The last part ('Sayings with a Message') encompasses ten entertaining texts displaying the close connection between Kant's aesthetics and moral philosophy. Especially noteworthy is Clewis' treatment of the function that Kant assigns to jokes and entertaining imagery as tools of moral education. Due to such discussions in the last two parts and the reconstruction of Kant's theory of humour in the first, the book is of twofold interest for aesthetics and moral philosophy scholars. Clewis offers both a comprehensive account of an underexamined aspect of Kant's aesthetics and a contribution to the literature devoted to reconstructing how Kant intends to provide the moral law with access, efficacy and durability.

Clewis' *Kant's Humorous Writings* is a thorough elucidation of the content, structure and dynamics of what Kant found funny. In addition to reconstructing Kant's theory of humour, the author hints at the possibility of exploring new areas like Kant's theory of tragedy and comedy (p. 38) or the presence, place and function of the aesthetic idea of the infinite in a joke (p. 198). Furthermore, Clewis' discussion does not require any proficiency in Kant's philosophy since the author skilfully navigates between oversimplifying Kant's thought for the sake of readability and providing accessibility at the expense of accuracy. Finally, Clewis' clarity, light prose and occasional witticisms make the book pleasant reading.

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Frederick the Great's Philosophical Writings, ed. Avi Lifschitz, trans. Angela Scholar Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021 Pp. xlvii + 249 ISBN 9780691176420 (hbk) $35.00

The role that Frederick the Great (1712–86) played in the Enlightenment goes far beyond that of the typical sovereign of one of the major political and military powers of Europe as it then was. The leading monarchs of the time were usually engaged in much more concrete matters than philosophical reflection, and in the best cases they only communicated their ideas in private, amateurish correspondence with a few scientists and philosophers of note. Rather distinctively, Frederick II, the *roi philosophe*, the 'inimitable modern Solomon' – as his friend and mentor Voltaire used to call him – cultivated throughout his life a passion for philosophy that was anything but dilettantish, and which always accompanied his political commitment and military action.

This collection of Frederick's writings edited by Avi Lifschitz and published in an accurate and refined translation by Angela Scholar (directly from the standard edition, Preuß 1846–56) offers the reader a large selection of works of different nature – essays, epistles, prefaces, notes and even a dialogue of the dead – composed by Frederick starting from the late 1730s. Altogether, these writings testify to the sovereign's persistent interest in the themes and topics that were, at the time, included in the wide spectrum of what was called 'philosophy', namely, political

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theory, literature, arts, and even sciences. The collection is driven by the idea that Frederick's long-standing interest in writing and publishing, far from being a mere *maquillage* of his public persona, a manoeuvre to project his role as a novel Marcus Aurelius, or even an attempt to exert control and authority over the *République des Lettres*, is rather the expression of his genuine theoretical interest and the result of his fruitful engagement with the ideas of his time. Moreover, according to Lifschitz's very convincing suggestion, reading Frederick's philosophical work allows for a better insight into Frederick's political ideas. His reflections on morality, on self-love, on the immortality of the soul, on the philosophical foundation of freedom, serve as the consistent framework of his political opinions on the foundation of sovereignty, of state power, of freedom of thought and expression.

Lifschitz's interpretation takes some distance from a current topos in the scholarship that goes back at least to Friedrich Meinecke, namely the idea of an alleged inconsistency between Frederick's philosophical beliefs and his political action, between the *ethos* of the philosopher and the *kratos* of the ruler. But then, how should we read Frederick's philosophical works? And what is the right way to approach the relationship between the enlightened sovereign, active promoter of the cultural renewal in Europe, and his political absolutism? Lifschitz suggests a reconsideration of the contradiction between what looks like a double-faced Frederick, coming out of a different reading of his philosophical writings that follows from a new methodological approach. As in the usual historical-critical exegesis of texts, Frederick's writings should be brought back to their original place and considered for all intents and purposes within the Enlightenment debate, taking distance from their peculiar authorship. This means, first, that Frederick's writings should be read regardless of their consonance or discordance with the political engagement and military action of the author. Second, they should be placed in their specific cultural context, in order to detect direct and indirect sources, polemical goals, and more or less explicit references to the philosophical debate of the time. Furthermore – according to a 'virtuous' exegetical practice – Frederick's writings should be read leaving aside any consideration on the irretrievable psychological motives of their author, such as his sincerity, disingenuousness, or attempts at dissimulation. Such methodological tenets allow a new perception of Frederick's philosophical work that does not hide its peculiarity under the shade of the colossal presence of its author but reveals its importance for the reader of the time, the features that made it appreciable or reprehensible, and the reasons for its circulation even beyond its author's intentions. This methodological approach also allows a reconsideration of the notion of 'kingship' that Frederick presents in his works, which Lifschitz convincingly suggests we consider as a 'regulative ideal' of eighteenth-century politics rather than the 'realistic image' of the then-political practice.

Lifschitz's robust and detailed introduction provides useful information concerning both the historical-political scenario in which Frederick 'made Prussia great', and the intense philosophical engagement of the sovereign in the debate of the time. The introduction provides a well-conceptualized and well-grounded identification of three core themes around which the selected writings are collected. The first – which besides the renowned *Anti-Machiavelli*, includes the less well-known 'Dissertation on the Innocence of Errors of the Mind', the 'Preface to the History of my Age', the 'Dissertation on the Reasons for Establishing a Repealing Law' and the last writing

in the volume, the 'Essay on the Forms of Government and the Duties of the Sovereigns' – provides an overall picture of Frederick's conception of sovereignty. In his philosophical works Frederick rejects kingship by divine grace in favour of a legitimation of royal authority on the basis of the social contract in which the sovereign acts as the servant of the state. Lifschitz traces back Frederick's ideas to their Hobbesian and Pufendorfian heritage: the origin of royal authority must be seen in the decision of individuals to give up their rights in return for the guarantee of their right to life and property, and the sovereign is the one who holds in his person the will of his subjects. Lifschitz correctly insists on Frederick's flexible way of interpreting the duty of the sovereign to guarantee the well-being and protection of his people, and on his intent to leave (moderate) room for those personal freedoms which allow each person, according to his famous motto *nach seiner Façon selig* [zu] *werden*, without ever yielding to the temptation to see in such forms of recognition of freedom of thought and expression a betrayal of the monarchical principle or an inclination in the direction of modern liberal democracies.

Closely related to the issue of political freedom is the group of writings that includes the 'Letter on Education', the examinations of two writings by Baron d'Holbach, the 'Essay on Prejudice' and the 'System of Nature', and the 'Dialogue of the Dead between Mme de Pompadour and the Virgin Mary'. Criticisms and unflattering opinions on the political practice of the sovereign were, according to Frederick, part of the sphere of freedom that escaped the constraint of the social contract and could therefore be tolerated to the extent that they did not cause social disorders or disturbance of the public order. Except for military matters, Frederick seemed to recognize the importance of public debate of ethical and philosophical issues; accordingly, in his own practice of writing and publishing he ran the risk, as for any author, of being exposed to criticisms, manipulations, misunderstandings and public refutations. In some cases, Frederick suffered the consequences of the public circulation of his writings, over which he did not always have full control (as Lifschitz (forthcoming) shows). Despite Lessing's sharp criticism, according to which the much-vaunted freedom of thought and expression in Prussia was basically intended as the freedom to write public nonsense about religion, it is nevertheless true that Frederick promoted public debate and civil freedom far beyond the then-usual boundaries. The *gelehrte Freiheit*, the *public use* of reason celebrated by Kant, was anything but an acquired right in the monarchies of the time. Indeed, Frederick firmly believed that the circulation of ideas, the progress of sciences, arts and culture were among the national glories and, as such, they had to be actively promoted by the sovereign. The amendment of the laws on censorship and the revival of the Society of Sciences founded by Leibniz at the beginning of the century (relegated by his father, Frederick William I, to among the lowest priorities of the kingdom) are just two of the many remarkable interventions in the cultural renewal in Prussia promoted by Frederick in the aftermath of his accession to the throne in 1740. Even so, it bears noting that the return of Christian Wolff to the University of Halle – an episode that Lifschitz ascribes to the merits of the new sovereign (p. xii) – was in fact already sought by Frederick William I under the influence of Ernst Manteuffel, Johann Gustav Reinbeck and other supporters of the Wolffian cause.

A third group of writings – which includes the 'Letter to Marshal Keith, on the Vain Terrors of Death and the Fears of Another Life' and the 'Letter to My Soul',

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the 'Preface to Extracts from Bayle's Dictionary', the 'Preface to the Abridgement of the Ecclesiastical History by Fleury' and the 'Essay on Self-Love Considered as a Principle of Morality' – focuses on the role the sovereign ascribes to himself in promoting the well-being of his subjects in terms of material prosperity, self-esteem and earthly fulfilment. Presenting Frederick's reflections in the context of the modern debate on luxury and *amour propre*, which had involved relevant representatives of the *Lumières*, from Montesquieu to Rousseau, from Fénelon to Voltaire, but also Hume, Lifschitz highlights Frederick's ideas about the active role the monarch must play in promoting the project of a commercial society. The pursuit of self-love, the welfare of the subjects, self- and social esteem turn out to be fundamental ingredients of such a project. Frederick's paternalistic conception of sovereignty is inspired by an ethics of self-affirmation which rejects any form of personal self-denial, whether it be that of Christian morality, that of the frugal ideal of *Télémaque* or Rousseau's condemnation of the corruptions of the natural instinct of self-preservation. And it is once again against Rousseau that Frederick stresses the importance of a benevolent pursuit of self-love and social esteem as the engine of progress in the arts and sciences, the importance of which for national glory he expressly emphasizes.

These and other themes emerge from Frederick's writings, though he himself certainly had neither the ambition nor the intention to build coherent and all-encompassing systems like those that dominated the German philosophical scene of his time. It does not mean that his philosophical work can be accused of amateurism; it shows rather a peculiar and fruitful form of eclecticism, no doubt at times excessively unstable, which however faithfully returns to the arduous linear path of philosophical reflection. Lifschitz's collection is an invaluable tool for research on the Enlightenment, a fresh look at the works of Frederick the philosopher, which are now newly available for investigation.

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Ian Proops, *The Fiery Test of Critique: A Reading of Kant's Dialectic* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021 Pp. xi + 486 ISBN 9780199656042 (hbk) £105.00

While many of Kant's positive doctrines in the *Critique of Pure Reason* are contained in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic, Kant scholars increasingly recognize that a full understanding of Kant's critique of (theoretical) reason requires a close reading of the Transcendental Dialectic. A 'critique' of reason is an investigation

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