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EDUARD HANSLICK AND ROBERT ZIMMERMANN

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In the Vienna of the 1890s there was a superabundance of extraordinary characters: artists of every kind, scientists, physicians, others. To take music alone as an example, any shortlist of extraordinary characters living and working in Vienna during that decade would have to include Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler, Schönberg, Johann Strauß Jr. and Hugo Wolf.

Published writings about that *fin de siècle* frequently mention Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904), the most widely-read music critic of his time and a famous historian and theoretician of music. Hanslick's lifelong friend Robert Zimmermann (1824-1898), a philosophical and literary critic no less distinguished in his fields than Hanslick in his, has received little mention. Hanslick's writings on music are still being discussed in the year 2001; the name of Robert Zimmermann has been all but obliterated by the passage of time; yet, any educated Viennese of the 1890s might have said that Zimmermann was a man of greater distinction than Hanslick. By the year of his death, 1898, Zimmermann

had accumulated many honours: elevation to the nobility (with the title “Edler”); membership in the most important learned societies; a term as Rector magnificus of the University of Vienna; two terms as Dekan (Dean) of the Philosophical Faculty and more than thirty years as “Primarius” in philosophy there. He made no major philosophical discoveries, devised no philosophical system, but he was the author of the very first comprehensive history of philosophical aesthetics in any language.¹ In addition, and incredible as it may seem, he was the author of (among many other things) more than one thousand literary and philosophical reviews.² By any standard, he was an extraordinary character.

Both Hanslick and Zimmermann were born in Prague, had their upbringing and early education in that city, and their advanced education and careers in Vienna. So far as I know, this present essay is the first attempt to sketch their convergences and divergences and the influences between and upon the two men.

In 1854 was published in Leipzig a little book by Hanslick with the main title *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*,³ hereinafter referred to as *VMS*. Zimmermann was an important influence on Hanslick in the writing of it. Because Zimmermann was an academic philosopher by profession, we shall reflect upon the philosophical climate in which the book came to be, and, in particular, upon the situation of academic philosophy in Austria in the middle years of the nineteenth century. In brief: Until the year 1849, a

¹ Robert Zimmermann, *Geschichte der Aesthetik als philosophischer Wissenschaft* (Vienna: Bräuml, 1858).

² Constant von Wurzbach, *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich...* (Vienna: k.-k. Hof und Staatsdruckerei), vol. 60 (1891), p. 133A.

³ Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Leipzig: R. Weigel, 1854).

mere five years before publication of *VMS*, no Austrian university included or ever had included anything resembling a department of philosophy in the English-speaking North American sense of the phrase, or an institute for philosophy in the Austrian and German sense.⁴

Prior to that year, 1849, formal instruction and research in philosophy in Austria had been under strict control of the Roman Catholic clergy; one consequence of the political revolution of 1848 was a major reconstitution of educational policy and administration at all levels which severely restricted this control. Nowhere was the change more evident than in the arrangements for philosophy in the Austrian universities. In effect, philosophy had to reinvent itself from scratch, so there were openings for clever, young, secular, well-connected, opportunistic philosophers. Robert Zimmermann was one of those, as we shall see, but we must first take a quick look at the philosophical education of Eduard Hanslick.

It was, for the most part, untypical of his time and place. In his autobiography Hanslick says that he obtained his literary and philosophical education from his father's private library and conversation,⁵ not from the *Gymnasium*⁶ and not from the two so-

⁴ Richard Meister, "Die Geschichte des Faches Philosophie an der Wiener Universität." *Wissenschaftlicher Jahresbericht der Philosophischen Gesellschaft an der Universität zu Wien für das Vereinsjahr 1927/28*, pp. 3-13 (see especially pp. 9-10); Carl Siegel, "Philosophie." J.W. Nagl, J. Zeidler, E. Castle, *Deutsch-Österreichische Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 3 (Vienna: Verlag von Carl Fromme, n.d.), pp. 17-48 (see especially p. 29); Ernst Topitsch, "Kant in Österreich." *Philosophie der Wirklichkeitsnähe. Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag Robert Reinigers* (Vienna: Verlag A. Söxl, 1949), pp. 236-253 (see especially p. 250: "Als Wien 1849 endlich eine philosophische Fakultät im modernen Sinn erhielt...").

⁵ Eduard Hanslick, *Aus meinem Leben* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Litteratur), 1894, vol. 1, pp. 6-8.

⁶ The German word *Gymnasium* looks like the English word "gymnasium," but does not translate it. In German-speaking countries, for select students, *Gymnasium* comes between elementary school and university. Senior teachers in a *Gymnasium* are addressed as "Professor," and typically they are eminent scholars, as was Robert Zimmermann's father, the poet Johann August Zimmermann, who was a professor of humanities at the Kleinseitner Gymnasium in Prague, where he was one of Eduard Hanslick's teachers.

called “Philosophical Years,” which Hanslick took at Prague University in 1844-1846 (and which I shall describe in a moment). He says that “philosophy” in the Philosophical Years consisted entirely of traditional proofs of the harmony between reason and revelation, between science and religious belief. The professor did what Hanslick calls an “egg-dance,” trying without success to hop on one foot from reason to revelation and back without crushing the figurative eggs between the two. At these entertainments, Hanslick lurked in the back row of the lecture room reading popular fiction. Incidentally, as a student in the Philosophical Years he was entitled by ancient custom to carry a walking stick and to be addressed as “Herr.”⁷ He was notoriously a dandy all his life.

Undoubtedly Hanslick exaggerates for literary effect in his trenchant account of his “Philosophical Years,” as he does almost everywhere else. On the other hand, he tells us that one of his philosophy professors at Prague was Franz Exner (1802-1853),⁸ who was no egg-dancer, who also taught Robert Zimmermann, and who was a close friend of Zimmermann’s father. In 1849, after the revolution had been defeated and order more or less restored in Austria, Exner was appointed to high office at the Ministry of Education in Vienna, and from there administered the educational reforms I have already mentioned. One of his first and most important moves was to secularize philosophy in the universities and *Gymnasien*, to which end he established the philosophy of Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), a German, as the official philosophy of Austria, much as

⁷ Hanslick, *Leben*, vol.1, pp. 20-21. Regarding the egg-dance, see J.W. von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, II, 8.

⁸ Hanslick, *Leben*, vol.1, p. 22.

Hegelianism had been of Prussia.⁹ Syllabus, method, and administrative policy at all levels of education were based on Herbart's doctrines, or interpretations of them, to such an extent that if one sought a teaching position in Austria, philosophical or otherwise, one had to be, or profess to be, an Herbartian. This was no problem for Robert Zimmermann, to whose philosophical education we now turn.

If we asked an historian of philosophy to tell us who were the important Austrian philosophers of the first half of the nineteenth century, we would most likely be given one name, that of Bernard Bolzano (1781-1848), who in our time is remembered by English-speaking philosophers as a pioneer in the field of mathematical logic.

As a friend of long standing, and as a priest, Bolzano officiated at the marriage, in November 1823, of the couple who a year later became the parents of Robert Zimmermann. When Robert approached upper-school age, Bolzano took on the task of supervising his philosophical instruction.¹⁰ Robert's lessons with Bolzano, and the latter's unstinting preparation for them, must have taken up a great deal of Bolzano's time, but he had time to spare, because he was unemployed. Indeed, he had been unemployed since 24 December 1819, when he was dismissed from his professorship at Prague University.

It is a miserable story. Bernard Bolzano, shy, consumptive, but of prodigious mental ability, was ill-equipped to deal with political and ecclesiastical turbulence. The story has its beginning in April 1805, in which month Bolzano was ordained into the

⁹ Siegel, "Philosophie," p. 28: "Herbartianismus...wird geradezu die österreichische Staatsphilosophie."

¹⁰ For a brief account of the Bolzano-Zimmermann relationship, see *Einleitung* to Eduard Winter, ed., *Robert Zimmermanns Philosophische Propädeutik und die Vorlagen aus der Wissenschaftslehre Bernard Bolzanos* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975: Österreichische

Roman Catholic priesthood; the degree of Doctor of Philosophy was conferred on him by Prague University; the same university appointed him to a newly established chair in religious studies in the Philosophical Faculty. In that month it must have seemed to everyone who knew him that Bolzano's academic career was off to a brilliant start, but three months later an imperial decree was drawn up at the Ministry of Education in Vienna calling for Bolzano's dismissal from the University, accusing him, among other things, of being a Kantian.¹¹

But what, we might ask, is so reprehensible about being a Kantian?

In brief, Kant's so-called "Copernican Revolution" challenged most previous writings on metaphysics, including those of St. Thomas Aquinas; Kant's criticisms of the traditional arguments for the existence of God and of immortal souls seemed no less threatening to ecclesiastical authority. In 1796 a German Benedictine, upon returning home from travels in Austria, wrote: "In the Austrian monarchy the critical philosophy [i.e. Immanuel Kant's] is acknowledged to be an enemy, and woe betide whoever wants to teach it."¹² And on 4 July 1798 a commission at the University of Vienna debated a motion to offer instruction there in Kantian philosophy. The motion was defeated on the ground that Kantian philosophy was both superfluous and dangerous.¹³ So in 1805, the year of Bolzano's doctorate, his appointment, and the threat of his dismissal, the teaching of Kantian philosophy was, in Austria, an underground activity. Bolzano was caught at it.

Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte, 299. Band, 5. Abhandlung), pp. 14-16.

¹¹ Siegel, "Philosophie," p. 19.

¹² Topitsch, "Kant in Österreich," p. 242.

¹³ Siegel, "Philosophie," p. 18; Topitsch, "Kant in Österreich," pp. 242-3.

Fortunately for him, he had an influential protector in Prague, Archbishop Florentin Wilhelm, Prince of Salm-Salm (1745-1810), who hurried to Vienna expressly to use his influence to have the decree rescinded. In this the archbishop was successful, but when Bolzano's enemies took aim again, in 1819, nothing could save him.

Robert Zimmermann, despite his privileged relationship, was not, strictly speaking, a disciple of Bolzano's; nevertheless there can be little doubt that his lifelong respect for rigorous method in both science and philosophy had at least part of its origin in his tutorial sessions with Bolzano.

Apart from those sessions, Zimmermann's education for some years was similar to Hanslick's. The father of each took an active part in teaching the son, especially during what we would call the high school years. Both Robert and Eduard took the two Philosophical Years at Prague University, and from there both entered the Juridical Faculty at the same university, but soon parted educationally, although they remained friends. Zimmermann dropped out of the Juridical Faculty in his first year because he found the law professors intolerably boring,¹⁴ and left Prague for Vienna, where he completed his studies not in the Juridical Faculty but in the Philosophical. Hanslick, on the other hand, endured his two law years at Prague University, then moved to Vienna to complete his doctorate in law at the university there.

We must now, perhaps belatedly, try to clarify the relationship in the present context between the terms "Philosophical Faculty" and "philosophy."

As a rough approximation, we may say that in the Austrian Universities, instruction was given in four traditional Faculties: Medical, Juridical, Theological,

¹⁴ Hanslick, *Leben*, vol. 1, p.36.

Philosophical. In the Philosophical Faculty was taught every subject that was not taught in any of the other three, which is not to say that it was the poor relative who received the cast-offs, the grab-bag of the University, although it may have seemed so at times. The Philosophical Faculty corresponds approximately to our contemporary Faculty of Arts and Science; in it were taught numerous academic subjects, including the subject we call “philosophy.” This ancient ambiguity is preserved in the strange locution “He is a Doctor of Philosophy in philosophy.” (I have tried in this essay to limit the confusion between two senses of “philosophy” by using upper-case initial for the faculty, the two-year program and the degree, but lower-case for the subject; the context should make clear which is meant.)

Every student who wanted to study medicine, law or theology was required first to enrol in the Philosophical Faculty to take the two Philosophical Years (sometimes referred to as the “Philosophicum”), in which philosophy was included as a mandatory subject, among others. A student could go from the second Philosophical Year into Medicine, Law or Theology, or continue to the Doctorate in the Philosophical Faculty, which is what Zimmermann did at the University of Vienna. He did this not in philosophy, however, but in physics, chemistry and astronomy, i.e. in so-called “Natural Philosophy.”¹⁵

Zimmermann received his Doctorate in May 1846, and in the following three years occupied a few minor positions, one in astronomy, others in philosophy, but continued his philosophical studies throughout. In March 1849 he was confirmed as a

¹⁵ For a resolution of this apparent anomaly, and the best biographical account of Robert Zimmermann with which I am acquainted, see Hugo Spitzer, “Zimmermann, Robert von,” in Anton Bettelheim, ed., *Biographisches Jahrbuch und deutscher Nekrolog* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1900), vol. 3, pp. 202-212.

Privatdocent (unpaid instructor) in philosophy at the University of Vienna, whereupon his philosophical career took wing. In the same year, still in his mid-twenties, he was appointed by Franz Exner's Ministry of Education to an associate professorship at the University of Olmütz, in Moravia. At his inaugural oration there, delivered on the occasion of his formal installation, Zimmermann told his philosophical colleagues at Olmütz that the aim of philosophy is to bring to the greatest possible clarity and distinctness the stuff of knowledge, namely, thoughts, concepts, judgments and conclusions; that knowledge of the ultimate conditions of knowledge is philosophical knowledge.¹⁶ This entire address followed closely the official Herbartian doctrine.

It is not hard to imagine the consternation among Zimmermann's colleagues in clerical garb at this oration. They knew a lot about reconciling reason and revelation, a task which required no method of its own, no inquiry into the limits of knowledge. Immanuel Kant did that sort of thing, didn't he? And look where it got him! What's this upstart Zimmermann going on about? Does he think he is some kind of prophet announcing a new dispensation for philosophy?

By then, 1850, the University of Olmütz could boast a history of almost three hundred years, but it was near its end. Three years later the university ceased to exist, a victim of political tensions between Czech nationalists and Sudetan Germans. Zimmermann got nimbly out from under the wreckage: In 1852, still in his twenties, he made another astonishing leap along his career path by becoming Professor of Philosophy at Prague University, appointed by Exner's Ministry of Education.

¹⁶ Dr. Robert Zimmermann, *Über die jetzige Stellung der Philosophie auf der Universität. Eine Antrittsvorlesung* (Olmütz: Eduard Hölzel, 1850), p.16.

Prague University, more correctly named The Karlovan University, is the oldest in Eastern Europe, and has a library ranking among the most important anywhere. At his formal installation in Prague, Zimmermann must have scandalized his philosophical colleagues even more than he had done at Olmütz: He proclaimed that the proper business of philosophy is with concepts and the analysis of concepts. Nothing, my reader will notice, about wisdom, truth and the good, let alone about the existence and attributes of God.¹⁷

Zimmermann did not make his ultimate career leap, to the chair in philosophy at the University of Vienna, until nine years later, in 1861. The Ministry of Education was then still under Herbartian control, despite Exner's absence (he died in 1853). Zimmermann occupied that chair for more than thirty years, and served a term as Rector magnificus of the University of Vienna in 1886-87. His appointment to this high position was warmly greeted in the Austrian press.¹⁸

But let us go back to the year 1852, in which the professorship at Prague University fell vacant, very conveniently for Zimmermann. His predecessor in this position was a highly regarded philosopher named Ignaz Jan Hanuš, who, as it happened, was a predecessor of Zimmermann's at Olmütz. In that year, 1852, Hanuš was dismissed from his professorship in philosophy at Prague University for the crime of giving lectures

¹⁷ Dr. Robert Zimmermann, *Was erwarten wir von der Philosophie? Ein Vortrag beim Antritt des ordentlichen Lehramts der Philosophie an der Prager Hochschule gehalten am 26. April 1852* (Prague: Credner & Kleinbub, n.d.), p. 11: "Die Philosophie ist eine Begriffswissenschaft, ihr eigentlicher Gegenstand sind daher Begriffe, ihre Aufgabe die Betrachtung und Untersuchung von Begriffen....Wie die Aufgabe, lässt sich nun, was wir von der Philosophie zu erwarten haben, kurz in zwei Worte zusammenfassen: die Verdeutlichung unserer Begriffe." Philosophers of my generation who survived the onslaught of the first wave of British analytical philosophers in the 1950s will find those slogans chillingly familiar.

¹⁸ Example: *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt* (14 October 1886), p.1: "...ein wahrer und aufrichtiger Freund der Wiener Studentenschaft".

on the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). His dismissal became a scandal throughout the German-speaking countries, generating a vigorous controversy in print.¹⁹ Hanuš was a more conspicuous figure at Prague University than had been the chronically ailing Bernard Bolzano, who earlier had endured in silence the same fate, but in post-revolutionary Austria such an outrage on the part of authority could not as easily be kept from public view as it was in 1819 when Bolzano got the boot. In the Hanuš affair, the Ministry of Education eventually came through with what someone called a typically Austrian compromise: The Ministry confirmed the Academic Senate's decision to remove Hanuš permanently from all teaching duties, but, because of his scholarly distinction, insisted that the university keep him on in some capacity at the salary he would have received if he had continued as professor.²⁰ This is how it came about that Hanuš became director of the Prague University Library, where in earlier years Eduard Hanslik's father had been employed as a *Skriptor*. Josef Adolf Hanslik (sic) wrote a history and description of the Library, for the publication of which, in 1852, the Ministry of Education provided the funding. In 1863 was published an index to it, prepared by Hanuš, along with an affectionate word portrait by him of Hanslik,²¹ the best description we have of this remarkable man, apart from his son Eduard's autobiography. J.A. Hanslik was cherished by his many friends for his learning, which was formidable, and for his humour, which was a little bit ribald.

¹⁹ For a prime example, see Verfasser des „Antibarbarus logicus“ (Friedrich Heinrich Theodor Allihn [1811-1885]), *Der verderbliche Einfluss der Hegelschen Philosophie* (Leipzig: Carl Geibel, 1852), a pamphlet of 71 pages.

²⁰ Wurzbach, *Biographisches Lexikon ...* vol. 7 (1861), p. 339B.

²¹ I.J. Hanuš, *Zusätze und Inhalts-Verzeichnisse zu Hanslik's „Geschichte und Beschreibung der k.k. Prager Universitäts-Bibliothek“ (Prag 1851)* (Prague: the Author, 1863, pp. VII-VIII).

Several times already I have mentioned that 1848 was a year of revolution in Austria; it was known as the “Storm-Year.” At the beginning, in the month of March, the issue was simply that of state control of the press and the theatres; but, as the uprising gained momentum, the more volatile issues of nationalism, religious toleration, republicanism, and what we call socialism but was then called liberalism, came to the fore, with help from the usual rowdies and fanatics and thrill-seekers, until there raged a full-scale revolution, mainly in Vienna, Prague and Budapest.

A few professors and students from the University of Vienna formed themselves into a battalion, the so-called “Academic Legion,” to support the revolutionaries; both Hanslick and Zimmermann joined it (they were sharing digs in Vienna at the time). Zimmermann fought at the barricades, and he wrote verses about this experience (as, it seemed, did everyone else), but in later years he did what he could to suppress evidence of both his fighting and his versifying. Little Hanslick was not a success as a warrior. At musket-drill (on an improvised parade-ground on the Graben) he found unbearable both the weight of his ancient flintlock and the waste of his time.²² However, he wrote a series of pseudonymous political articles from Vienna for the *Prager Zeitung* in that revolutionary summer of 1848.²³

On October 6th Hanslick was witness to the mob-murder in Vienna of a cabinet minister who was beaten to death and his body strung up on a lamp post in front of the War Ministry, from where loyalist soldiers and their officer looked on but did not

²² Hanslick, *Leben*, vol. 1, p. 124.

²³ The articles, or “Briefe,” are reprinted in Dietmar Strauß, ed., *Eduard Hanslick: Sämtliche Schriften: Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, vol. I,1: *Aufsätze und Rezensionen 1844-1848* (Vienna etc.: Böhlau, 1993),

intervene. For Hanslick and many others this event marked the end of all hope for the revolution, which very obviously had fallen into the wrong hands.²⁴ It was crushed by loyalist troops later that month, then there were bloody reprisals under martial law in November and December, which Zimmermann somehow escaped, although he was as guilty of treason as any of his comrades who were tried and shot.²⁵

Hanslick's *VMS* appeared only six years later, in 1854, as already mentioned. That the book, actually no more than a pamphlet, had in some degree a political agenda nobody will deny who has read Hanslick's political articles of summer 1848 in the *Prager Zeitung*, and his musical journalism of 1844-1854. In these, Hanslick argued tirelessly for racial and religious toleration, for the liberation of the press and the arts from state censorship; and, in a not altogether figurative sense, for the autonomy of the art of music, as he did in *VMS*.

We must return now to the German philosopher Johann Friedrich Herbart. It is not easy to accept that for two decades in the nineteenth century, in the domain of philosophy in the German language, the Herbartian faction was the only serious rival to the Hegelian. Herbart died in 1841, not long before the events we have been considering, and before the philosophers of the so-called Herbartian School made their presence known in Austria and Germany. The hotbeds of Herbartianism in its heyday, roughly 1845-1865, were Prague and Leipzig; it is perhaps no coincidence that *VMS* was published in the latter

pp. 224-261. (*Author's Note*: These pseudonymous articles by Hanslick were uncovered and attributed by me in 1983. They appear in Dr. Strauß's volume with my approval.)

²⁴ Hanslick, *Leben*, vol.1, pp.135-36; Strauß, *Hanslick: Sämtliche Schriften*, vol.I,1, p. 251.

²⁵ For an account of one revolutionary who did not escape the reprisals: Geoffrey Payzant, "Eduard Hanslick and the 'geistreich' Dr. Alfred Julius Becher," *The Music Review*, vol. 44, no. 2 (May 1983), pp.104-115.

city. Arguably the most productive and influential of all Herbartian philosophers, Austrian or German, was Robert Zimmermann of Prague and Vienna.

Herbartian Philosophers regarded themselves as realists and objectivists, in opposition to the Hegelian philosophers, whom they vilified as idealists and radical subjectivists. Among Herbart's followers this opposition was total and uncompromising, although he himself had been a diligent seeker after common ground between opposing philosophical positions, in the manner of his exemplar Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716). For much philosophical literature of the time, the term "Hegelian" may be taken as coextensive with "speculative," although strictly speaking speculative philosophy included, in addition to Hegelianism, the doctrines of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and their followers. Herbartian philosophy was frequently referred to by its adherents as "exact philosophy" to emphasize the difference between it and speculative philosophy, although Herbartian philosophy seems to me in the year 2000 no more exact than Hegelian, and no less "speculative." [26](#)

Here is a perplexing remark of Zimmermann's in an article of 1864, ten years after publication of *VMS*:

Professor Hanslick is not a philosopher by profession, and not an Herbartian.[27](#)

[26](#) I can recommend two surveys in English of Herbart's philosophy: George Sidney Brett, *A History of Psychology* (London: George Allen & Company, 1912-1921), vol. 3, pp. 43-62; Stout, G.F., *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology* (London: MacMillan, 1930), pp. 3-50, reprinted from *Mind*, vol. 13, no. 51 (July 1888), pp. 321-338; no. 52 (October 1888), pp. 473-498. For an Herbartian's response to Stout, see Dr. Dumdey, "Herbart und die englischen Psychologen nach G.F. Stout," *Zeitschrift für exacte Philosophie*, vol. 19 (1893), pp. 2-22.

[27](#) Robert Zimmermann, "Abwehr," *Zeitschrift für exacte Philosophie*, vol. 4 (1864), p. 205.

That Hanslick was not a philosopher “by profession” is undeniable: He was a lawyer, an administrator, and a part-time musical journalist; but there are other ways than “by profession” of being a philosopher, some of them respectable. Zimmermann’s statement that Hanslick was not an Herbartian is true, or so I believe, but it contradicts what Hanslick himself wrote when, in 1856, he applied to the Ministry of Education for a teaching position at the University of Vienna. At the time, he was employed as a legal officer at the same Ministry, which was still under control of the Herbartians. In the unctuous language everywhere characteristic of applications for jobs, Hanslick wrote:

I am most compatible with the philosophical system of Herbart, with which as a favorite student of Exner’s I had the opportunity to become closely acquainted. As evidence of my philosophical orientation, I cite the review [of *VMS*] by the Herbartian Professor Robert Zimmermann...,²⁸ and the remark of the aesthetician Dr. Ambros, who, in his book *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie*²⁹ refers to the “great satisfaction” my book has given the Herbartian philosophers.³⁰

It is noteworthy that in Zimmermann’s review of *VMS* there is no mention of Herbart or Herbartianism by name, but there is no question that Zimmermann was an Herbartian philosopher, or that he was given “great satisfaction” by the book. Dr.

²⁸ Robert Zimmermann, “Zur Aesthetik der Tonkunst. Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. Von Dr. Eduard Hanslick. Leipzig. R. Weigl 1854. S. 104,” *Oesterreichische Blätter für Literatur und Kunst*, no. 47 (20 November 1854), pp. 313-315. Reprinted in Robert Zimmermann, *Studien und Kritiken zur Philosophie und Aesthetik*, vol. 2, *Zur Aesthetik* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1870), pp. 239-253.

²⁹ August Wilhelm Ambros, *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie. Eine Studie zur Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Leipzig: Matthes, 1855), p. 10.

³⁰ Reproduced and transcribed in Dietmar Strauß, *Eduard Hanslick: Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. Vol. 2, Eduard Hanslicks Schrift in textkritischer Sicht* (Mainz: Schott, 1990), pp. 142, 145.

Ambros's *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie* (1855) was the first book published in response to *VMS* (1854). August Wilhelm Ambros (1816-1876) was one of Hanslick's closest friends in Prague during the mid-1840s, but they disagreed over aesthetic matters and became estranged. Ambros considered himself an Hegelian, but it seems, on the evidence of his book, that he knew very little about Hegelian philosophy. Perhaps Hanslick took malicious pleasure in quoting his adversary Ambros out of context in support of his application to the Ministry of Education; few of the officials who read his application could have been unaware of the irony, which would surely have counted in Hanslick's favour with those Herbartian bureaucrats.

Hanslick's application was not at all a routine affair for the Ministry. First, he was applying for a position that did not exist, in a subject that did not exist, at a very conservative university: a position as instructor and eventually professor of the history and aesthetics of music. The Ministry was called upon to create, not just a line in a payroll, but a new academic discipline, and a chair in it, all for Hanslick. Second, his academic qualifications were in law, not in music, history or philosophy. Third, he sought a major concession, namely, to be excused the habilitation requirement, offering his already-published *VMS* in its place. Habilitation was and is, in the German speaking universities, one of the important landmarks of an academic career; each newly appointed academic must "habilitate" himself, normally by delivering a formal lecture on some unpublished research of his own.

Hanslick's application was successful, for in that year, 1856, he became a *Privatdocent* at the University of Vienna, and five years later was promoted to

professorial rank. There was an outcry when he had an old upright piano brought into the lecture room for the purpose of illustrating his lectures, because such a thing was unheard of: What is this man doing? Lecturing or concertising? A few descriptions of Hanslick in the classroom have come down to us from students.³¹ We read that his lectures were boring, which nobody could have expected who was familiar with his journalistic writings. He stood at a lectern and read into his beard from a script, in a nearly inaudible, high-pitched monotone, soporific but not displeasing. At the piano, his small hands, with their short, blunt fingers, moved at astonishing speed over the keys while he bobbed and swayed and tapped a foot, playing always from memory. The performance was described as a comical thing to behold, but nobody has reported that it was unmusical.

The Ministry of Education had to improvise, and to stretch the rules beyond the limit, in order to impose Hanslick's appointment upon the University of Vienna. This would have been impossible if he had not convinced everyone of his unswerving loyalty to Herbartianism, but he greatly exaggerated that loyalty for his purposes of the moment. My view is that *VMS* is an eclectic work, by no means exclusively or even significantly Herbartian.

A minor but characteristically Herbartian feature of *VMS* is Hanslick's insistence that, for purposes of theory, the differences among the arts are more important than the similarities. This contradicts the Hegelian doctrine that all the arts form one great system under a unifying principle, namely, the Idea; that all the arts are really just one art.

Zimmermann, in his 1854 review of *VMS*, applauds Hanslick's remarks on this matter,³²

³¹ Max Graf, *Composer and Critic: Two Hundred Years of Musical Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1946), pp. 244-245; Richard Specht, trans. Eric Blom, *Johannes Brahms* (London: Dent, 1930), pp. 171-72.

³² Zimmermann, "Tonkunst," *Blätter*, p. 314A-B.

but when Hanslick sought an authority to quote in support of his view, he chose not the philosopher Herbart but the poet Franz Grillparzer (1791-1872); this, however, he did not do until the eighth edition of *VMS* (1891).³³ Herbart is nowhere mentioned in Hanslick's autobiography *Aus meinem Leben*,³⁴ but the Hegelian philosopher Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807-1887) is mentioned several times, always with admiration and respect. Herbart is neither quoted nor named in the first edition of *VMS*.

We are entitled, therefore, to be skeptical when we read a comment by Zimmermann in his *Geschichte der Aesthetik*, which appeared in 1858, four years after *VMS*.

Eduard Hanslick's penetrating study *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen...* has provided musical aesthetics with a new verification. This is the more noteworthy in view of the fact that its author, proceeding originally from a philosophical position fundamentally opposed to Herbart's, was led by the force of the argument to an outcome that is in perfect accord with the doctrine of Herbart.³⁵

Of particular interest here is an essay by Zimmermann with the title "Die spekulative Aesthetik und die Kritik," which appeared in February of 1854 (*VMS* appeared in autumn of the same year). I quote from this essay.

³³ Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 8th ed. (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1891), pp. 3-4.

³⁴ Hanslick, *Leben*, vol. 1, pp. 3-11.

³⁵ Robert Zimmermann, *Geschichte der Aesthetik* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1858), p. 784n.

Aesthetics has in our time fallen somewhat into disrepute. Despite the prevailing critical tendency of our Alexandrian epoch, genuine artistic criticism is scarcer than ever, and true regard for it even scarcer. The artist emancipates himself from criticism just as the critic turns his back on the philosopher of art. Each takes matters into his own hands; the inevitable consequence is a spiritual anarchy in which, as in the well known saying of Frederick II, each of us seeks salvation after his own fashion. The spirit of barenaked individualism dominates art as well as criticism. The artist follows his subjective inclination, the critic his private whim. Collaborations towards a common goal, namely, established principles of criticism and an aesthetical understanding of art, are almost as scarce as genuine artists. “Kill the scoundrel, he’s a critic!”³⁶ has become the warcry of the artist, and “I say what I please!” that of the critic. Each goes his way unmindful of the other, and consoles himself with the old saying that ultimately all roads lead to Rome.³⁷

Zimmermann blames this deplorable relativism on Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and their followers, all of whom he condemns as radical subjectivists; he then demolishes them with arguments which might do credit to a sophomore who has acquired his knowledge of philosophy from the pages of Will Durant or the good Father Copleston, but not to the Professor of Philosophy at Prague University. “Die spekulative Aesthetik und die Kritik” is a bizarre performance, reeking of ulterior motive, as was promptly noticed by an anonymous reviewer whom we shall meet in a moment, but first I have to introduce a doctoral candidate in philosophy at the University of Vienna named

³⁶ J.W. von Goethe, “Rezensent,” in vol. 1 of *Goethe Werke Jubiläumsausgabe* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1998), p. 273.

³⁷ Robert Zimmermann, “Die spekulative Aesthetik und die Kritik,” *Oesterreichische Blätter für Literatur und Kunst*, no. 6 (6 February 1854), p. 37.

Siegmund Barrach (1834-1885). In early 1854, a few weeks after Zimmermann's essay appeared, Barrach published a pamphlet of forty-seven pages with the title "Ueber spekulative Aesthetik und Kritik. Ein Sendschreiben an Herrn Dr. Robert Zimmermann, Professor der Philosophie an der Prager Universität." In it young Barrach earnestly counters Zimmermann's arguments. Neither Zimmermann in his essay nor Barrach in his pamphlet mentions the name of Herbart, which is odd, since obviously the one was written to promote Herbartianism, the other to attack it.

Not long afterwards, in April 1854, appeared an anonymous review, ostensibly of Barrach's pamphlet but actually of Zimmermann's article, in a rather less solemn Viennese journal named *Der Wanderer*. The anonymous reviewer was patronisingly pro-Barrach and caustically anti-Zimmermann.

Zimmermann comments upon the central propositions of a well known philosophical system [i.e. the Hegelian], propositions which, to use a trite but very pertinent figure of speech, the sparrows are already chirping from the rooftops. He does this in so unseemly a manner that one is forced to give credence to the inescapable surmise that Zimmermann, taking into account only his personal and official disagreement with the aforementioned system, attacks it with a camouflaged sophistry (not to overstate the matter), at the risk of burdening himself with the mere sham of total misunderstanding.³⁸

In other words, Zimmermann in his essay "Die spekulative Aesthetik und die Kritik" deliberately misrepresents the speculative philosophers, Hegel in particular, in order to

³⁸ " 'Ueber spekulative Aesthetik und Kritik,' von Sigmund Barach. Erschienen bei Tendler und Comp. Wien 1854," *Der Wanderer*, vol. 45, no. 179 (19 April 1854), n.p. (feuilleton).

make them appear more vulnerable than they really are to attack by the adherents of a rival philosophical system, a system in which Zimmermann has a personal and professional stake. Unlike both Zimmermann and Barrach, the anonymous reviewer came right out with the name of the actual villain of the piece; his comment is a parody of a parody of a remark of Aristotle's:³⁹

Dear is Herbart, but dearer still is truth.

Next into the breach with a pamphlet was another doctoral candidate in philosophy at the University of Vienna, Mathias Amos Drbal (1829-1885). He had been a student of Zimmermann's at both Olmütz and Prague. With the title "Die absolute Kritik. Antwort auf das Sendschreiben des Herrn Sigmund [sic] Barrach an Herrn Dr. Robert Zimmermann, k. k. o. ö. Professor der Philosophie an der Prager Universität," his pamphlet of forty-five pages was published hot on the heels of *Der Wanderer's* anonymous review. Drbal in his pamphlet defended his professor against Barrach, and railed against *Der Wanderer's* reviewer, with a hint of a possible legal action against the latter for defamation of Robert Zimmermann's character.

I think we shall never know what prompted Zimmermann to produce so compromising an essay as "Die spekulative Aesthetik und die Kritik." That he had second thoughts about it is suggested by the fact that he did not reprint it in his volume of essays on aesthetics collected from his previously published writings, dedicated to

³⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 6.

Hanslick, published in 1870.⁴⁰ Perhaps this essay was intended by Zimmermann to prepare the way for a major Herbartian statement on aesthetics by himself or by someone else. Perhaps he expected *VMS* to be that statement.

Whatever Zimmermann's intentions may have been, in the year 1854, in Vienna, there was a little pamphlet war in which Hanslick's book was caught up, whether he wanted it to be or not, a conflict which rekindled itself from time to time, in one form or another, over the following hundred or more years, until long after Hegelianism went out of fashion, and Herbartianism vanished from the face of the earth almost as if it had never been. At issue over the long run was not which of the two philosophical systems was the better, but the smaller question of whether a musical composition can be regarded as an intellectual or emotional content embodied in tones, or can be regarded as nothing but a contentless tonal structure. Hanslick's enemies accused him of promoting the latter view to the detriment of the former, but this they did without having read his book, or so it seems. *VMS* is the best account we have of the theoretical territory lying between these two extremes.

What about Barrach and Drbal, the doctoral candidates who, putting their careers on the line, marched so bravely into combat in 1854, one to attack the formidable Professor Zimmermann, the other to defend him?

Both went on to good careers, Barrach as a neo-Kantian philosopher, and Drbal as an Herbartian philosopher and an educational administrator at the *Gymnasial* level. Inconveniently for researchers, neither of the two made it into any of the great biographical lexica of the time. Zimmermann has eleven columns in Wurzbach's

⁴⁰ Robert Zimmermann, *Studien und Kritiken zur Philosophie und Aesthetik* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1870), vol. 2, *Zur Aesthetik*.

Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich, apparently written by himself, and five pages in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*; there is no entry for Barrach or Drbal in either. Drbal has half a column in *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815-1950*, but Barrach is not there. We would have to say that neither had a constituency.

Barrach, or to give his full name Karl Siegmund Barrach-Rappaport, obtained his doctorate from the University of Vienna not later than 1858, in which year he published a substantial volume with the title *Die gegenwärtige Aufgabe der Philosophie*,⁴¹ which someone said should be called “Philosophy of and since Kant.” He became a *Privatdocent* at the University of Vienna in 1861, the year in which Hanslick was likewise appointed *Privatdocent*, and the year in which Zimmermann moved from Prague to Vienna as Professor of Philosophy. This latter coincidence may have seemed inauspicious to poor Barrach, considering his public attack on Zimmermann in 1854, but all the evidence suggests that Zimmermann was anything but vindictive toward his opponents in philosophical debate.

Nevertheless, no move was made to promote Barrach to confirmed and paid academic rank at the University of Vienna, so eight years later, in 1869, he accepted an appointment in philosophy at the University of Innsbruck, where in due time he made his way through the ranks with distinction. It has to be said, ruefully, that Siegmund Barrach had two strikes against him at the University of Vienna: he was a Jew and a Kantian.

The other pamphleteering doctoral candidate, Mathias Amos Drbal, was a student not of philosophy but of law at the University of Olmütz when Zimmermann went there

⁴¹ Carl Sigmund Barach, *Die gegenwärtige Aufgabe der Philosophie*. (Vienna: Braumüller 1858). Barrach’s names appear in many variations in the primary and secondary literature.

as associate professor in 1850; but, inspired by Zimmermann, Drbal transferred to philosophy, much against his father's wishes, and followed Zimmermann to Prague in 1852. In 1854 he was studying philosophy at Vienna. Along with his doctoral work in philosophy, Drbal studied pedagogy, and, after graduating with a doctorate in philosophy from Prague University in 1857, he became sometimes a teacher and sometimes an administrator in Austrian *Gymnasien*, but spent the greater part of his working life as an educational administrator at Linz. Drbal wrote books and articles on Herbartian philosophy, including an introductory logic of 1865, and an empirical psychology of 1868; both ran to several editions, were translated, and were used as textbooks in, of all places, Watertown, Wisconsin, if we can believe one of his obituaries.⁴² In 1860 appeared a volume by him on the nature of the senses, based on the texts of two public lectures he gave at Linz;⁴³ in it are five pages about music,⁴⁴ all stolen, unaltered and unacknowledged, from Hanslick's *VMS*. I do not know what to make of this plagiarism. I have seen no evidence of personal contact between Hanslick and Drbal, although, of course, the two of them had Zimmermann in common.

In 1868 the University of Lemberg, a German institution in the Austrian province of Galicia, offered Drbal a professorship in philosophy, an appointment he coveted; but the Ministry of Education, despite Drbal's loyalty to Herbartianism, vetoed the appointment for the stated reason that his Slavonic surname would give the impression of

⁴² Grolig, Moritz, "Nekrologie: Dr. Matthias Drbal," *Zeitschrift für die österreichischen Gymnasien*, vol. 36 (1885), pp. 487-88. Much of the information concerning Drbal presented in the present essay comes from this source.

⁴³ Mathias Amos Drbal, *Ueber die Natur der Sinne: Zwei populär-wissenschaftliche Vorträge...* (Linz: Vinzenz Fink, 1860).

⁴⁴ Drbal, *Sinne*, pp. 61-64.

“polandizing” the university, although his education and family background were entirely German. Subsequently he received a similar offer from the University of Czernowitz, a German institution in the Austrian dukedom of Bukovina, but the Ministry vetoed this appointment, this time invoking financial reasons. It was evident that the Herbartians had, after twenty years of almost unchallenged authority, lost their power base in the Austrian Ministry of Education.[45](#)

[45](#) An early version of this essay was read on October 14th, 1995 at a symposium on music and philosophy held at the University of Toronto. It is a pleasure to acknowledge with thanks the assistance I received from Christoph Landerer in the revising of it for publication.