

Thomas Isermann

Jacob Böhme and the Philosophizing. Introduction into his writings.

(Lecture, held on 18.02.2017 in the "Kultour Station", Görlitz. Many Thanks to Clint Stephens, Houston / Texas for helping to translate.)¹

You will have noticed that the title of my lecture is not: Jacob Böhme and philosophy. So I'm not talking about his relationship to a discipline or institution, but to his activities. You may rightly ask, how is it meant that philosophizing is something different from philosophy? Isn't the one certainly the basis of the other, and do they relate to each other like walking to walk or thinking to think?

Philosophy also confronts us as an established institution that performs its social function, as Max Horkheimer characterized it, "in the critique of the existing". Philosophy claims scientific coordinates for this. It reflects our present, criticizes science, discusses ethical problems, and keeps a general critical consciousness alive. With its historical function, philosophy reflects the conditions of its own history. It works historically to the extent that it processes and conveys the sequence and generation of ideas of Jacob Boehme's contribution to the history of thoughts would find a field of discussion here.²

This profile of a representative philosophy is difficult to find in Boehme's way of thinking. As a layman, he observed what he did not understand about his time, first of all about Christianity as he encountered it. The contradictions of this religion, its representatives, its teachings, its impact on people, he has worked out within himself. He thought unfinished in it, even in contradictions, in searching movements of thought and in awareness of his own inadequacy. He always presents his thoughts self-willedly, sometimes defiantly, sometimes timidly,

¹ This translation of a lecture in Goerlitz, hometown of Jacob Böhme, is only a first introduction, all citations are translated by the author based on the german edition of the complete works from 1730.

² Lucinda Martin (ed.): Jacob Böhme and Early Modern Philosophy. In: Aries. Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism. Vol. 18, Issue 1, Special Issue, Brill 2018. Cecil Muratori: The first German philosopher: the mysticism of Jacob Boehme as interpreted by Hegel. Dordrecht 2016.

sometimes sweetly, sometimes angrily. This constant becoming of a thought in the upheaval of ever new approaches causes despair in those who expect a system guided by reason or a philosophy that can be referred to in Jacob Boehme's works. However, this would be a misunderstanding of later times, since we are used to suspect a sequence of such systems in the history of philosophy. If we renounce this expectation and surrender to the emotionality with which Boehme philosophized about Christianity and his time, and which in the forms of his writing already depicts the process of philosophizing, his movement of thought, his baroque style of writing, then Boehme first becomes understandable to us as a writer in whom the enigmatic and the emotional are constitutive elements of philosophizing. This leads to difficulties in understanding. We praise Jacob Böhme for what we have understood, not what was important to him. Thus we run the risk of reproducing him and of considering our own mysticism as an interpretive achievement. This circumstance is responsible for the enormously heterogeneous history of Boehme's work. Therefore, we lower our expectations and start by observing his self-image as a writer.

"[...] I am astonished," he writes in the Aurora, "...that God wants to reveal himself completely in such a simple man, and urges him to write this down, since there would be much better scribes who could write and execute it at a much higher level than I, who am only a mockery and fool to the world."

The fact that Jacob Boehme was a craftsman and thus a layman in philosophical or theological matters has both astonished and fascinated his contemporaries. However, Böhme did not think up the social roles of the unskilled and the enlightened - both roles are in a biographical complementary relationship - and they were not exclusive either. As philosophical fiction, they already served as a license to speak freely and unspoilt in the Renaissance and Humanism. If scholasticism was responsible for the knowledge of the words of the Bible and their interpretation, the layman, was granted the right to read the world and

nature. The laymen, however, who were mostly biblical, read in the Book of Nature, according to a famous metaphor of that time, which on the one hand became the reading material of later natural science. On the other hand, the laymen here also posed the question about God in a completely new way: As a book the world offers a double aspect: that of the contents and that of the references back to the author. To draw conclusions about God from nature means to paraphrase him in the language of nature, and also to accept him in the centre of constant rewriting, where theological language seemed no longer to reach. Nicolaus Cusanus, for example, as one of the last representatives of scholasticism its overcomer, justifies in several of his dialogues handed down to us the wisdom of the laity.

The corpus of text alone, which Böhme produced in no more than about six and a half years, i.e. for the 400-page "Aurora" mainly the period from January to May 1612, for the later writings the years 1618 to 1624 - the year of his death - is worth all the attention: the surviving work comprises a good 4000 pages. This results in a writing output of around 600 pages per year, an average of 50 pages per month, including the work as a shoemaker during the writing of the "Aurora" and as a yarn publisher and frequent traveler from 1613. Three writings, the first after the six-year break, the "Three Principles of Divine Being", "On the Triple Life of Man" and the "40 Questions from the Soul" were written in three quarters of a year; that would be a good thousand pages in nine months! The "Mysterium magnum", which comprises just under 900 pages, was begun at the earliest in November 1622 and completed in September 1623, thus written down in at most ten months!

His treatises, especially the small writings on serenity, penance, rebirth, contemplation or revelation, appeal to an early modern scene of seekers of meaning. Böhme wrote with them a useful literature of Protestant mysticism for self-study. Their aim seems to be a far-reaching replacement of church institutions. He had, supported by

friends, a certain marketing strategy. This included the attempt, especially in the small writings, to address practical topics, to describe simple connections. Böhme was involved in the distribution of his manuscripts among the conspiratorial readers. He worked on his reputation as an enlightened layman. Together with Siegmund von Schweinichen he published the first print of "Weg zu Christo", Way to Christ. He informed himself about the writings of other enlightened people. He looked around to see who else was writing in his spiritual and regional environment, and participated in the debates as much as he could.

In four short keywords I invite you to watch Jacob Böhme philosophizing: Firstly, his insight into his own problems of representation; secondly, the relationship between nature and language; thirdly, self-knowledge; fourthly, narration as a way out of insoluble contradictions.

First: Problems of representation

We find sentences like this in the Aurora or Morgenröthe im Aufgang, in which Boehme assures us: "I do not write pagan, but philosophically." Is what we learn there about angels, Lucifer, Saturn, spring spirits, stars - just to name a few keywords - philosophical? Strange also this confrontation, although - according to historical understanding - it is precisely ancient paganism that has been handed down as a trend-setting philosophy also in Christian times. How is that to be understood?

The Aurora or Dawn in the Rise is a work of departure. In the Aurora, Böhme reports on crises, life crises that he has overcome. The expressive book of Aurora is the report of it. Through the initial brooding, Böhme writes:

"[...] I was therefore altogether melancholic and deeply saddened, and could not be comforted by any scripture, which was almost [very]

familiar to me: during which the devil would not have ceased, who then often instilled in me pagan thoughts, of which I will keep silent here. But when in such a tribulation my spirit (then I understood little and nothing of what he was) rose up earnestly in God as with a great storm, and my whole heart and mind, together with all other thoughts and wills, was united in it, struggling without ceasing with the love and mercy of God, and not slackening, he blessed me, that is, he enlightened me with his Holy Spirit. He enlightened me with His Holy Spirit so that I might understand His will and get rid of my sadness. [...] But what triumphs in the spirit have been, I cannot write or speak. Nor can it be compared with anything but that where life is born in the midst of death, and compares itself to the resurrection from the dead."

Böhme himself describes his crisis as the expression of a melancholy, which was typical for the time as a diagnosis, referring to the loss of old certainties that shook the world at that time, such as - but not only - the loss of the old world view that Copernicus held against his new one. Melancholy was a diagnostic, one of the four temperaments (the others were the sanguine, the choleric and the phlegmatic) into which the mental dispositions of individuals were sorted as if in drawers. This buzzword of the epoch about "noble" melancholy, as it was also called, served Böhme to legitimize the writer's authority, which he told his contemporaries - and himself - in a comprehensible way. Since the Renaissance, melancholy was even a prerequisite for being able to be enlightened. Legendary works such as that of Albrecht Dürer or the later classic on the subject, Robert Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy", first published in 1621, testify to the popularity of this model of illness. Perhaps Boehme suffered from depressive fluctuations, which he actually experienced in the alternation of melancholy and repeated moments of happiness, and which he interpreted as enlightenments. The quoted narrative of the breakthrough to writing sounds very authentic, but is also full of quotations from the alchemy and mystic tradition.

Perhaps Boehme's motivation to study alchemy was a consequence of the diagnosed melancholy. For according to the early modern humoral pathology, according to the doctrine of juices, black bile, or melancholy, can be cured by alchemistic measures.³

In alchemy, the planet Saturn is associated with melancholy. If we now look at how the planet Saturn is named in Boehme's complete works, in the early theory of qualities, in the later works, in the planetary tables of the "tabulae", then melancholy becomes clear and logical as an underlying theme. It has hardly been noticed in the literature to Böhme, how closely a connotation of alchemy and melancholy in Böhme runs along the contemporary standard. It is less important whether Böhme actually had mystical visions that would have freed him from sadness than how he and his time understood anamnesis and therapy. According to his first biographer, Abraham von Franckenberg, Böhme was

"[...] with the beginning of the 17th Seculi, namely in the year 1600, when in the 25th year of his age he was seized by the divine light for the second time, and with his starry soul-spirit he was introduced to the innermost reason or centre of the secret nature by a gruesome [abrupt] sight of a pewter vessel (as the lovely jovial appearance) [...]."

This sentence contains hidden messages: the "jovial" appearance is that of Jovis, genitive to Jupiter. In alchemy, the metal associated with Jupiter is tin ("tin vessel"). These references can be found in Paracelsus, in Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, in the Italian Renaissance theorists, and even in Albrecht Dürer's famous copperplate engraving "Melancholia I", which depicts a pewter tablet that the sad angel cannot see and perhaps for this reason remains melancholy.

³ New aspects to the contemporary scientific background: Bo Anderson et. al. (ed.) : Jacob Böhme and His World. Leiden, Boston 2018.

In ancient mythology, Zeus defeated Chronos, or Jupiter defeated Saturn (in Roman names). This model is reflected in the discussions on melancholy from the Middle Ages to the 17th century. In my impression, Jacob Böhme's writing follows the therapeutic approach of overcoming melancholy by writing the cosmic logic of the seven planets and their alchemical meaning. Böhme's obsessive writing with its infinite redundancies and repetitions then receives a therapeutic motive. This is something that could be discussed. Jacob Böhme speaks openly about his problems in writing.

"And so it was a strong influence on my mind to write it down for a memorial: Even though it was hard for me to grasp it in my outward appearance, and I was able to put it into my pen, I had to start working in this very big mystery as a child going to school. Inside I see it as if it were in a great depth, then I see through it as if it were in chaos, because everything is inherent, but its unfolding was impossible for me."

Böhme reports here on the genesis of the thoughts on the "Aurora", the main parts of which were written in the first five months of 1612, whereby the twelve years that preceded it began in 1600 with the quoted and decisive visionary experience that, according to Böhme, gave him a unique insight into the nature of God and replaced "art or studying" once and for all. We can imagine this vision as a picture of the wholeness in which the contradictions of his world come together at least in an imagined meaningful unity:

"You dear searching mind, I would like to write this in your heart if only I could: see it is all as solely God, but you ask, where does evil come from? Then you see in all creatures wickedness and poison, and then also love and desire: think how nature is a serious being."

With a high readiness for self-criticism, which is rather missing in his later works, he sometimes confesses his excessive demand to represent this wholeness:

"Some species [some objects] are often repeated and described more and more deeply, for the sake of the reader, including my own tenacious comprehension. [...] then because of our perdition our knowledge is piecemeal, and not all at once perfect; how much this book is a wonder of the world which the holy soul will understand."

Here, an individual disadvantage is justified by anthropological generality. Its problems of presentation as well as possible problems of understanding of the readers are explained with the original sin and the loss of divine knowledge in paradise ("our ruinousness"). On the one hand Böhme knows how to act modestly as writer, on the other hand he claims the highest of all possible legitimations. His sense of ego, his sense of value appears extremely divided, in a frightening separation between the - let us say: normal ego and the divinely-called self. In demonstratively unacademic language, the enlightened layman stands both above and below the institutions of knowledge.

"For understand only your mother tongue correctly," warns Böhme, "you have such deep ground in it as in Hebrew or Latin, whether the scholars rise up in it like a proud bride; it doesn't matter, their art is now on the decline. The spirit shows that even before the end of many a Laye will know and understand more than the wisest Doctores now know [...]."

Böhme apologizes to the reader that the great simultaneousness of his theory of qualities, the wheels of the stars' orbits, the interlocking of natural processes, the quasi three-dimensional and kinetic, even the spherical, can only be reproduced two-dimensionally and one after the other, in the linear writing process.

"If one wants to see God the Son, then one must look at natural things, otherwise I cannot write about Him: For the Divine Being is in power that cannot be written or spoken. We must therefore make parables before us if we want to speak of God: for we live in this world in pieces, and are made of pieces."

Clearly enough he puts his own inadequate writing parallel to the whole world, which itself offers only fragments. With this Böhme does not resign himself as a layman, but is in exquisite neighborhood to the Bible, whose thoughts Böhme indirectly quotes in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, there is also the insight:

"For our knowledge is piecework, and our prophetic speaking is piecework."

On the subject of fragmentarism and wholeness a comprehensive tradition could be called up, which reaches from the Bible through the entire history of philosophy up to our time.

So let us note the first keyword of his philosophical endeavour: to think the simultaneity of a wholeness, but to write in the fragile linearity of its representation.

Second. Nature and language

In Böhme we often come across passages like the following:

"The speaking in itself as in eternity, and the spoken also in itself as in time: the speaking is the master, and the spoken is the tool. The speaking makes the nature of eternity and the spoken makes the nature of time, one in its version makes two qualities, as light and darkness; in it there is the element of all beings, which in the spoken is divided into four elements, but in the spoken is only one. [...] in the four elements

alone there is a number and an end, then they have taken a beginning with their utterance, having become their own, and set themselves in a model of a time, which runs in itself as a clockwork: it forms, builds and breaks.”

This citation contains the nucleus of Jacob Böhme’s System. So something speaks in creation, and something is what is spoken. Böhme imagines the interaction of the divine with nature as a speech act: the divine "speaks" the concrete nature around us. Böhme's entire doctrine of qualities is based on this relationship of creation to creatures, as a self-referential communication through sound and light.

The basic idea of Jacob Boehme's work " De Signatura Rerum", from which the quoted passage is taken, seems quite simple: The invisible forces of nature create the visible world of things, and from the visible natural forms we can read the invisible processes: like a writing, just like the famous "language of nature".

The metaphors of this thought (it does not originate from Böhme himself) again corresponds to the pictorial tradition of the "Book of Nature". This metaphor - Böhme makes use of it - can rightly be regarded as a central one of his own writing poetics. The idea of a connection between the Book of Nature and Boehme's own books is tempting, because the author of the Book of Nature, the "Speaker", is the same as the one inside his own writings. Thus a parallel between the world and the work is created in thought, and the theory of signatures would be the system of reference to both books.

Not in all works, but expressively in "Aurora", systematically in "De signatura rerum", narratively in "Mysterium magnum", Böhme applies a pronunciation semantics for understanding German words, which physiognomically identifies sound and content with each other. An example:

“The word ‘Himmel’ [heaven] is grasped in the heart, and reaches to the lips, there it is closed: and the syllable ‘Mel’ [from Him-Mel] opens the lips again, and is held in the middle of the tongue, and the spirit comes out of the mouth on both sides of the tongue,[...] But because it is a word with a double syllable, and the other syllable Mel opens the mouth again, it means that the gates of the Godhead have been opened again.“

Whole parts of his cosmogony sometimes contract into a single word, if Boehme interprets it accordingly: "Barmherzig" (english: "merciful"), for example, reflects the struggle of the first qualities, whereby "barm", "mercy", means the dark first quality, "herzig" the son (Herz = heart of God, Jesus Christus) means the second quality. Another interpretation of the sound of words is given by the other name of Lucifer (german: Teufel).

"The word ‘teu’ has its origin in the hard knocks or tones, and the word ‘fel’ has its origin in the trap: so now Mr. Lucifer is called the Teufel [devil], and no longer Cherubin or Seraphin."

The speech act "creates" the image of heaven by its pronunciation, one might say, and puts into the pronunciation elements of its semantics, its content. Boehme does this with any words, especially those from the Bible. To put it in a formula:

In the Book of Nature, nature's language of things refers to their holistic context within creation. In the Book of Böhme, the writer imitates the linguistic nature of words and uses them for the famous word-sound interpretations that we find only in Böhme.

We find the concept of philosophy as an alchemistic-nature-oriented one already in Paracelsus. Freedom in the exploration of nature, which follows from the liberation from astral influence, is with Paracelsus, (he uses the word himself) a philosophical claim in times of Christian opposition to theology and church. Paracelsus already justifies himself

with quite similar critical concerns as Boehme in the writing "Liber prologi in vitam beatam" (i.e. in the preface to the "Book of the Happy Life"):

"That I am writing here of the essence of the blessed life is not that I am giving teachings to the unbelievers or to those who are ignorant of Christ, for I am not an apostle or the like, but a philosopher in the German manner. ... the spirit acts where he wills, not in all, not in many, but where he lusts."

The term "philosopher" was different from what we are familiar with in the Paracelsus-alechemistic environment. The philosopher of the "German kind" does not want to missionize outwardly (he is not an "apostle"), but inwardly for self-determination in relation to the church hierarchy. As a contemporary of Luther, Paracelsus did not see himself as a reformer. But it is plausible to us that "German" to philosophize meant to do it in German and to carry the knowledge to the people, especially the knowledge about religious matters. So also with Böhme. Probably in no other of his works does the term "philosopher / philosophical" appear as often as in "De signatura rerum", a decidedly natural history work in alchemical nomenclature. From here the term Boehme is explained as "philosophus teutonicus", as a German philosopher, a term that the Paracelsist Balthasar Walther gave him. Böhme was proud of this honour and signed numerous letters with this title.

Here we have the explanation of the short sentence in the "Aurora", he did not write "pagan" but "philosophical"; not un-Christian but un-theological. In the things of nature, according to him, we can read similar messages as in a Holy Scripture. This reading should not be confused with natural science. It is about an emotional, spiritual relationship with nature, one that a landscape painter has, less a physicist, in short an aesthetic one. The formula of "liber naturae", the book of nature, which is the basis here, remains of course only a

metaphor and would be hopelessly overloaded if it were to be shouldered solely by Boehme's cosmology. There is another important biblical reference with which John's gospel begins:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word. [...] all things were made by the same."

Here we have a theological insurance for Boehme's gigantic natural language speculation. However, a deep religiousness of that time is connected with the identification of the inner Word with "Jesus Christ". Boehme's very independent, three-part scripture of the "Incarnation of Jesus Christ" bears witness to this. Among the longer writings, this is a deeply mystical, even platonic-emotional scripture, in which it says:

"We must proceed from reason and enter into the incarnation of Christ, and so we shall be taught by God."

Admittedly, this is difficult to philosophize with, and I will content myself with a little meditation on the title, which is in Latin: "de incarnatione verbi", i.e.: embodiment of the word. What does the incarnation of a person called Jesus Christ mean? Doesn't it sound tautological, according to which the incarnation of a house or the becoming of a book only acquires meaning at the price of mystification, in that the idea of a house becomes a finished house? Not in this case. Or do we have to think and translate in a completely different direction: Not incarnation, but becoming human? Not in this case. Tyrants and fiends could become human, with Jesus Christ we cannot imagine that he would need that. I want to unravel the mystery. We are dealing with a reinterpretation of the Trinity, the doctrine of the Trinity consisting of Father - Son - and Holy Spirit, which can be found in this form only in Jacob Böhme. In Christian theology it is an eminently important question to what extent the Trinity existed already before the birth of Christ. If, in whatever form, the "Son" is eternal, so also before his birth as a human being. His appearance on the stage of the world, however

dreadfully he ends on the cross, is only one stage on which he has a mission to fulfil. At this point Böhme now says: Then the Trinity as a positive unity can only be understood in the hereafter. It then does not encompass the negativity of the world at all, remains foreign to it. For Böhme there is no divine being outside the creative nature.

From 1618 (not yet in the "Aurora" from 1612) he knows the concept of the completely indifferent "unground", which is not part of the Trinity. He therefore completely draws the threefold deity, which he also calls ternarius sanctus from 1620, into the world, the earth, society and the soul of man.

"A man is his own god and his own devil: to whatever torment (german: Qual) he may be inclined and give himself, the same drives and leads him, the same work-master he becomes."

That's why Boehme speaks of the three principles and the threefold life from 1618 to 1621, the titles of two major works. Did you notice the word "torment" (Qual) in the quotation? It doesn't quite fit into the sentence there. What is meant, of course, we suspect, is the theory of the seven "Qualities", which again plays a role in the Aurora and in the works from 1622 onwards. The "Qualities" are divided in "Qual" (torment) and "quellen" (to swell, in creation).

We are now well prepared to take a closer look at the early teachings on form or quality, the 3-principle theory of the middle phase and the interlocking of both teachings in the late work.

Third: Self-knowledge

Another motif of his philosophising is the motto of "Know thyself, gnothi seauton." Several of Boehme's works contain this central sentence of

Western philosophy, as does the work of "Triple Life" in 1620: Boehme writes:

"In this misery on earth, nothing is more necessary and useful to man than that he should learn to know himself, what he is, from whence he is, or where he wants to go? What he would become and where he would go when he dies? Is that the most useful thing for someone else to know? For external change remains in this world; but what the heart grasps, man takes with him."

The preface to the "Three Principles" also begins with this pattern of self-knowledge that is fundamental to any philosophy. We can quite precisely indicate Boehme's source of this ancient claim to thinking: In a letter to his friend and copyist Christian Bernhard, shortly after the report that the work of the "Triple Life" was finished, on September 12th, 1620:

"Because of the two (...) little books, the New Testament and the third part Gnothi seauton, please be patient, they are not with us now, until after the Leipzig Mass I am sorry, but they will be sent to you."

No better than the names of the borrowed books symbolize two cultural spaces in the reader Böhme: the Christian Bible and a book whose Greek title "Gnothi Seauton" quotes the core sentence of pre-Socratic philosophy, "know thyself". It will certainly be the work of the same name of Valentin Weigel (1533-1588), the priest of Zschopau in Saxony who was critical of the Reformation, as Andrew Weeks has noticed,⁴ trained by Meister Eckhart, Paracelsus and Thomas Müntzer, and who carried out anonymous shadow-writing against his own orthodoxy. There was indeed a "third part" of Weigel's "Gnothi seauton", but it is unsure if this third part comes from Weigel. It was published as a book

⁴ Andrew Weeks: Valentin Weigel (1533-1588), Ein Ketzer in neuer Perspektive. Mainz 2017. See also: Andrew Weeks: Boehme. An intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-century Philosopher and Mystic. New York 1991.

posthumously in 1618, just in time for the beginning of Boehme's second writing period.

Both Boehme and Weigel's writing have a basic idea, which is briefly described. It lies on a line of tradition that uses ancient and Christian thinking for reflection in order to place one's own self in the world. "For to recognize oneself / is a beginning to bliss", writes later, as an exponent of radical pietism, the nonconformist and Boehme student Friedrich Breckling. For them, man is the cosmos in miniature, he contains the world in himself once again, entirely in the correspondence that Paracelsus saw between macrocosm and microcosm. However: To recognize the whole cosmos is an excessive demand, no one can achieve this realization. But since every human being carries all the cosmic elements within him, he can also try to understand the great connections through self-knowledge. The "Know thyself" stands before the claim to grasp the cosmos. Thus Weigel says: "Yes, it is better that you should know yourself, for you know all things in heaven and on earth." Thus says Böhme:

"Our writing does not go so far that we want to found the Godhead in the eternal nature; no, that cannot be, but that we want to show the blind man the way which he himself must go: We cannot walk with his feet [...]."

The argument is so important to Böhme, that he read many books but read them in vain because they did not help him, finds an explanation in this motif:

"For only I can recognize myself, no books can do this for me. The books do not know me. We can learn from them, but we can only understand ourselves and our nature through experience."

The lost that we are to seek is, before the time horizon of Böhme, theologically speaking, paradise. Philosophically speaking, the biblical paradise, about which Boehme writes extensively in the work of the

"Three Principles", stands for an allegorical space of longing to escape alienation, alienation from oneself. The "Know thyself" does not lead back to the Garden of Eden of childhood. Eve and Adam "recognized" each other in their nakedness after the expulsion from the Garden of Ignorance and were ashamed. But they recognized each other as human beings with their faults.

"If we recall this recognition correctly, we see clearly that we were as imprisoned as we were led up to that point, and it is precisely by the wise men of this world that they had imprisoned us in their art of reason, that we must see with their eyes both in Philosophy and Theology: And may this spirit, which has led us captive for a long time, be called the Anti-Christ, however cheaply. In the light of nature I can find no other name, since I could call him with, than the Anti-Christ in Babel. Only be diligent, you will see him riding; he shall be shown to you, you shall not be allowed to wear glasses, not even to an academy: he rides over the whole world in all castles, towns and villages, over body and soul. [...]"

The liberation that is to lead out of the dungeon of alienation has a different allegorical foil than the Garden of Eden. It is the apocalypse that liberates, the Judgment Day, the Revelation. The forefinger, with which Boehme refers to the seriousness of the situation, lends emphasis to its end-time seriousness: The riding Antichrist, who in a terrible mutation left Dürer's and Brueghel's paintings and now rides into the catastrophic Thirty Years' War, dramatizes, even terrorizes the relationship between reason and alienation, so that - in a second dimension - self-knowledge helps prepare for Revelation. In the liberating revelation (apo-kalypse means dis-revelation) the self-knowledge of the whole world before its downfall shows itself. Many a thing therefore sounds as if it had been decided for the end of time and accordingly mysterious in the serious whispering of Jacob Boehme: "Therefore no one shall revile the other, for he knows not under whom voice he has spoken: now that which is to be done has happened."

Fourth: forms of narration

How does Boehme's philosophizing behave in the face of insoluble contradictions, where he does not know what to do, how does he philosophize in the face of evil, of negativity in the world? Already in the Aurora, the problem of evil preoccupies him, and throughout his life, writing about it, this does not let him go:

"Now you speak: Did not the whole God of such [Lucifer's case] before the time of the creation of the angels know that it would happen? Nay, for if God had known before the creation of the angels, it would have been an eternal will, and would not have been an enemy of God; but God would have created him as a devil in the beginning."

For this is the problem: Lucifer was conceived as a beautiful angel, whose beauty, however, drove him to vanity, that is to say, to the "self" and "pride" turned away from God, which Boehme calls the first of the four "sons" of Lucifer. The other sons are called avarice, envy and wrath, thus the normal catalogue of our humanities.

What became of the once so beautiful angel was outside the temporal competence of God, and thus also outside every predestination, every predetermination. So either God is all-wise and omnipotent, in which case he would not only be loving (Lucifer would be his invention), or he possesses only insufficient creative omnipotence, in which case he can want the good but create the evil. As Böhme now emphatically affirms the first, but applies the second in his thoughts, a tension arises in which his philosophising "moves" and requires a staff that embodies precisely this constant conflict. Through the aporia in theory, the eternal paradox of the question of evil, why God allows it, this eternal contradiction, only very rarely admitted as in the above quoted one, Böhme finds an epitome of unsolved problems. I would like to explain this briefly.

In the Aurora, almost only in it, the epic of the battle of the angels takes place on three levels: The wheel of qualities is itself full of sensuality. Anger and fury arise at breakneck speeds. Here every quality is a quality. The love tincture of light as well as the mild words of Jupiter and Venus, for example - their quality is rather the swelling - have a calming effect. These movements are often illustrated in parables, such as...

"[...] the sweet quality loves the heat very much, so I love the fact that I can't compare it with anything else: take a likeness, which is much too narrow, of two young people of noble complexion [constitution], when they heat up against each other in love-fire, it is such a fire, if they could crawl into each other's bodies, or transform themselves into one body, they would do so; but this earthly love is only cold water and not really fire; one cannot find a real likeness in this half dead world [...]"

And yet, even if no comparison is possible, these qualities live in Boehme's thought only through their reassurance in the sensual, because they cannot be described in abstract terms. Since the qualities are personalized and repeated on the second level, that of the angelic and devil world, sensuality is also transferred to them. From the dynamic flow or tearing of the qualities, an action according to the qualities, "essences", of the quality that brings them forth, arises in these etheric bodies. Especially the devil, as a person, is able to tease elements and people on the earthly world, the third level. Boehme's reckoning with him finds poetically brilliant turns through his high emotionality in writing, as when it is said about the fall of Lucifer:

"If all trees were scribes, and all branches were pens, and all mountains were books, and all waters were inks; yet could they not sufficiently describe the misery that Lucifer and his angels brought to his locum."

Note the writing metaphors in the passage. This "locus" - place - is the darkness once of the first quality, furthermore of nature and its harsh and hard qualities. As the "principle of isolation", the devil, for example,

prevents the soul from being released from its so-called complex, its psychic involvement, and promotes all self-will and egoism. For Boehme's reports on this, by the way, the problem arises that the devil could come between him and the reader, so that he prepares him especially for the passages in which the devil is told in a revealing way. In "Aurora" he often threatens him and addresses him directly. In his revelations he puts remarks such as:

"Prince Lucifer, how do you like it?" or: "But wait, Fritz [nickname for Friedrich], you have also given me a few shocks; I have got to know you, and I want to open your door here a little, so that someone else can see who you are."

Boehme's occasionally narrative philosophising would be incomplete if we did not mention the late major work, the "Mysterium Magnum". Even the first comparison of the individual writings reveals differences in the text genre as well as in the stylistic levels to which the writer demonstratively moves: Theological discussion (in "electione gratiae"), alchemical reflections (in "Signatura rerum"), tracts similar to sermons, comforting writings, dialogues, polemical controversial writings, letters. The "Mysterium magnum" is a commentary on Genesis whose aesthetic elements are reminiscent of a novel essay. Narrative elements and philosophizing reflect each other, thus opening up the biblical stories of Moses' First Book.

This late work is by far Böhme's most extensive and mature. In this respect, the title "Magnum" is rightly called. It presents a meticulous interpretation of Genesis, covering 78 chapters, from the beginning of creation to Jacob's funeral and Joseph's death. The work claims its own philological calibration. Typical of late works, it seems to be overflowing, yet still like a summa. Boehme's "Mysterium magnum" is a monolith in the landscape of his writings. In terms of time, comparisons with the "Joseph motif" are obvious, for example in Grimmelshausen's novel "The Chaste Joseph" from 1667, or with the motif of expulsion from paradise, for example in John Milton's "Paradise Lost", also from 1667.

Of course, these comparisons with the genre of epic poetry should not be overstressed. However, it owes its genre-free unwieldiness and a certain stubbornness to being almost unexplored. As far as I can see, there is no current individual study of this major work of Böhme.

With committed imagination Jacob Böhme retells all the stories of Genesis. The expulsion from paradise, Cain and Abel, the Flood - Noah's "box" of wood is of particular interest to the craftsman Böhme -, the building of the Tower of Babel, whose language catastrophe is enormously important for Böhme's philosophy of language, Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his family. Exactly in the middle of the work is a self-commentary, an instruction for reception:

"And you should know that the first book of Moses was written entirely from the spirit of hinting at what each story in the character means: He who wants to read the story and understand it properly must model the old and the new man in his mind, and set Christ and Adam against each other, he may understand everything; and besides, he understands nothing of it, but only a childlike historia, which is rich in mysteries, that no man wants to pronounce it from the cradle to the highest age."

For this is the purpose of all biblical retelling, to transfer what is told to the present in order to understand mythical stories in a new way. With the "Mysterium Magnum", Böhme's interest in Jewish philosophy, the Kabbalah, begins to grow, admittedly in a Christian-legitimated guise; anything else would have been unthinkable. The reasons and extent of this have not yet been fully researched. While there is not much left of the spontaneous joy of formulation of the early "Aurora" in the late work, there is all the more a realistic view of the negativity of the world. Böhme must have felt at the mercy of this negativity, especially in the last year of his life, since the hostilities around him must have reached an unbearable level.

Jacob Boehme's philosophizing is realized between the lines of Christian certainties as their sometimes radical, sometimes humane criticism of the existing. Let us recapitulate the characteristics of his philosophizing:

1. the awareness of the difference between holistic, systemic knowledge and its poor reproduction as "piecework".
2. the connection between nature and language.
3. self-knowledge as a practice of philosophizing.
4. the emergence of narrative forms from the agony of contradictions.

You will now ask yourself, what do these characteristics of philosophizing have to do with the keywords that usually fall as Boehme's contribution to the history of philosophy, such as his concept of the will, his dialectics certified by Hegel and Ernst Bloch, to name only the most important ones? Well, here, too, the one is based on the other. It is a long way to prove a dialectic with Böhme, perhaps too far, if, for example, a dialectic of the philosophy of history is expected, which assumes an optimistic concept of progress. But many people know how it feels when everything underhand suddenly becomes patchwork. How one feels when words fall apart in one's mouth like mushrooms elevates Boehme's word-sound analyses to the aesthetic nobility.

The fact that he has had an influence on philosophers and artists and their concepts since the Baroque era does not so much make him a critical interlocutor of our modern age: more so that he perceived the negativity of his time with great openness; more so, finally, that the human way in which he moved through his thoughts contributes to the criticism of the existing.

This closes my small circle for today. Whereas systems and ideological wholes used to be the goal of advanced philosophy, today we have to take it upon ourselves to critically accompany the urge to the quasi

totalitarian systematization of our life in technology and the media world. I am convinced that unfinished but committed philosophizing amounts more to a critique of the existing than secular worldviews and religious ideologies, which first and foremost have to justify themselves before they deal with reality. That which melancholically remained of Jacob Böhme and his friends, despite their enlightenments and visions, joins their covenant to the Brothers of the Brooding, to a community of free spirits, to whom the heraldic motto of Paracelsus could be dedicated:

Alterius non sit, qui suus esse potest: One would not be in bondage to another who can listen to himself.