

CAROLINE IN THE LEIBNIZ-CLARKE CORRESPONDENCE OR ON HOW TO MAKE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

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The history of the reception of the so-called correspondence between Leibniz and Clarke is also the history of a concealment: that of the role and participation of Princess Caroline of Ansbach in it. Despite having been the engine and vehicle for the exchange between Leibniz and Clarke to take place¹, Caroline is hardly mentioned in studies on the correspondence². And in the few instances when her participation is considered, she is treated only in her 'virginal' role of a mere mediator and conciliator³. On the other hand, it may seem established to not think of Caroline as a philosopher. But she does play a key role in the production of a philosophical work that has been very influential not only for philosophers but also for scientists. Can Caroline's involvement in the Leibniz-Clarke controversy be considered as *philosophical*?

My thesis in this paper is that Caroline's function is not limited to that of a passive mediation between two (male) philosophers. On the contrary, I defend that Caroline not only initiates the exchange between Leibniz and Clarke, but also determines the content and form of the exchange, i.e., the arguments to be given. Moreover, I state that Caroline is the *real addressee* of both Leibniz and Clarke while engaging in the dispute, so that without considering Caroline's participation, our understanding of the epistolary exchange is erroneous or, at least, incomplete. This is the content of the first part of my paper: first, how the Leibniz-Clarke controversy is received within the traditional scope of the history of philosophy (1.1); second, I present briefly Caroline of Ansbach (1.2); third, I present how she is spoken of within the scholarly reception and make my case for another reading of the controversy, that acknowledges Caroline's role (1.3.).

The results of the first part of my paper open the discussion on a meta-philosophical level: I question how to write and conceive of history of philosophy. With this aim, I tackle a way into the following challenges for historians of philosophy: first, I question how to be aware of misogynistic biases implicit in a historian's view of the past (2.1). Second, I question how to determine *who* contributes to philosophy, for Caroline's decisive participation in the controversy between Leibniz and Clarke demonstrates the importance of the figure of the

¹ Cf. Klopp (1973), p. 52 i.a.

² Cf. Gerhardt and Ariew attest to Caroline's mediating role, but do not recognize her as an epistemic agent. See: Ariew (2000), pp. ix ff.; Gerhardt (1879-1890), pp. 347-351. Although he bases his translation on Gerhardt's edition, Cassirer does not comment at all on Caroline's role. He prefers to look for the keys to the interpretation of the controversy in the figure of I. Newton, thus failing to understand it from a global point of view (see Cassirer (1904), Part I). On the contrary, Eloy Rada considers the Correspondence Leibniz-Caroline as indispensable for understanding the Correspondence Leibniz-Clarke, albeit for political rather than philosophical reasons (see Rada (2016), pp. xvi-xviii).

³ Cf. Valiati (1997), p. 3, 7-11. Valiati concedes a certain epistemic agency to Caroline in p. 65 and 165. Bertoloni and Brown acknowledge a greater degree of autonomy and agency in Caroline's interventions, but, in the end, they still reduce her role to that of mediating between Clarke and Leibniz. For both Bertoloni and Brown, the major dispute between Leibniz and Newton remains the driving force of the Leibniz-Clarke polemic and thus also the interpretative framework (see Bertoloni Meli (1999); Brown (2016); Brown (2021), p. 232, n. 8).

interlocutor in the process of production of philosophical ideas (2.2). Finally, if the engagement of an interlocutor may determine the production of a philosopher's ideas, as it may be seen written in a publication, then philosophy might be understood as a *process* or *dialogue*⁴, rather than as the written result of the process or abstract of the discussion. I engage with this final discussion on section 2.3.

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⁴ Tangentially in line with Lisa Shapiro (2004).