
Valentin Weigel, a Lutheran pastor in the Saxon town of Zschopau in the sixteenth century, was a German reformer and a man of many and varied interests. An ardent proponent of religious toleration during a period of deeply divisive doctrinal conflicts, Weigel was a follower of medieval mysticism, a student of the nature of knowledge, and a budding cosmologist. When he died in 1588 at the age of 55, however, Weigel had published only a single funeral eulogy; all of his other writings were published either posthumously or not at all. During the early decades of the seventeenth century, Weigel's works gained an audience among those who opposed religious intolerance and the ravages of war, but it was not until the twentieth century that the real significance of Weigel as a progressive thinker was recognized. Why, however, does he even now remain an enigmatic figure relegated to the fringes of Reformation studies?

In his new book, Andrew Weeks answers this question, as he successfully draws Weigel from obscurity to restore him to his rightful place in the German intellectual tradition. In this first book-length treatment of Weigel's ideas and writings to be published in English, Weeks argues that Weigel's ideas were ahead of their time, that his “approach to toleration is embodied in his writings and related to his other themes, including his critical-theoretical understanding of self, knowledge, and world” (p. 186). Taking issue with earlier traditions that presented Weigel as either a Lutheran apologist or a heretic, Weeks portrays him as neither: he was an “oppositional Lutheran,” who resisted all doctrinal hegemony and any form of religious divisiveness and intolerance. Impressed by Weigel's clear, unambiguous message of toleration in an age of religious persecution, Weeks argues that the reformer's early writings synthesize his self-knowledge with his understanding of God and the world. Weeks argues that his universal message of toleration and peace, and his fusion of mystical, Lutheran, and humanistic elements elevate Weigel's ideas and theoretical essays to the level of those of his contemporary, Michel de Montaigne.
In Chapter 1, Weeks discusses Weigel's life, education — he studied natural science at Leipzig and theology at the University of Wittenberg — and career. A follower of Meister Eckhart, Cusanus, and Sebastian Franck, and deeply influenced by Paracelsus and Boëthius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Weigel went on to become an "essayistic theorist" during his tenure in Zschopau. By 1572 his writings, with their overtones of religious dissent and protest, had come to the attention of the authorities, and he was forced to defend his stand on Lutheran orthodoxy to the superintendent of Chemnitz. This he apparently did with little trouble, eventually signing the declaration of loyalty to the Formula of Concord, most probably to save his pastoral position in Zschopau. Weeks dryly notes that his signing raises "questions about his sense of obligation to respond truthfully to the authorities" (p. 14). Whatever his motives, however, Weigel did not cease his opposition to authoritarianism and religious intolerance.

In Chapter 2, Weeks provides a superb analysis of the nature of persecution in Reformation Germany. "Dissenting sectarians," he writes, "were vilified and persecuted with the same rigor that characterized the persecutions of Jews or witches in an era of epidemic witch hunts" (p. 21). Though Weigel never experienced persecution personally, his writings sparked serious controversies in seventeenth-century Germany after his death. Chapter 3 explores Weigel's place in the Lutheran tradition and reviews the sources on which he depended for his own writings. Most influential for his work was the tradition of medieval German mysticism. Two sources in particular helped to shape his own ideas, Luther's edited version of the *Theologia Germanica* and *Der Baseler Taulerdruck* of 1521 and 1522. Weigel understood these works in particular as precursors of and models for the new theology. His early writings synthesize the mystical sermons of Tauler and Meister Eckhart with the "difficult theories of Paracelsus and the *Theologia Germanica*" (p. 86).

Weeks discusses and analyzes Weigel's writings in Chapters 4 through 7. Following his defense in 1577, Weigel became more strident in his opposition to intolerance. His *On the Life of Christ* exemplifies his dismay at religious divisiveness, for he rejected doctrinal and dogmatic codifications, including the Formula of Concord he had earlier signed. He denounced the persecution of heretics and, perhaps most tellingly, cast his gaze to the future to speculate on the discord and discontent he saw as inevitable for a confessionally divided Germany. By this point in his career, Weeks tells us, Weigel had wearied of the doctrinal controversies that infused the Reformation.

Chapter 8 is devoted to the problems involved with identifying Weigel's posthumously published works. Some that have been attributed to him were, according to Weeks, written in Weigel's style by later dissenters. The difficulty of sorting through what may or may not be Weigel's work is enormous, and even Weeks makes it clear through his close reading of a collection of sermons, *Kirchen Oder Hauspostill*, that there are no definitive answers. This chapter is an impressive lesson in comparative analysis, as Weeks dissects the sermons paragraph by paragraph to distinguish Weigel's work from "pseudoepigraphic Weigelian publi-
cations” (p. 143). Chapter 9 explores the historiography of Weigel's unfinished work, *Viererlei Auslegung von der Schöpfung*, and Chapter 10 concludes with a discussion and recapitulation of how Weigel's works fit into the German intellectual tradition.

Throughout this excellent study, Weeks reminds us that Weigel represents an important stage in the German intellectual tradition of toleration and validation of differing points of view. In the tradition of Eckhart, Cusanus, and Franck, who preceded him, and of Jacob Boehme, who followed him, Weigel struggled mightily in the wake of the Reformation to establish a foundation for spiritual toleration that was inclusive rather than divisive. The points that Weeks addresses are important ones. This book is a welcome and timely contribution to current Reformation history.

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In Milan, early in the sixteenth century, as a boy of twelve was setting off a firework, a piece of the paper casing struck the wife of a respectable musician, and the boy's face was slapped. More than sixty years later, when the boy, Girolamo Cardano, was near his death, the incident went down in his autobiography, *De vita propria*, in a chapter devoted to humiliating experiences; in other chapters, he confided his favourite veal recipe to his readers, reflected on the execution of his beloved elder son, listed the names of seventy-three writers who had cited his works, and told the story of the spirit who appeared to him in 1572 (looking like a farmer, of all things), spoke the wholly enigmatic words *te sin casa*, then vanished.

One of the problems which faces a scholar trying to make sense of Cardano's life now is the documented richness which this list suggests. He is, thanks to the autobiography and other personal writings, knowable in formidable detail. Moreover, he wrote so much — the standard edition of his works runs to ten folio volumes and is nevertheless incomplete — and did so much: he practised medicine, to international acclaim, and was also one of the leading astrologers of his day, as well as an important mathematician, a moral philosopher, an encyclopedist, and at one time something very like a professional chess player. A full treatment of this life would be a Gormenghast of the biographer's art — enormous, rambling, and even nightmarish. The same, of course, is true of a number of the other great early modern polymaths: their lives are immensely interesting, but too full of varied intellectual achievement to be made into readable unified narratives. A series of recent studies have exemplified an elegant way out of this dilemma. They examine one part of the achievement of a major intellectual figure, setting it in a rich biographical context and contextualizing it with particular attention to the histories