancing themselves from the passionate love of the initial infatuation. While lust was doomed to fade and often paved the way for an outright unhappy marriage, this type of civic passion was based on the inherent logic of perfection, according to which the mutual cultivation and display of perfections also nurtured and constantly renewed love and passion. Situated in a broader context, this view can be seen as a specific expression of what Isabel Hull has described as an emerging civil society in which sexual fulfillment was considered a desirable and integral part of a happy marriage.³⁶

To sum up, Meier and Lange’s discourse on marital love and happiness was intimately connected with the ethics of perfection. Insofar as the parties possessed adequate cognitive and moral capacities, marriage, like friendship, would ideally unfold as a virtuous relation of mutual perfection. When spouses displayed, mirrored, and affirmed each other’s perfections on a daily basis, their love and happiness would be sustained. While physical intimacy constituted an integral part of the happy marriage, it again needs stressing that this was a civic passion that, unlike base and short-lived desire, sprang from the mutual enjoyment of cognitive and moral perfections.

The diseases of marriage

So far we have seen how marital happiness unfolded according to the self-perpetuating logic of the ethics of perfection. Yet, in reality, the happy marriage was as rare as true friendship and true virtue. One of the most central questions was precisely why so many marriages were so unhappy. Having regarded Lange and Doris’s happy marriage with envy, the writer thus reminded himself of what most marriages are like in practice:

³⁴Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige 1–2*, part 84, 705: “einen Damon sehe, der neben seiner Doris sitzt, und ... manchen Scherz Ihr sinnreich in die Ohren pflüstert, Und ihn mit einem Kuß verschwistert, Und immer spricht: mein Kind, mein Herz!”

³⁵Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige 1–2*, part 71, 577: “Diese beyde Personen sind die glücklichsten Eheleute, weil sie sich beyde unwandelbar mit der zärtlichsten Inbrunst lieben. Alle diejenigen, welche dieses beneidenswürdige Paar kennen, die verwundern sich über die Stärke dieser dauerhaften Liebe: wer aber ihren beyderseitigen Character weiß, der begreift die Möglichkeit einer ehelichen Liebe, die in dem zehnten Jahre der Ehe noch so feurig ist, als in der ersten Woche.”

³⁶Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815* (Ithaca, 1996), 285–98.

But as soon as I think of the everyday relations; as soon as I imagine the simple, slavish and unfortunate intentions of most lovers; as soon as I see the mean, the arrogant, the lustful, the tyrannical and jealous, under the figure of the lover on the one side, and the unfaithful, wasteful, proud, and imperious bride, under the guise of a luminous, pleasant, charming, and virtuous one: so soon I also feel a secret and silent joy that I am still so far away from this dangerous state. A thousand marriages are made, and hardly ten are successful; the rest sigh and curse their choice.³⁷

The pessimistic view of marriage in fact lent itself well to the moral weekly, whose perhaps most common rhetorical device was to depict different social types, preferably negatively and in a comic and often exaggerated way. In line with this logic Meier and Lange described various types of corrupted or diseased marriage:

What can one hope from married couples who do not know the feeling of a tender heart, and whose heavy and lazy blood is set in motion by nothing? They drag their inert bodies to bed and to the table; their house is similar to a Carthusian monastery because of its silence; one hardly hears one-syllable words from them, but only those that cannot be indicated, like Yes and No, by a slight movement of the head. They are as dead to society as they are to themselves; indeed, they flee it if it does not cause too much inconvenience ... A cold north wind, a night frost in the first spring hardly does as much harm to the flowers as these human forms do to social life.³⁸

These farcical descriptions of unhappy marriages were structured by the influential humoral theory, according to which people's physical constitution and health depended on the balance between the four bodily fluids—blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm.³⁹ While diseases were explained as the result of temporary imbalances between these fluids, the more permanent humoral dispositions were thought

³⁷Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 1–2, part 84, 706: “So bald ich mir aber die Alltags-Verbindungen einfallen lasse; so bald ich die niederträchtigen, die slavischen und unseligen Absichten der mehresten Verliebten mir vorstelle; so bald ich den Geizigen, den Hochmüthigen, den Wollüstigen, den Tyrannischen und Eifersüchtigen, unter der Gestalt des Liebhabers auf der einen Seite, und die untreue, verschwenderische, stolze und gebieterische Braut, unter der Larve einer Leutseligen, Angenehmen, Reizenden und Tugendhaften erblicke: so bald empfinde ich auch eine geheime und stille Freude, daß ich noch so weit von diesem gefährlichen Stande entferent bin. Tausend Ehen werden geschlossen, und es gerathen kaum zehne, die übrigen seufzen und verfluchen ihre Wahl.”

³⁸Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 1–2, part 3, 31–2: “Was soll man von den Eheleuten hoffen, die die Empfindung eines zärtlichen Herzens nicht kennen, und deren schweres und faules Blut durch nichts in Bewegung gebracht wird ... Sie wälzen ihren trägen Körper zu Bette und an den Tisch; ihr Haus ist durch das Stillschweigen einem Cartheuserkloster ähnlich; kaum höret man einsylbige Worte von ihnen, doch nur solche, die nicht, wie Ja und Nein, durch eine leichte Bewegung des Kopfs können angezeigt werden. Sie sind der Gesellschaft eben so todt, als sie sich selber sind; ja sie fliehen sie, wenn es nicht zu viel Ungelegenheit macht ... Ein kalter Nordwind, ein Nachtfrost thut im ersten Frühling den Blüten kaum so viel schaden, als diese Menschengestalten dem geselligen Leben zufügen.”

³⁹The research on humoral theory is extensive. See, for example, Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1999); Roy Porter, *Disease, Medicine, and Society in England, 1550–1860*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1995); Porter, ed., *Medicine in the Enlightenment* (Amsterdam, 1995); Andrew Cunningham and Roger French, eds., *The Medical Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge,

to produce different temperaments or personalities. While the temperaments typically applied to individuals, they were also used quite creatively in other contexts. The quotation above thus features a typical phlegmatic marriage characterized by passivity and lack of energy. Another similar example features a choleric marriage marked by mutual dislike and conflict:

What do you think of such spouses who seek their pleasure in being able to offend each other? Since they have learned all the little things that make each other angry, they do not refrain from giving society samples of their skillfulness ... Observe Grandille, how she presents her small round figure in a chair, and with carelessly thrown arms shows the company the very contemplation with which she annoys her husband in this position ... Grandille is worthily married; she has a husband who is as whimsical as she is ... As they take pleasure in insulting each other, so do they bring this disgusting manner to all social gatherings, in which they disturb the peace, the joy, and the pleasant atmosphere, and nearly exhaust the patience of those present.⁴⁰

The discourse on unhappy marriages reflects a tension inherent in the humoral theory itself: it was static in the sense that people were simply born with different humoral constitutions; at the same time, it was also dynamic since the humors and temperamental qualities could be controlled through various forms of medical and therapeutic intervention. While medicines and diets served to physically balance the humors, the *cultura animi* provided techniques for therapeutic regulation on a cognitive level.

The inherent tension in the humoral theory between static constitutions and dynamic change organized the discourse on marital diseases in two fundamental respects. First, a marriage could be diseased and corrupt simply because one or both parties were so: choleric or overly unforgiving, for example:

[Mr] Stubbornness, on the one hand, is not only hot-tempered, but his stubbornness drives him so far that he wants his wife to listen to and suffer through everything he says. She, on the other hand, has received a defect from her bad upbringing that certainly deserves the name of a vice, for she does not speak a word for a long time. He, who knows nothing about giving in, becomes more and more bitter, and she more and more spiteful. Therefore

1990); Vivian Nutton, "Humoralism," in W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, eds., *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine* (London, 1993).

⁴⁰Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige 1–2*, part 3, 30–31: "Was dünkt euch von solchen Ehegatten, die ihr Vergnügen darin suchen, wenn sie einander beleidigen können. Da sie auf alle Kleinigkeiten, die einander Verdruß machen, ausgelernt haben: so unterlassen sie nicht, der Gesellschaft von ihrer Geschicklichkeit Proben zu geben ... Betrachtet Grandillen, wie sie ihre kleine runde Figur in einem Stuhl präsentirt, und mit nachlässig hingeworfenen Armen der Gesellschaft eben die Betrachtung bezeigt, mit welcher sie in dieser Stellung ihren Mann ärgert ... Grandille ist würdig verheyraethet; sie hat einen Mann, der so wunderlich ist als sie ... Wie sie sich ein Vergnügen daraus machen, einander zu beleidigen: so nehmen sie dieses widerwärtige Wesen in alle Gesellschaften mit, in welchen sie die Ruhe, die Freude, und das gefällige Wesen stören, und beynahe die Gedult der Anwesenden ermüden."

it often happens that they do not speak a word to each other in four weeks. The grumbling with which they get up and go to bed, with which they dine at the same table at noon and in the evening, is accompanied by the most unmanageable behavior. She pulls herself off chairs on which she has thrown herself more than she has sat down; she slams the door shut; she quickly pulls herself in front of him and often bumps into him, and he constantly turns his back on her ... It is no wonder that these spouses become coldhearted and build a hell with each other instead of a heaven.⁴¹

Both this and the previous case exemplify how marital misery often derived from fundamental defects of character and temperament. Even if it might be possible in theory to cure these marriages, doing so would be difficult precisely because the problems were rooted in more permanent flaws. Second, also those marriages that started well tended to disintegrate over time. While the reasons might vary, the causes tended to derive from character flaws in one way or another. For this reason, it was crucial to make informed choices. Virtues such as wisdom, kindness, caring, diligence, and loyalty should be prioritized, whereas desire-driven and short-sighted qualities such as superficial beauty, wealth, and noble status should be avoided.⁴²

The diseases of marriage typically reflected the diseased minds of those who were married. Corrupt people, according to this logic, tended to make corrupt choices and end up with others with similar problems, while those with good character tended to gravitate to other virtuous persons. While some were beyond redemption, to the point of being pathological, most diseased marriages reflected problems and shortcomings that could be relatively easily remedied with the right skills and techniques. This brings us to Meier and Lange's core problematic regarding how to establish and maintain marital love and happiness over time.

Tempering and perfecting marital love

Cultural and literary historians have tended to reconstruct the eighteenth-century ideal of the romantic marriage from literary genres in which the passionate and often dramatic love affair stands in the foreground.⁴³ While genres such as the romantic novel and epistolary fiction certainly drove the ideal of romantic love,

⁴¹Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 3–4, part 115, 158–9: “Starrkopf im Gegentheil ist nicht nur hitzig, sondern sein Eigensinn treibt ihn so weit, daß er von seiner Frau begehret, sie soll alles von ihm überhören und erleiden. Sie im Gegentheil hat von der übeln Erziehung einen Fehler erhalten, der gar wol den Namen eines Lasters verdient, nemlich sie redet alsdenn in langer Zeit kein Wort. Er, der nichts vom Nachgeben weiß, wird immer erbitterter, und sie immer boshafter. Daher geschieht es oftmal, daß sie in vier Wochen kein Wort mit einander reden. Dieses Maulen, mit welchem sie aufstehen und zu Bette gehen, mit welchem sie Mittags und Abends an einem Tische speisen, ist begleitet mit dem unanständigsten Verhalten. Sie reisset sich von Stühlen, auf welche sie sich mehr geworfen als gesetzt hat; sie schmeisset die Stubenthüre mit grossem Krachen zu; sie reisset sich vor ihm schnell vorbei, und stößt ihn öfters an, und er kehret ihr beständig den Rücken zu ... Es ist kein Wunder, daß deise Gatten kaltsinnig werden, und stattt des Himmels eine Hölle miteinander bauen.”

⁴²Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 1–2, part 23, 195.

⁴³See particularly Coontz, *Marriage, a History*; Pasco, *Revolutionary Love in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century France*; Roulston, *Narrating Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England and France*.

Meier and Lange put remarkably little energy into discussing the initial and, in their eyes, highly ephemeral passion. In stark contrast, their main concern revolved around how to establish and maintain marital love over time.

As we have seen, the choice of spouse was a central precondition for a good marriage. Once the choice was made, however, it was equally important to adopt the right attitudes and expectations. Meier and Lange thus advised men on the best way to regard their future wives:

5. Do not demand that your bride be without fault and blameless. No woman is a perfect saint. Each one has her faults and weaknesses ... 6. Do not demand that your wife should be perfectly according to your tastes, your disposition, and your temperament ... 7. Imagine often and vividly in advance that your wife will give you many opportunities for annoyance and displeasure. An evil that is foreseen does not move us very much when it becomes real, and we can prepare ourselves properly for it ... 8. Imagine your bride much worse than she really is, especially you must not think her as good as she seems to be in her bridal state. When we imagine something better than it really is, we feel painful remorse as soon as we realize our error.⁴⁴

While this advice may at first glance appear rather cynical, situated in the context of the *cultura animi* it aligns with a long tradition of spiritual exercises. As the French historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot has shown in a number of groundbreaking works, the ancient philosophical schools relied on a broad spectrum of spiritual exercises designed to cognitively change our attitude toward things whose course and outcome are beyond our control.⁴⁵ Practitioners were thus encouraged to imagine future misfortunes and suffering in order to prepare themselves to face these with a calm and balanced mind. Cognitive exercises such as these were then passed on through both the philosophical and Christian spiritual traditions to figure in a range of contexts and discourses in the early modern period. In addition to making exercises of this type a natural part of their ethics, Meier and Lange also incorporated them into more specific discourses regarding illness and death, but also, as we see here, marital happiness. Rather than being the expression of an elaborately cynical and pessimistic view of marriage and of women, these were part of a regimen of the mind through which expectations that otherwise threatened to poison a marriage would be tempered and regulated.

⁴⁴Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige 1–2*, part 23, 196–8: “5. Verlange nicht, daß deine Braut ohne Fehler und untadelhaft seyn soll. Kein Frauenzimmer ist eine vollkommene Heilige. Eine jede hat ihre Fehler und Schwachheiten ... 6. Verlange nicht, daß deine Frau vollkommen deinem Geschmacke, deiner Gemüthsfassung und deinem Temperamente gemäß seyn soll ... 7. Stelle dir zum voraus oft und lebendig vor, deine Frau werde dir viele Gelegenheit zum Verdrusse und Mißvergnügen geben. Ein Uebel, so man vorhersieht, rührt uns nicht sonderlich stark, wenn es wirklich wird, und wir können uns auf dasselbe gehörig vorbereiten ... 8. Stelle dir deine Braut viel schlechter vor, als sie in der That ist, sonderlich mußt du sie nicht für so gut halten, als sie in ihrem Brautstande zu seyn scheint. Wenn wir uns etwas besser vorstellen, als es in der That ist; so entsteht in uns eine schmerzhaft Reue, so bald wir unsern Irrthum gewahr werden.”

⁴⁵Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*; Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA, 2002); Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA, 2001).

While the establishment of marital happiness was, of course, important, perhaps even more crucial was its maintenance over time. Discussing the matter in a separate contribution, Meier and Lange started by addressing a reader's letter regarding a proposed negative dynamic inherent in the logic of perfection:

A question has been put to us: Whether and how it is possible that married couples do not fall into coldheartedness against each other? The author of this question has included a philosophical proof of the opposite in his letter, which we would have communicated if it had not been wrapped in a too philosophical and dry lecture. The main thing is that our pleasure ceases if it is not stimulated by discoveries of new perfections: the writer of the letter believes that the greatest pleasure, in the possession of perfections, decreases daily through habit: and since it is not possible to appear daily in a splendid form, it is natural that even the best spouses would have to gradually become insensitive and finally coldhearted.⁴⁶

The analysis reflects the ethics of perfection, according to which the perception of perfection produces pleasure. Applied to marriage, the same principle suggests that love and happiness are the direct result of the perception of each other's perfections. On the one hand, such perceptions abound in the early stages of a love relationship, but eventually tend to become blunted by time and habit. As this happens many marriages become coldhearted or corrupted in other ways. On the other hand, the authors objected to the analysis in the reader's letter by pointing out that this very development was partly the result of a misconception, whereby the initial passion, doomed to fade, was mistaken for perfection. For those who instead based their relationship on true perfections, the pleasure of perceiving them would not only remain but also stimulate further perfections. Although the authors thus rejected this reader's pessimistic analysis, they nevertheless agreed that in practice the logic of perfection was often compromised, as passions and desires either simply took command or corrupted the mind by appearing as perfections. Following the same self-reinforcing logic, imperfections produced further imperfections. For this reason, marital happiness not only required good matches but also that love be sustainably founded and continuously entertained:

One of the most important causes of unhappy marriages is that very few people understand the art of establishing a lasting and reasonable love. True love can only arise from the pleasure of the perfections of a beloved person. Therefore, if I want to begin to love a person in such a way that this love

⁴⁶Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 3–4, part 115, 153: "Es ist eine Frage uns vorgeleget worden: Ob und wie es möglich sey, daß Eheleute nicht in eine Kaltsinnigkeit gegen einander verfallen? Der Verfasser derselben hat einen philosophischen Beweis des Gegentheils seinem Brief einverleibet, welchen wir mittheilen würden, wenn er nicht in einen gar zu philosophischen trockenen Vortrag eingekleidet worden wäre. Die Hauptsache gehet dahin, daß unser Vergnügen aufhöre, wenn es nicht durch Entdeckungen neuer Vollkommenheiten gereizet werde. Der Briefsteller glaubt, daß das gröste Vergnügen, in dem Besitz der Vollkommenheiten, durch die Gewohnheit täglich abnehme: und da es nicht möglich sey, täglich in einer herrlichen Gestalt zu erscheinen, so sey es natürlich, daß auch die besten Ehegatten nach und nach unempfindlich, und endlich kaltsinnig werden müssten."

should be very strong, tender, and lasting, I must recognize in her very many and very great true perfections, and this recognition must be quite clear, certain, and touching.⁴⁷

For a marriage to be happy it was crucial to establish a proper foundation by learning to know and appreciate each other's perfections. Discovering new perfections or rediscovering old ones in a new light should thus become part of everyday married life:

If a person is to love another in a lasting way, he must constantly discover in the other new perfections, or a new side to the old perfections. Consequently, the spouses who want to love each other constantly must improve themselves daily in intellect, virtue, and skill. They must show each other, in the daily incidents of the marriage state, their insights and their understanding, and they must constantly give each other new samples of all their perfections through the practice of all virtues, especially the duties of service, politeness, and good behavior. Then they feel each other's perfections in a new way every day, and so they get a new cause to love each other every day.⁴⁸

Demonstrating perfection in daily behavior not only stimulated further perfection but also could help break negative patterns. One of the many examples in the moral weeklies recounts how Mr Joyful was able to do this. Joyful suffered from a bad mood with fits of rage, while his wife was sensible and took these outbursts hard:

In the first year of marriage, she could easily remain in her dark mood for an hour: gradually she brought it so far that she shut down, and did not look angry, but only became quiet. This moved her husband so much that he kissed her tenderly as often as he noticed it. This little quarrel served as a reconciliation that increased their love. Joyful gradually overcame his outbursts of anger, and I cannot say how surprised his wife was when, instead of a hot

⁴⁷Samuel Gotthold Lange and Georg Friedrich Meier, *Der Mensch: Eine Moralische Wochenschrift herausgegeben von Samuel Gotthold Lange und Georg Friedrich Meier. Teil 5 und 6 (1753)*, ed. Wolfgang Martens (Hildesheim, 1992), part 214, 377: "Eine von den vornehmsten Ursachen unglücklicher Ehen besteht wol darin, daß die wenigsten Menschen die Kunst verstehen, eine dauerhafte und vernünftige Liebe zu gründen. Die wahre Liebe kan nur aus dem Vergnügen an den Vollkommenheiten einer geliebten Person entstehen. Wenn ich also eine Person auf eine solche Art zu lieben anfangen will, daß diese Liebe sehr stark, zärtlich und dauerhaft seyn soll, so muß ich an derselben sehr viele und sehr grosse wahre Vollkommenheiten erkennen, und diese Erkenntniß muß recht deutlich, gewiß und rührend seyn."

⁴⁸Lange and Meier, *Der Mensch* 5–6, part 214, 378–9: "Wenn ein Mensch auf eine dauerhafte Weise einen andern lieben soll, so muß er an dem andern beständig neue Vollkommenheiten, oder die alten Vollkommenheiten auf einer neuen Seite entdecken. Folglich müssen die Eheleute, die einander beständig lieben wollen, sich täglich an Verstand, Tugend und Geschicklichkeit verbessern. Sie müssen einander, in den täglichen Vorfällen des Ehestandes, ihre Einsichten und ihren Verstand zeigen, und sie müssen durch die Ausübung aller Tugenden, insbesondere der Pflichten der Dienstvertigkeit, der Höflichkeit, der artigen Aufführung, einander beständig neue Proben ihrer gesamten Vollkommenheiten geben. Alsdenn fühlen sie täglich gegenseitig ihre Vollkommenheiten auf eine neue Weise, und sie bekommen also täglich neue Ursache, sich zu lieben."

temper, she noticed a magnanimous indulgence. She then fell around his neck and a thousand kisses rewarded his efforts to improve. She caresses his cheeks and calls him a good man, and to him she seems like an angel.⁴⁹

It was thus by learning how to calm and temper his mind that Joyful was able to reestablish marital happiness. The case of Joyful is rather typical of the extraordinary psychological sensitivity that Meier shows in many of his analyses. Having written extensively on metaphysics, ethics, psychology, and aesthetics, Meier often used concrete cases to highlight the complexity of real human affairs. The *cultura animi* lent itself well to such analyses because the seemingly simple framework often boiled down to very complex and nuanced accounts of how desires and affects play out in concrete situations.

As with the regulation of expectations regarding marriage, the *cultura animi* often prescribed exercises in mending one's attitudes and regulating the affects. One virtue that was particularly important for work on the marital mind was peacefulness:

The peaceable is not sensitive, or he does not easily take something for an insult. He turns everything around for the best, he excuses the other person, he forgives him his transgressions, and does not hold them against him too highly ... A peaceable person, if he has offended another, asks for forgiveness and makes all possible amends, and also easily accepts the same from his offender.⁵⁰

What made peacefulness such an important virtue was its ability to break negative patterns of behavior. Through this early modern variant of de-escalation, it was possible not only to stop repeating harmful actions but also to restore the positive balance of the ethics of perfection. Thus it was by suddenly changing his behavior and showing tenderness and love that Joyful awakened his wife's love and created a positive blueprint for the relationship. Although Joyful initially did this, so to speak, spontaneously, it was by systematically tempering his own mind that he managed to establish marital happiness more permanently.

To sum up, it was important to lay a good foundation for happiness in marriage and to maintain it over time. In both cases, however, the *cultura animi* provided the

⁴⁹Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 3–4, part 115, 158: “In dem ersten Jahre der Ehe konte sie wol eine Stunde lang in ihrer Gemüthsfinsterniß bleiben: allmählich brachte sie es so weit, daß sie in der Hitze nachgab, und nicht finster aussahe, sondern nur stille wurde. Dieses rührete ihren Mann so sehr, daß er sie zärtlich küßte, so oft er dieses merkte. Dieser kleine Zwist diene zu einer Versöhnung, die ihre Liebe vermehrete. Nach und nach überwand Freudenreich die Anfälle seiner Hitze: und ich kan nicht sagen, wie erkänthlich seine Gattin war, wenn sie, anstatt eines hitzigen Auffahrens, ein großmütiges Uebersehen merkte. Sie fällt ihm alsdenn um den Hals und tausend Küsse vergelten ihm sein Bestreben, sich zu bessern; sie streichet ihm die Backen, und nennet ihn einen liebenswürdigen Mann: und ihm komt sie alsdenn als ein Engel vor.”

⁵⁰Lange and Meier, *Der Mensch* 5–6, part 214, 380: “Der Friedfertige ist nicht empfindlich, oder er hält nicht leicht etwas für eine Beleidigung. Er kehrt alles zum besten, er entschuldiget den andern, er vergiebt ihm seine Vergehungen, und rechnet ihm dieselben nicht zu hoch an ... Ein Friedfertiger, wenn er den andern beleidiget hat, bittet um Vergebung, und leistet alle mögliche Genugthuung, und nimt auch leicht dergleichen von seinem Beleidiger an.”

overall framework for achieving this. Rather than attributing the ills of marriage to one's partner's inadequacies, attention should instead be focused on one's own shortcomings and pernicious attitudes. Since the attitudes were the only things one could strictly control, they should also be the focus of one's efforts. By tempering the mind and adopting knowledgeable and virtuous attitudes to both spouse and marriage, one would be able to escape negative patterns by, for instance, responding to aggression with understanding and magnanimity, and to establish positive dynamics in accordance with the moral–psychological logic of the ethics of perfection.

Happiness at the intersection of egalitarian friendship and patriarchal authority

The question of how the perfection of marriage related to prevailing gender norms has so far been conspicuous by its absence—not because it is unimportant, but in order to address it in relation to previous contexts here in the final section. More specifically, I want to highlight and elucidate two aspects of gender. The first is purely historical and concerns the ways in which Meier and Lange were part of a movement that both affirmed and challenged traditional notions of gender. The second is more analytically complex and has to do with the fact that the discourse of marital happiness took shape at the breaking point between ideals of amicable equality and patriarchal authority.

Meier and Lange's discourse on marriage is fundamentally gendered. While gendering has so far appeared, so to speak, between the lines, there are plenty of passages where it emerges as one of the most central elements. This applied not least to the choice of spouse:

Choose a bride who is adorned with many lasting goods. Understanding and virtue include all these goods. Meanwhile, I will not advise a bridegroom to seek a learned and holy bride, for how many of that kind would be found? A woman who can only think, and understands everything that is required for a good mother, housewife, and companion; who has the most common virtues of friendship, social life, and service in her power, can already make the marriage state happy.⁵¹

There is today a host of literature showing that, in the eighteenth century, marriage and family life in particular were characterized by clearly defined gender roles, with the husband expected to provide for the family and the wife to take care of household and children.⁵² Men were expected to be intelligent, rational, and proactive,

⁵¹Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 1–2, part 23, 194: “Suche dir eine Braut aus, welche mit vielen dauerhaften Gütern ausgezieret ist. Verstand und Tugend fassen alle diese Güter unter sich. Unterdessen will ich keinem Bräutigam rathen, eine gelehrte und heilige Braut zu suchen; den wie viele würden wol von der Art zu finden seyn? Ein Frauenzimmer, welches nur denken kan, und alles das versteht, was zu einer guten Mutter, Hausfrau und Gesellin erfordert wird; welches die gemeinsten Tugenden der Freundschaft, des gesellschaftlichen Lebens, und der Dienstvertigkeit in seiner Gewalt hat, kan schon den Ehestand glücklich machen.”

⁵²For good overviews see Hunt, *Women in Eighteenth-Century Europe*; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Women's Roles in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Santa Barbara, 2010); Sara Read, *Maids, Wives, Widows: Exploring Early Modern Women's Lives 1540–1740* (Barnsley, 2015); Laura Lunger Knoppers, ed., *The Cambridge*

while women should embody virtues such as modesty, gentleness, and care, but also proactiveness within the household.⁵³ On the one hand, Meier and Lange largely agreed with and further reproduced this traditional order through numerous vignettes. Negative examples often revolved around people who failed to fulfill or even deliberately violated conventional expectations, just as positive examples tended to depict people who embodied gendered virtues. On the other hand, Meier and Lange's specific cultural context also partly challenged established ideals by promoting the figure of the witty and charming muse. One contribution to *Friendly Letters* contained a passage where a shy, dull, and submissive woman was compared to Lange's own wife, Doris:

Yes, there is a girl here, but an antipode to Doris, a girl who can only speak when she is asked ... Mademoiselle, are you content? Yes. And also dear Mama? Yes. Are you then always so diligent? Yes. Would you allow me to look after you a bit? Yes. Should I help you to sew? Yes. Is that not cross-stitching? Yes ... I believe that she would have answered yes even if had asked: Are you even dumber than dear Mama? In fact, she would have answered yes. Because I then asked her some question that she should have answered with a no but she still answered yes. Oh, you antipode! What a difference there is between you and Doris! What amiability, what wit, what pleasant enchanting being!⁵⁴

In the literary debates that took place in Germany in the first half of the eighteenth century, male poets often promoted female muses.⁵⁵ In the 1740s the Anacreontic

Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing (Cambridge, 2009); Katherine Goodman, *Amazons and Apprentices: Women and the German Parnassus in the Early Enlightenment* (Rochester, NY, 1999).

⁵³There are numerous studies of women's virtues in the early modern period. See Silvia Bovenschen, *Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit: Exemplarische Untersuchungen zu kulturgeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentationsformen des Weiblichen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2003); Wendy Arons, *Performance and Femininity in Eighteenth-Century German Women's Writing: The Impossible Act* (New York, 2006); Vivien Jones, ed., *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity* (London, 1990); Jessica Murphy, *Virtuous Necessity: Conduct Literature and the Making of the Virtuous Woman in Early Modern England* (Ann Arbor, 2015); Ann Öhrberg, *Vittra fruntimmer: Författarroll och retorik hos frihetstidens kvinnliga författare* (Stockholm, 2001); Jon Helgason, *Hjärtats skrifter: En brevkulturs uttryck i korrespondensen mellan Anna Louisa Karsch och Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim* (Lund, 2007); Ina Lindblom, *Känslans patriark: Sensibilitet och känslopraktiker i Carl Christoffer Gjörwells familj och vänskapskrets, ca 1790–1810* (Umeå, 2017); Soile Ylivouri, "Rethinking Female Chastity and Gentlewomen's Honour in Eighteenth-Century England," *Historical Journal* 59/1 (2015), 71–97; Dana Harrington, "Gender, Commerce, and the Transformation of Virtue in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31/3 (2001), 33–52; Marisa Linton, "Virtue Rewarded? Women and the Politics of Virtue in 18th-Century France. Part I," *History of European Ideas* 26/1 (2000), 35–49.

⁵⁴Lange and Gleim, *Freundschaftliche Briefe*, 48–9: "Ja, es wittert hier ein Mädchen, aber ein Antipode von der Doris, ein Mädchen das nur sprechen kan, wenn es gefragt wird ... Mademoiselle, befinden sie sich wohl? Ja. Und auch die Frau Mama? Ja. Sind sie denn immer so fleißig? Ja. Wollen sie erlauben, daß ich ihnen ein bisgen zusehe? Ja. Soll ich ihnen nehen helfen? Ja ist dis nicht der Kettenstich? Ja ... Ich glaube wenn ich gefragt hätte: Sind sie noch dummer als die Frau Mama? So hätte sie auch ia gesagt. In der that sie hätte ia gesagt. Denn ich richtete einige Fragen darnach ein, daß sie sie mit nein beantworten solte, aber sie sagte doch: ia. O du Antipode! Welcher Unterschied ist zwischen dir und der Doris! Welche Freundlichkeit, welcher Witz, welch angenehmes bezauberndes Wesen!"

⁵⁵Goodman, *Amazons and Apprentices*. For the literary context see also Manfred Rudersdorf, *Johann Christoph Gottsched in seiner Zeit: Neue Beiträge zu Leben, Werk und Wirkung* (Berlin, 2011); Frederick

poets frequently referred to Doris as just such a witty, charming, and talented woman. In Meier and Lange's portrayal of women, traditional female virtues were often playfully mixed with more progressive ones such as erudition, intelligence, wit, and charm. Situated in a larger social and cultural context, the exploration of civic identities brought new female virtues along with more flexible and diverse, yet clearly complementary, gender roles.

The complementary gender order brings us back to the relation between patriarchal hierarchy and friendship between equals. Friendship traditionally denoted a male relationship, but in the eighteenth century the notion of affectionate friendship was, as we have seen, applied also to marriage. In her study of early modern Scotland, Katie Barclay has argued that the companionate marriage did not necessarily imply equality but rather the negotiation between complementary gender roles defined within a larger patriarchal order.⁵⁶ Laura Thomason, on the other hand, has shown that women in eighteenth-century England sought to challenge this order by launching a more egalitarian ideal of marriage as a perfect companionship.⁵⁷ Similarly, the German context is also characterized by tensions and negotiations that often took place within but also sometimes challenged the patriarchal order.⁵⁸ In the specific context explored here, the discourse is marked by an almost constant tension between the reproduction of the traditional patriarchal order and the challenging of it through the ideal of marriage as friendship. So how should this apparent paradox be approached? One option would be to argue that marriage differs from (male) friendship precisely because it is not equal: the discovery of each other's perfections is fundamentally gendered and patriarchal. Not only should the man seek a spouse with the proper female virtues, but, as a man, embodying male virtues, he was also the head of the marriage itself. Consider, for example, the example of Aurelius and Concordia mentioned above. "Aurelius believed with reason that his spouse would not be offended if he regarded her as a weak tool. Just as he as the head of marriage had to take the most noble care of it, he also believed it was his duty to take primary responsibility for the maintenance of conjugal love."⁵⁹ Well aware of his own superiority and greater responsibility, Aurelius devised a method by which he emotionally attached Concordia to himself. "I love my Concordia most tenderly, and I bind her daily, by a pleasant compulsion, to love me back just as strongly; by making myself constantly venerable, indispensable,

C. Beiser, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing* (Oxford, 2009); Detlef Döring, *Die Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft in Leipzig: Von der Gründung bis in die ersten Jahre des Seniorats Johann Christoph Gottscheds* (Tübingen, 2002).

⁵⁶Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650–1850* (Manchester, 2011).

⁵⁷Thomason, *The Matrimonial Trap*, 1–14.

⁵⁸For the broader social context see Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815*. For the negotiations of friendship and love see also Wolfram Mauser and Barbara Becker-Cantarino, eds., *Frauenfreundschaft, Männerfreundschaft: Literarische Diskurse im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1991); Helgason, *Hjärtats skrifter*; Arons, *Performance and Femininity*; Susanne Kord, *Women Peasant Poets in Eighteenth-Century England, Scotland, and Germany: Milkmaids on Parnassus* (Rochester, NY, 2003).

⁵⁹Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 1–2, part 71, 579: "Aurelius glaubte mit Grunde, seine Freundin werde nicht beleidigt, wenn er sie als ein schwächliches Werkzeug betrachtete. Gleichwie er die vornehmste Sorge für seinen ganzen Ehestand, als Haupt, führen musste; so glaubte er auch, es sey seine Schuldigkeit, vornehmlich für die Unterhaltung der ehelichen Liebe Sorge zu tragen."

and pleasing in her eyes.”⁶⁰ The author continues by illustrating the means by which Aurelius accomplished this:

He works her mind, and makes her wiser. He increases her virtue. He provides for her, he protects and defends her, he gives her all possible comforts, she is honored because of him, he renders her all great services of friendship. If she is distressed and suffers a misfortune, he comforts her, he gives her courage, he relieves her distress. In short, Concordia cannot live without him.⁶¹

Aurelius is a patriarch who assumes the role of the at once self-evidently superior and responsible husband who adheres to the very advice and techniques that marital happiness demands. The result is a kind of ideal marital happiness established partly through a form of softer patriarchal power that is in line with the civic ethics of perfection:

She always has free access to him, and he interacts with her openly. From this arises a familiarity that tends to set a pair of hearts in love ablaze. He always looks friendly, and if he is made annoyed, he does not utter harsh words against his wife in a fit of anger; rather, he remains silent, and goes aside for a quarter of an hour to calm down again. Often he sits at his study table, and Concordia on a chair opposite him, knitting or doing something similar. Now and then Aurelius raises his eyes and casts a tender glance at Concordia, who smiles at him. He does not believe that a man has a right to be rude or even crude with his wife.⁶²

The example of Aurelius and Concordia clearly illustrates the paradox that arises at the interface of marital friendship and patriarchy.⁶³ While the patriarch is clearly in command, he is also compelled to institute a balance that implies a form of equality in the sense of a mutual benevolent openness and willingness to compromise and collaborate. Meier and Lange’s discourse reflects a new type of civic morality in which the love and affirmation of oneself as an empathetic and generous

⁶⁰Lange and Meier, *Der Gesellige* 1–2, part 71, 579: “Ich liebe meine Concordia auf allerzärtlichste, und ich verbinde sie täglich, durch einen angenehmen Zwang, mich eben so stark wieder zu lieben; indem ich mich beständig in ihren Augen ehrwürdig, unentbehrlich und gefällig mache.”

⁶¹Ibid., 581: “Er bearbeitet ihren Verstand, und macht sie klüger. Er vermehrt ihre Tugend. Er versorgt sie, er beschützt und vertheidiget sie, er giebt ihr alle mögliche Bequemlichkeiten, sie wird seinetwegen geehrt, er erweist ihr alle grosse Dienste der Freundschaft. Ist sie betrübt, und begegnet ihr ein ünglück; er tröstete sie, er macht ihr Muth, er hebt ihre Noth. Kurz, Concordia kan ohne ihn nich leben.”

⁶²Ibid., 582: “Sie hat beständig zu ihm einen freyen Zutrit, und er geht mit ihr offenerzig um. Daraus entsteht eine Vertraulichkeit, dergleichen ein paar verliebete Herzen in Flammen zu setzen pflegt. Er sieht immer freundlich aus, und wenn er ja verdrießlich gemacht wird, so stößt er nicht etwa in einem Jachzorne harte Worte wider seine Frau aus; sonder er schweigt stille, und geht eine Viertelstunde beyseite, um sich wieder zu besänftigen. Oft sitzt er an seinem Studiertische, und Concordia auf einem Stuhle gegen ihm über, indem sie etwa strickt oder dergleichen verrichtet. Dann und wann hebt Aurelius die Augen in die Höhe, und wirft einen zärtlichen Blick auf die Concordia, die ihn anlächelt. Er glaubt nicht, daß ein Mann ein Recht habe, mit seiner Frau gerade zu oder wol gar grob umzugehen.”

⁶³Thomason has made similar points regarding the relationship between marital friendship and the patriarchal order: Thomason, *The Matrimonial Trap*.

person, friend, and spouse clashed with the traditional ideal of the stern and authoritative patriarch and, by extension, the harsh patriarchal God.⁶⁴ This paradox cannot be entirely resolved as it reflects underlying and historically profound tensions between partially opposing concepts and discourses on friendship, love, and gender.⁶⁵

Concluding discussion

It is well known that the romantic marriage emerged as a new ideal in the eighteenth century. While a number of studies have examined representations of romantic marriage in novels, advice literature, and correspondence, the moral weeklies instead ask why so many marriages are unhappy and what can be done to establish and maintain marital happiness over time. In this article I have attempted to show how Meier and Lange's discourse took shape in direct relation to their civic ethics of perfection, which in turn reflected a long tradition of *cultura animi*, spiritual exercises and therapeutic regimens. While the classical *cultura animi* depicted philosophy as an exercise-oriented therapeutic cure of affectual distempers, Meier and Lange held that the sensual and affectual constituted a crucial part of the good life. In the context of marriage, they argued that unhappy relationships typically reflected character and temperamental defects. To establish and maintain marital happiness over time it is necessary to examine and temper the mind and to mutually develop, display, mirror, and confirm each other's cognitive and moral perfections. When this works it gives rise to a self-sustaining logic of perfection that instills pleasure and happiness that is not only virtuous but also sensual and passionate. In contrast to the initial and short-lived infatuation, this form of civic passion is nourished and renewed as long as the spouses discover and rediscover each other's perfections. If this positive chain is broken, however, marriages are easily thrown into a negative spiral of distanced coldness or open hostility. The way to break this negative pattern is typically to control one's temper and respond to animosity with indulgence, understanding, and serenity.

Meier and Lange's ethics of perfection was developed and communicated as a civic morality, providing guidelines as to how, to what extent, and in which contexts the sensual and affectual should be explored and affirmed or restrained and controlled. Marriage was only one of many arenas in which this ethics was established, and where myriad individual cases were used to explore norms and patterns of behavior, establishing boundaries in relation to Christian as well as class-related strands of thought. Situated in this context, Meier and Lange's explorations of marital love, friendship, and selfhood exemplify the interest in the unique individual

⁶⁴For Meier's critique of the Christian notion of humility and self-denial see particularly Meier, *Philosophische Sittenlehre. Anderer Theil*, 484–5, § 443.

⁶⁵In addition to the already discussed ideal of companionate marriage, there is also a long tradition of understanding the very concept of love in terms of self-sacrificing affectionate friendship, a conception that permeated ancient as well as Christian thought, and which Meier and Lange connected to, even if Meier, as we have seen, criticized an overly self-denying Christian concept of love. For the history of love see Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Love: A History in Five Fantasies* (Cambridge, 2021); Ann Brooks, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Romantic Love* (New York, 2021); Simon May, *Love: A History* (New Haven, 2011).

experience that later came to characterize Romanticism and was linked both to romantic love and to the emergence of a modern individual self more generally.⁶⁶

Finally, as an ethical and therapeutic regimen closely linked to the culture of sensibility, the ethics of perfection appears as a highly conscious attempt to shape and establish an *emotional community* where the sensual and affective experience should not only be affirmed but also controlled and channeled as a part of a virtuous civic lifestyle.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Meier and Lange's concrete and practical examples and instructions are well in line with what Monique Scheer has labelled *emotional practices*.⁶⁸ Scheer launches the concept as a way to distance herself from a historiography where emotions just exist or happen in favor of a historiography where emotions are produced through historically specific practices. The early modern *cultura animi* lends itself to such an analysis precisely because of the emphasis placed on systematic and concrete spiritual exercises and therapeutic regimens. Meier and Lange's attempt to launch and communicate a specific civic ethics of perfection, where the therapeutic approach is applied to the area of marital love and happiness, constitutes a particularly interesting case of *emotional practice* as it involves a broad spectrum of questions and problems related to class, gender, identity, and self. As pioneering representatives of a modern individual self, Meier and Lange faced an open future with curiosity about who they were, who they could and should become, and how they could communicate their vision to the reading public.

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⁶⁶Although this development is highly complex, involving a series of different and partly interrelated phenomena and processes, scholars nevertheless agree that the second half of the eighteenth century in particular was crucial to the emergence of the modern individual self. See, for instance, Leventhal, *Making the Case*; Seigel, *The Idea of the Self*; Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*; Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

⁶⁷Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*; Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*.

⁶⁸Monique Scheer, *Enthusiasm: Emotional Practices of Conviction in Modern Germany* (Oxford, 2020).

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