See, Hear, Taste: Sensory Metaphors and Their Use before and in Paracelsianism*

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Abstract:
This paper discusses and tentatively contextualises the use of sensory metaphors in 16th- and 17th-century Paracelsianism, mainly the metaphor of taste. Before turning to Paracelsus, Weigel and Khunrath, it begins with the more general question of why sight became the main sensory metaphor in Western thought, especially in Platonism. It had an influence on Christian thought but metaphors of taste also played an important role in the Bible, in medieval mysticism and beyond. The later approach to sensory metaphors is exemplified in two 15th-century authors, Cusanus and Ficino. The Lutheran emphasis on hearing as a major cognitive metaphor is then discussed. Finally, it is hypothesized that the rejection of figurative language in 17th-century Cartesianism and empiricism may have been rather a removal of non-visual metaphors.

Keywords: Paracelsus; Weigel; Khunrath; Cusanus; Ficino; Lutheranism; Tauler; Platonism; light; eye; mysticism

DOI: https://doi.org/10.46854/fc.2025.1s.112

Foreword: Objectives and limits

This paper discusses and tentatively contextualises what has yet to be explored on a larger scale: the use, meaning, possibilities, limits, and influence of sensory metaphors in 16th- and 17th-century Paracelsianism. Such a contemplated study would make use of the EMLAP online database, a digi-

* This study was written as part of grant project LL 2320, "The Origins of Modern Encyclopaedism: Launching Evolutionary Metaphorology" (TOME), supported by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and coordinated by the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague.

tal corpus of alchemical and Paracelsian texts[1] under construction at the TOME project,[2] aimed at the role of metaphors in early modern thought. This article, in a way, sets the stage. It seeks to search for the broader context of sensory metaphors, especially metaphors of taste as opposed to metaphors of sight, and to consult those several searchable texts and databases currently available, thereby providing future research with firm foundations and clear orientation and, by alternating distant and close views and focusing more precisely on certain authors, introducing new aspects, tones, and flavours – to start with a few metaphors.

Introduction: Why metaphors?

Before we deal with the more specific issue of sensory metaphors in the 16th and 17th centuries, it will be beneficial to begin with more general questions and to delve somewhat into history. Naturally, the very first question is – what is a metaphor? The rather outdated Cambridge Dictionary definition says it is "an expression, often found in literature, that describes a person or object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to that person or object".[3] Correct as it may be, this definition presents metaphors as something rather artificial and exclusive. However, Hans Blumenberg in 1960,[4] and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980, have conclusively shown the omnipresence and crucial role of metaphors in our thought. As Lakoff and Johnson say, "the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor".[5] It is a "myth of objectivism" that "figurative language can always be avoided in speaking objectively".[6]

In the meantime, the essential importance of metaphors in the cognitive process has been widely accepted. Interesting insights were brought about, for example, by the Canadian-American linguist and psychologist Steven

1 Hedesan, G. – Huber, A. – Kodetová, J. – Kříž, O. – Kubíčková, J. – Kaše, V. – Pavlas, P., EMLAP [Data set]. *Zenodo*, 2025. Available online at www: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14765293 [cit. 19. 5. 2025]; The graphical user interface is currently under construction see http://emlap.flu.cas.cz [cit. 19. 6. 2025].

2 For more details on TOME see the editorial of this special issue and the project's website – available online at www: http://tome.flu.cas.cz [cit. 29. 5. 2025].

3 Available online at www: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/metaphor [cit. 19. 5. 2025].

4 Blumenberg, H., Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie. *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, 6, 1960, pp. 7–142.

5 Lakoff, G. – Johnson, M., *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago–London, University of Chicago Press 1980, ch. 1, p. 4.

6 Ibid., p. 188.

Pinker[7] and by the American linguist Eve Sweetser. The latter presented the general mind-as-body metaphorical system pointing out that, as the Hungarian linguist Zoltán Kövecses put it, "words denoting various psychological phenomena, such as knowing, emotion, and judgment, derive historically from words denoting bodily sensations, such as sight, touch, and taste".[8] Specifically, metaphors of knowledge and mental vision are derived from sight, metaphors of internal receptivity from hearing, metaphors of emotions from our feelings, and metaphors of personal preference from taste. Thus, taste appears, quite obviously, as something very subjective while sight is the most objective among the senses. However, as Kövecses reminds, metaphors are not only cognitive instruments but also motivators, they both motivate and constrain the way we think.[9] This is a position advocated, among others, by the American psychoanalyst A. H. Modell. For him, metaphor is a medium between body and soul/mind, something between psychology and physiology.[10] "Metaphor is rooted in the body" because "it rests on the border between mind and brain" and its purpose is "to organize bodily sensations cognitively, especially affects".[11] As Modell emphasizes, there is "a privileged connection between affects and metaphor".[12] Metaphors enable us "to organize otherwise inchoate experiences" so that "metaphoric thought is a fundamental way of knowing" which probably evolved before language itself.[13]

Thus, there are two essential aspects of metaphors: they serve cognition and influence affects. This makes them both appealing and problematic in philosophy.

7 Pinker, S., *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*. New York, Viking 2007.

8 Sweetser, E., *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure*. Cambridge–Peking, Cambridge University Press – Peking University Press 2002, pp. 32–48; Kövecses, Z., *Metaphor. A Practical Introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University Press 2010, p. 256. See also Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I., The Power of the Senses and the Role of Culture in Metaphor and Language. In: Caballero, R. – Díaz-Vera, J. E. (eds.), *Sensuous Cognition. Explorations into Human Sentience: Imagination, (E)motion and Perception*. Berlin–Boston, De Gruyter 2013, pp. 109–133.

9 Kövecses, Z., *Metaphor*, p. 52.

10 Modell, A. H., The Synergy of Memory, Affects and Metaphor. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 42, 1997, No. 1, pp. 105–117, here p. 106.

11 Ibid. (abstract).

12 We could reference here also Jaak Panksepp's studies on emotions and their symbolic expression, see Panksepp, J., *Affective Neuroscience. The Foundation of Human and Animal Emotions*. Oxford, Oxford University Press 1998; idem – Biven, L., *The Archaeology of Mind: Neuroevolutionary Origins of Human Emotions*. New York–London, W. W. Norton & Company 2012.

13 Ibid., p. 107.

Platonic tradition: The primacy of sight

Consider Plato (c. 427–347 BC). He was certainly a master of metaphorical and allegorical language, and so were his followers. One need only mention the famous parable of the cave in the *Republic* (514a1ff.), the passage in the *Cratylus* (407a8–b2), the allegorical interpretations of Homer in the *Phaedrus* (229c6ff.) with its criticism of the rationalization of myths, as well as other allegories, such as the interpretation of the origin of men and women from an originally androgynous being in the *Symposium* (189d–191d) and the interpretation of the creation of the cosmos in the *Timaeus*. On the other hand, poetic interpretations are regarded by Plato as potentially dangerous to the administration of the community (*Constitution* 378d).[14] However, instead of looking into Plato's texts, let us read what the great Platonist of the Quattrocento, Marsilio Ficino (1533–1588), has to say on him:

> Plato's words are not only intellectually stimulating but they purify the soul from excitement, separate the mind from the senses, and turn the mind to God to be enlightened by Him; all this with the help of simile and dialogue, which have a powerful persuasiveness and are capable of moving us deeply.[15]

Here, Ficino clearly recognises that metaphors, for Plato and the Platonists, have mainly an emotional value: they can *move* us.[16] This, Blumenberg remarks, was the main reason why metaphors were *purposely* accepted and used in antiquity.[17]

But there is no metaphor like metaphor. Here we are about to deal, primarily, with metaphors of sensory perception in an epistemological context. I have mentioned the hierarchy of senses according to Sweetser and others. It seems that the epistemological primacy of metaphors of sight is indeed a given, as if philosophy *per se* tended to privilege sight.[18] As the German-

14 For broader social contexts of metaphors, above all their role in maintaining civil obedience, see Lucie Storchová's study in this special issue.

15 Ficino, M., In commentaria Platonis [...] Prooemium. In: idem, *Opera omnia*. Basel, Heinrich Petri 1576, p. 1129. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

16 However, for Aristotle, metaphors seem also to have an epistemological value: "the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. ... Through resemblance, metaphor makes things clearer" (*Poetics* 1459a); "ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh" (*Rhetoric* 1410b).

17 Blumenberg, H., Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie, pp. 8f. Ancient rhetoric, generally, made extensive use of metaphors.

18 Kambaskovic, D. – Wolfe, C. T., The Senses in Philosophy and Science. From the Nobility of Sight

American philosopher Hans Jonas suggests, only sight provides the sensual basis on which the mind may conceive of the idea of the eternal, that which never changes and is always present; sight alone can distinguish between the changing and the unchanging.[19] At the same time, as others have put it, "taste, so far as it is ever considered, is thought [in philosophy] to abide at the brink of non-Being".[20] Or, to quote another author:

> Metaphors of sound and smell, of taste and touch, are tied so firmly to the play of motion, change, and degree that there can be no question of their being able to approximate for thought its proper object. Thus, thought is restricted by criticism to metaphors of light and fixed place.[21]

Thus, sight is understood as the sense that can grasp and fix essences, it can "see" the unmoving, and thus can serve as a metaphor for (the highest) knowledge, the knowledge of truth that since time immemorial (at least, since Parmenides, c. 510–450 BC) was considered in Western thought to pertain to what is unmoving and unchanging.

Let us again open Plato's *Phaedrus* to see how deeply the metaphors of light penetrated his fundamental epistemology:

> [the souls before entering their bodies] saw beauty shining in brightness, when […] they saw the blessed sight and vision […] the sight of perfect […] apparitions, which we saw in the pure light […] beauty […] shone in brilliance among those visions; and since we came to earth we have found it shining most clearly through the clearest of our senses; for sight is the sharpest of the physical senses […] beauty alone […] is most clearly seen […] (*Phaedrus* 250b–d)

For Plato, it is "the eye [that] receives the effusion of beauty" (*Phaedrus* 251b). Although he remarks, somewhat enigmatically, that "wisdom is not *seen* by it" (250d), sight is presented not as a *metaphor* of knowledge but rather as an actual sensory perception that can carry us up the *ladder* of knowledge

to the Materialism of Touch. In: Roodenburg, H. (ed.), *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Renaissance*. London, Bloomsbury Academic 2018, p. 110.

19 Jonas, H., *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology*. New York, Harper & Row 1966, p. 145, quoted in Kambaskovic, D. – Wolfe, C. T., The Senses in Philosophy and Science, p. 110.

20 Cameron, W., Philosophy, Metaphor, and Taste. *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 12, 1978, pp. 241–257, here p. 251.

21 Ibid.

to the higher, metaphysical, "vision". Here, metaphysics and the physics of light intersect.[22]

Not surprisingly, Plotinus (c. 205–270) follows Plato down this path. He also emphasizes the primacy of sight while recognizing the nobility of hearing among the other senses: "beauty addresses itself chiefly to sight; but there is a beauty for the hearing too".[23] At the same time, smell and taste are "mere accessories, distractions of the soul".[24] As distracting as they may be to the soul, their metaphorical use still makes sense to Plotinus: we can meaningfully say that some sounds are "sweet, harsh, soft"[25] and that what is "sweet" is beneficial while the "bitter" is injurious,[26] a standard stance in medieval medical and alchemical texts.

We can take Dionysius the Areopagite (5th–6th century) as a third example of the Platonic position. In his *Celestial hierarchy*, he addresses the symbolic value of our senses:

> It is possible […] to find within each of the many parts of our body harmonious images of the Heavenly Powers, by affirming that the powers of vision denote the most transparent elevation towards the Divine lights […] reception, free from all passion, of the supremely Divine illuminations. Now the discriminating powers of the nostrils denote the being able to receive, as far as attainable, the sweet-smelling largesse beyond conception, and to distinguish accurately things which are not such, and to entirely reject. The powers of the ears denote the participation and conscious reception of the supremely Divine inspiration. The powers of taste denote the fulness of the intelligible nourishments, and the reception of the Divine and nourishing streams. The powers of touch denote the skilful discrimination of that which is suitable or injurious.[27]

For the metaphor of sight and light, we can also peruse *On divine names* where Dionysius explains:

> He, the Good, is called spiritual Light, on the ground that He fills every supercelestial mind with spiritual light, and expels all ignorance and

22 For this topic see Burton, S. J. G., Pansophic Mirrors of the Soul: Comenius, Pinder and the Transformation of Cusan Optics. *Acta Comeniana*, 34, 2022, No. 58, pp. 9–48.
23 Plotin, *Enneades* I,6,1. All translations of Plotinus are by S. McKenna. Available online at www: https://ccel.org/ccel/plotinus/enneads/enneads [cit. 19. 5. 2025].
24 Plotin, *Enneades* IV,4,25.
25 Plotin, *Enneades* VI,3,7.
26 Ibid. VI,3,18.
27 Dionysius the Areopagite, De cœlesti hierarchia 15,3. In: idem, *The Celestial and Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Transl. J. Parker. London, Skeffington & Son 1894, p. 45.

> error from all souls […] cleanses their mental vision from the mist […] from ignorance, and […] darkness, and imparts, at first, a measured radiance; then, whilst they taste, as it were, the light, and desire it more, more fully gives Itself, and more abundantly enlightens them, because 'they have loved much', and ever elevates them […].[28]

What is interesting in these two quotations is that "taste" appears here alongside "sight" in connection with reception (i.e., knowledge) and desire (i.e., emotion), two aspects we have already met.

The Bible and medieval mysticism: The essentiality of taste

With Dionysius we entered the Christian world. Given how much Christian theology was influenced by Platonic thought, we can expect light and sight to play a significant role in early Christian texts. But what about sensory metaphors in the Bible in general? The motif of light certainly occurs many times in the Bible, too many to dwell upon, especially since our task is primarily to follow the metaphors of taste (and smell). Using search engines, one arrives at very preliminary but telling results: visual and auditory metaphors seem greatly to exceed metaphors of taste and smell. The situation changes, however, when considering a broader context, words such as "sweet", "bitter", "wine" and "drunk", which are from the same semantic domain.[29] As one might expect, there is a stronger representation of these metaphors in the *Song of Songs*.[30] However, this all omits the most fundamental fact. At the beginning of the Bible, we read the famous words: "And God said, Let there be light… And God saw the light, that it was good" (*Genesis* 1,3–4).[31] Next to the metaphor of light,[32] however, in the second report of creation in *Genesis*, we find these ominous words:

28 Dionysius the Areopagite, De divinis nominibus 4,5. In: idem, *The Works*. Transl. J. Parker. London, James Parker & Co. 1897, vol. 1, p. 38.

29 The results of my rather primitive search in Davar 4 (*King James Version*): "touch-" 177 results; "taste-" 35 in the Bible (New Testament 12), "sweet-" 142 (*Song of Songs* 10, *NT* 8), "bitter" 96 (*NT* 12), "wine" 240 (*NT* 30), "drunk-" 88; "smell-" 30 (*NT* 3), "hear-" 1626 (excl. results like "heart", "hearts" and "hearted"), "ear" + "ears" 286; "see" + "seen" + "saw" 1450, "sight" 343, "eye" + "eyes" 686 results. I have ignored whether these keywords are used in a literal or figurative sense. Of course, we would have to add more search terms and refine the search to get more reliable results.

30 See *Song of Songs* 5,13; 4,10; see also *Psalmus* 34,8; 119,103; *Ezekiel* 3,3.

31 All biblical quotations are *King James Version* (*KJV*).

32 The metaphoricity of the word "light" in the first day of creation, as understood within the Augustinian exegesis of this passage, lies in the following interpretation: since the stars are created on the third day, and the Sun and Moon only on the fourth day (see *Genesis* 1,14–19), the

> And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked […] (*Genesis* 3,6–7)

Here, the fundamental role of "eating" is confirmed, that is, also of "tasting": it can produce specific seeing ("the eyes of them both were opened") and hearing ("they heard the voice of the Lord", as the text follows), that is, a specific *knowledge*. The crucial New Testament parallel comes in the words of Jesus:

> Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup […] saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me (*1 Corinthians* 11,24–25)

Again, eating and tasting involves or implies specific knowledge, i.e. the remembrance of Jesus Christ.[33]

This is the ground on which the metaphors of "taste" could develop in medieval mysticism between the 12th and 14th centuries. Consider the words of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153):

> When will we experience this kind of love [*huiuscemodi experitur affectum*], so that the mind, drunk with divine love [*divino debriatus amore animus*] and forgetting itself […] should throw itself wholly on God and, clinging to God (*1 Corinthians* 6,17), become one with him in spirit […] To love in this way is to become like God. As a drop of water seems to disappear completely in a quantity of wine, taking the wine's flavour and colour [*saporem vini induit et colorem*]; as red-hot iron becomes indistinguishable from the glow of fire, and its own original form disappears; as air suffused with the light of the sun seems transformed into the brightness of the light, as if it were itself light rather than merely lit up […].[34]

initial *fiat lux* and the separation of light from darkness should be understood as the creation and fall of angels.

33 For the taste as a metaphor of experiencing in English, Basque and Spanish see Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I., The Power of the Senses and the Role of Culture in Metaphor and Language, p. 114.

34 Bernard of Clairvaux, De diligendo Deo 10. In: *Patrologia Latina*. Ed. J.-P. Migne. Paris, Migne 1841–1865, vol. 182, pp. 990C–991B.

Or Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), Bernard's contemporary:

> To undergo such an action is to be deified, when the spirit, drunk with divine love, forgets everything and passes completely into God, tasting what no one knows except the one who receives it [*gustans illud quod nemo novit, nisi qui accipit*] […].[35]

Here, tasting is linked to emotion ("drunk with love"), leading to a new way of "knowing" that involves an essential transformation of the cognitive subject. Later protagonists of mysticism can attest to this. For Meister Eckhart (d. 1327), the "father of German mysticism", tasting God and seeing God go hand-in-hand for those who "have God".[36] Yet the importance of "taste" is, perhaps, best illustrated in the writings of female religious authors, such as in the *Mirror of Simple Souls* by the French Beguine Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), also an important source for Eckhart. A search in Czech translation for the Czech equivalents of English "tast-" in her text yields only 7 results; "drunken", "inebriated", "intoxicated" together yield 17 results; and "wine" 3 results; however, the keyword "sweet-" amounts to about 60 results (e.g., sweet Love, sweet Soul…).[37] Here is an example of the author's intriguing language:

> What makes her [the Soul] drunk […] [is that] her lover drank […] for thanks to the transformation of love [*muance d'amour*] there is no difference between him and her, whatever their natures. […] He intoxicates her with that 'more' of His drink […] most intoxicating wine […] This is the sovereign drink, which no one drinks but the Trinity. And with this drink, without having drunk it, the Annihilated Soul, the Liberated Soul, the Forgotten Soul, is intoxicated, yes very intoxicated, more than intoxicated, with what she has never drunk and never will drink.[38]

Obviously, tasting[39] and becoming intoxicated by the divine drink serves as a metaphor for experimental knowledge of God (*cognitio Dei experimen-*

35 Richard of St. Victor, De gradibus caritatis. In: *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 196, p. 1198B.

36 Eckhart of Hochheim, Die rede der underscheidunge 6. In: Meister Eckhart, *Predigten. Traktate*. Stuttgart, Kohlhammer 2008, p. 348: "He who has God thus in his being (*im wesenne*) receives God divinely, and God shines (*liuhtet*) to him in all things; all things taste of God to him (*alliu dinc smeckent im götlîchen*), and in all things he sees the image of God."

37 As searched in Porete, M., *Zrcadlo prostých duší* [Mirror of Simple Souls]. Transl. M. Žemla. Prague, Malvern 2013.

38 Porete, M., *Lo specchio delle anime semplici* [Italian-French]. Milano, Edizione San Paolo 1994, ch. 23, p. 202.

39 The tasting is confirmed by ibid., ch. 121, with an allusion to the *Song of Songs* 2,14.

talis),[40] precisely because it is, unlike seeing, far from creating fixed concepts. It is about intimacy and "un-knowing". Such language is typical for the tradition of negative theology, which traces back to Dionysius the Areopagite. Thus, we can presuppose that it will be in this apophatic context that we may find evaluation of the metaphors of taste.

Another example I have examined in detail is John Tauler (1300–1361), a follower of Eckhart, who had a great impact in the 16th century. In his 81 authentic sermons,[41] we find a total of 97 occurrences of the Middle High German stems *"-smak-"* and *"-smack-"* (i.e., taste), demonstrating their relative importance as metaphors.[42] Similarly impressive are the results for the search terms *"sus-"* and *"su^{e}s-"* (sweet), which yield 115 results.[43] In contrast, the word *"ro^{v}ch-"* (smell) appears only 11 times[44] while *"oge-"* (eye) 89 times – which is obviously important, but not decisive on closer inspection, being limited to the theological motif of the *visio beatifica* or "blessed eyes"[45] and the "inner eye" capable of seeing the "true light".[46] Tauler, however, tends to associate the symbolism of light with intellect, which as a proponent of an anti-intellectualist position he tries to avoid. Significantly, his anti-intellectualism also manifests itself in his use of metaphors of taste. For example:

> There are many poor people who have for some forty years renounced their goods, and yet have not tasted a drop of this [*dis nie einen troppfen gesmachtent*]. They understand it well, and they certainly have it in their minds and in their reason, but it is fundamentally alien to them and far removed in taste […].[47]

> Just so does our Lord: when He sees that the temptations and persecutions are already too great and heavy for man, He delays them a little and lets a little drop of the sweetness of divine things flow into the mouth of man's heart [*ein troppfe in den munt des hertzen, ein smag von*

40 For this expression see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II–II, q. 97, a. 2, ad 2. Generally see Geybels, H., *Cognitio Dei experimentalis: A Theological Genealogy of Christian Religious Experience*. Louvain, Peeters 2008.

41 Tauler, J., *Die Predigten Taulers*. Ed. F. Vetter. Berlin, Weidmann 1910. Available online at www: http://www.mhgta.uni-trier.de [cit. 19. 5. 2025].

42 E.g., Tauler, J., *Die Predigten Taulers*, p. 46, line 2; p. 65, line 24; p. 164, line 8; p. 237, line 21; p. 355, line 24; p. 159, line 12; p. 173, line 20; p. 105, line 11f.

43 E.g., ibid., p. 47, line 36.

44 E.g., ibid., p. 377, line 23.

45 Ibid., Sermon 45 "Beati oculi qui vident quod vos videtis", pp. 194–201, passim.

46 Ibid., p. 195, line 19.

47 Ibid., Sermon 10 "Ego sum lux mundi dicit dominus", p. 50, line 13ff.

> *su*[e]*ssekeit von go*[e]*ttelichen dingen*]. And this strengthens him so much that he no longer tastes [*smackent*] anything that is not God, and he feels that he has overcome all his weakness. […] he is driven to God and begins to thirst [*turst*] for that in which all peace, truth and comfort truly reside. He does so in order that the drink which will satisfy his thirst may be all the sweeter, more pleasing, and more delicious, both here in time and hereafter in eternity. There, man will drink from the sweet spring with full draughts from its very source.[48]

We can find a similar approach in the *Theologia Deutsch*, an anonymous mystical treatise from around 1400. It was classified as "Taulerian" by Martin Luther (1483–1546), its first publisher and promoter in the 16th century: we do not know exactly why, but we can speculate that Luther may have had in mind its emphasis on non-intellectual cognition and affectivity. As in Tauler, taste comes here as a metaphor for the experimental knowledge of God which always avoids fixed concepts.[49]

Cusanus and Ficino: "Tasted wisdom" and the "rage" of taste

There is still another author whose ideas should be considered before entering the 16th century – Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464). As the most philosophically minded reader of Eckhart and a pupil of the *Devotio Moderna*, imbibed with the somewhat melted ideas of German Mysticism, Cusanus presented his negative theology as early as his first major work, the dialogue *Idiota de sapientia*. Despite his emphasis on "unknowing knowledge", he is in many ways a Platonist and makes much use of light metaphysics. However, primarily in that dialogue, he explains how the highest experience of God, "unknowing knowledge", can best be described in terms of "taste". Cusanus is fond of using Latin etymology to substantiate his claims:

> Wisdom is what tastes [*Sapientia est quae sapit*], than which nothing is sweeter to the intellect […] But those who speak from the taste of wisdom are those who know that it is all things in such a way that it is nothing of all things […]. […] it dwells in the highest places, it is not tastable by all tastes. It is tasted untastably [*Ingustabiliter ergo gustatur*], being higher than all that can be tasted, sensed, rationalized, and

48 Ibid., Sermon 11 "Si quis sitit, veniat et bibat", pp. 52f., line 24ff.

49 For "taste" see, e.g., *Theologia Deutsch*, ch. 1, 7, 8, 11. Available online at www: https://www.evangelischer-glaube.de/theologia-deutsch/ [cit. 19. 5. 2025].

> intellectualized. To taste untastably and from afar is like a certain fragrance, a kind of untastable foretaste. […] eternal and infinite wisdom, while shining in all things, entices us from a kind of foretaste of effects, to be carried to it with a wonderful desire.[50]

Thus, according to Cusanus, there is "a certain innate foretaste" of the divine source of life without which it would be impossible to have a "desire" or "such great zeal" to find it, because "it is sweet for every spirit to continually ascend to the fountain of its life, however inaccessible".[51] Although the source is inaccessible to the intellect, it still holds true that its "understanding is to be nourished [*pasci*] by wisdom and truth" and that "the intellect that does not taste [*degustans*] clear wisdom is like an eye in darkness".[52] Here we have a nice unity of metaphors of taste and seeing. It is not enough to have knowledge, Cusanus says in *De venatione sapientiae*, but "we are urged by the appetite [*appetite*] deep in our nature to seek not only knowledge, but to have wisdom or tasted knowledge [*sapientiam seu sapidam scientiam*]".[53] This "tasted knowledge", *sapida scientia*, is the highest achievement we can hope for.

Another influential 15th-century author is Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499). Not surprisingly for a Platonist, in his *De amore* (1484) we find many metaphors of seeing in connection with recognizing beauty and achieving knowledge – yet we cannot overlook his ideas on "taste". For Ficino, seeing is the "door of the soul"[54] which is drawn to beauty, and beauty in itself is a kind of "brightness".[55] As Ficino emphasises,

> […] the light emanating from the body is perceived neither by the ears, nor by the sense of smell, nor by taste, nor by touch, but by the eye. […] Therefore, the eye alone enjoys the beauty of the body […].

That is, only the eye can lead our knowledge towards its proper goal, Beauty itself.[56] The only other sense that can participate in beauty is hearing. Just like seeing, it can "remain longer empty" while "other senses are quickly

50 Nicholas of Cusa, Idiota de sapientia 1,10,8f. and 11–14. For the standard Heidelberger *Opera omnia* edition of Cusanus (and for English and German translations) available online at www: http://cusanus-portal.de [cit. 19. 5. 2025].
51 Ibid., 1,11,1–9 and 15.
52 Ibid. 1,13,1–6.
53 Ibid., dedication.
54 Ficino, M., De amore VII,2. I have used the Latin-German edition, idem, *Über die Liebe oder Platons Gastmahl*. Ed. P. R. Blum. Transl. K. P. Hasse. Hamburg, Felix Meiner 1994.
55 Ibid., II,9.
56 Ibid.

filled".[57] Also, smell, taste and touch are "simple forms" but beauty requires the "conformity of diverse members", that is, harmony,[58] and this is accessible only to hearing and seeing. The perception of these two senses prompts love while the other senses evoke "lust and rage".[59] That is why touch, taste and smell belong to the body and matter while "reason, sight and hearing belong to the spirit [*ad spiritum*]".[60] So, Ficino can say:

> Love […] does not crave the sweets of taste and touch, which are so violent and fierce that they throw the mind out of balance and throw us into confusion […] they are the opposite of beauty because of their intemperance. […] we enjoy beauty by recognizing it, and that by mind, sight, and hearing. […] Through the other senses […] we enjoy […] a need of the body. Through these three faculties, then, we will hunt for beauty, and the beauty of voices and bodies will lead us like a trace to the dignity of the soul.[61]

This "hunt for beauty", an expression alluding to the *venatio sapientiae* of Cusanus, can become more effective by means of seeing and hearing, the senses which, together with reason, "comprehend things most distant".[62] In contrast, "touch, taste and smell perceive only what is near them" and this perception, as Ficino comments, "has a strong effect on them"[63] – stronger than other perceptions but, we may assume, less harmonious, beautiful and virtuous.

Still, it would be unfair to conclude that Ficino does not attribute any use to taste. In fact, the context in which senses have been debated above is that of real bodily senses, not a metaphorical one. When we switch to a metaphorical context things seem to change, as when Ficino speaks of God as the "hidden taste" (*sapor occultus*) that infuses into things the "sweetest fragrance [*odorem*] that excites and attracts us".[64] This attraction is important: it is, as it were, a cognition before real knowledge, a sort of the lowest *docta ignorantia* that, however, causes love to arise. It is an indiscriminating love that seeks its object, rather an unformed "craze" or "rage", as we have heard, but

57 Ibid., VI,9.
58 For this aspect of harmony see Lenka Řezníková's study in this special issue.
59 Ficino, M., De amore I,4.
60 Ibid., V,2.
61 Ibid., I,4.
62 Ibid., V,2.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., II,6.

it already pulls us in the right, more discriminate, more harmonious, more "loving" direction. And, in its turn,

> [love] continually evokes new pleasures in the soul, as it were, and thus makes it blissful with delicious and sweet pleasure.[65]

Thus, one becomes "inflamed with love" and feels "thirst for beauty", so that they "must take the sweet juice of beauty [*dulcissimum pulchritudinis huius humorem*] which inflames this thirst in them".[66] The sweet "taste" is something that both ignites and accompanies love and desire for God. As Ficino puts it elsewhere,

> […] the nature of beauty itself, i.e., the highest beauty […] draws to itself, as it were, the sweetness of all desire […].[67]

Thus, for Ficino, sight (and hearing)[68] can bring us to God by means of the ladder of beauty – which is also a trace of the Beauty in the world. Sight is quick and can reach very far; it is the highest sense that follows right after reason, or rather, reason follows what seeing presents. On the other hand, taste as a sensory perception is practically useless in terms of its cognitive value: it does not perceive at a distance, it recognizes no harmony, it cannot perceive what is immaterial, that is, light and beauty, both of divine origin. However, taste as a metaphor for the unspeakable presence and attraction of God in nature and its experience retains its true importance. In this way, "tasting" has its irreducible value just because it is irrational and causes a "formless" emotion.

Martin Luther: Hearing and tasting

Entering the 16th century, we cannot but begin with Martin Luther (1483–1546) and his theology of the *fides ex auditu*. Indeed, this is one of the crucial aspects of his theological thinking which was intentionally aimed against the standard scholastic emphasis on the metaphysics of light, and therefore on seeing as the main cognitive metaphor. At the same time, Martin Luther's

65 Ibid., IV,6.
66 Ibid., V,3.
67 Ibid., VI,10.
68 The power of music, i.e., of hearing, is emphasised in Ficino's *magia naturalis*, see his *De vita coelitus comparanda*.

concept of "hearing the Word" is used as "a counterpoint to both the idealism of the scholastic theologians and the naïve 'touch' empiricism of the humanists."[69]

If we try a quick search for the string "*höre-*" ("hear") in Luther's works, we get 145 results. This is, perhaps, not very impressive, given the scope of Luther's oeuvre. Much more telling, however, is what he says about "hearing" right at the beginning of his literary career. In his early *Lecture on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, Luther interprets *John* 3,8: "[…] you must always and everywhere be ready to hear and to go your way with a willing ear, your whole duty is to listen humbly and to be taught".[70]

Just a little later, in his *Lecture on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews*, we can read:

> God […] demands of all people, namely to hear his voice […] Truly, nothing is heard more often by the prophets than 'hear!', 'listen!', 'they did not hear', 'they did not want to hear'.[71]

As important as the emphasis on hearing, faith and will may be relative to seeing, knowing and intellect/reason, this is not paramount to us here. Yet taste also plays some role for the Reformer. This is not surprising, as he was an avid reader of Tauler and *Theologia Deutsch*. A good example, still an early one, is his *Foreword to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (1522). Right at the beginning, Luther assures the reader that "the more one deals with it, the more delicious it is and the better it tastes [*schmecket*]".[72] It is not easy, however, because the epistle says that "everyone finds in himself a disgust [*unlust*] for good and an appetite [*lust*] for evil"; that is why "the foundation of the heart is not at the law of God", and the appetite [*lust*] for it can come only through the Holy Spirit.[73] Luther also remarks that a false or historical faith is a human invention, as opposed to a true faith of the Holy Spirit, and the foundation of the heart (*des hertzen grund*) can never experience (*erferet*) it.[74]

69 Kambaskovic, D. – Wolfe, C. T., The Senses in Philosophy and Science, p. 109.
70 Luther, M., Vorlesung über den Römerbrief (1515/1516), ch. 3. In: *Luther Deutsch. Die Werke Martin Luthers in neuer Auswahl für die Gegenwart*. Vol. 1: Die Anfänge. Ed. K. Aland. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1982, p. 162.
71 Luther, M., Vorlesung über den Hebräerbrief (1517/1518). In: *Luther Deutsch*. Vol. 1: Die Anfänge, p. 304.
72 Luther, M., Vorrede auf die Epistel S. Pauli an die Römer. In: *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Die Deutsche Bibel*, vol. 7. Weimar, Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger 1931, p. 3.
73 Ibid., pp. 5 and 7.
74 Ibid., p. 11.

We can say that Luther's almost proverbial disdain for intellectual reasoning on matters of faith opens the door not only to metaphors of hearing but also to metaphors of taste. Taste, as always, suggests intimate experiential cognition as opposed to intellectual knowledge from a distance. This "supposed" knowledge was what Luther criticised in most of the mystical tradition. In short: intellectual eyes are wrong; hearing is blind but true; taste is the ultimate witness of God's workings yet difficult to prove.[75]

Paracelsus: Taste and smell as "signatures"

Now, let us finally enter the specific world of Paracelsus (1493–1541). A quick search in the THEO database[76] turned up the following results: *"schmeck-"* (taste) 140 hits, *"schmack-"* 20 hits, *"geschmack"* 239 hits, *"gust-"* 187 hits; *"auge-"* 1708 hits. It seems a lost cause for "taste", yet this is not the case. As a follower of both Ficino and German mysticism in its Lutheran reformulation, Paracelsus bears witness to both the light metaphysics/epistemology and the pre-eminence of taste and, thus, direct experience.

Besides being an alchemist, natural philosopher and lay theologian, Paracelsus was a physician. This indicates that his use of "taste" would often have been non-metaphorical. Moreover, there is an ambiguity in his use of the word *"geschmack"*, which sometimes means "taste"[77] but very often "smell".[78] At any rate, the two meanings are closely related for Paracelsus in the specific context in which he uses them. By the "specific context" I mean the theory of *signatura rerum*, which connects something's invisible inner forces/powers with its outer form and sensory qualities. Here, taste plays an important role, as it reveals that thing's hidden powers (*virtutes occultae*). Of course, shapes and colours visible to the eye, as well as qualities and structures such as softness, roughness, harshness, etc., also tell us something about the inner powers. However, it seems that Paracelsus emphasizes taste as the most intimately connected to the invisible powers, and thus the most reliable. This

75 This is, frankly, a simplification of Luther's position. Given the subjective nature of taste, it is difficult to judge whether what one is tasting is truly God, or a demonic illusion. Luther very soon limited his original insight that the work of the Holy Spirit can be directly perceived by anyone.

76 This database, as a part of the Zurich Paracelsus Project run by Urs Leo Gantenbein, covers the Johann Huser edition of Paracelsus, published 1589–1591, plus his surgical writings, printed in 1605 and 1618. Available online at www: https://www.paracelsus.uzh.ch [cit. 19. 5. 2025].

77 E.g., Paracelsus, Philosophia de Generationibus et Fructibus quatuor Elementorum. In: idem, *Bücher und Schrifften*. Ed. J. Huser. Basel, Conrad Waldkirch 1589–1591 (hereafter *HE*), vol. 8, p. 111.

78 E.g., Paracelsus, Das Buch von der Geberung der Empfindlichen dingen in der Vernunfft, *HE* 1,355; idem, Von den natürlichen Dingen, *HE* 7,157; idem, Eilff Tractat, *HE* 4,191; idem, Opus Paramirum, Liber quartus de Matrice, *HE* 1,233; idem, Das Buch Paragranum, *HE* 2,23.

is especially important for a physician who needs to know the medicinal effects of a plant or substance. As Paracelsus says, "from the image and *gustus* [of a thing] proceeds a recognition of its medicine".[79]

This is implied when Paracelsus says that as everything "has its taste from its root (*nach seiner wurtz schmecket*)" so also a disease "remains united with that out of which it grows".[80] Similarly, as "the roses bring their smell [*geschmack*] with them out of the earth" so we bring all our qualities "from our mother's womb".[81] Thus, generally,

> […] nothing should be attributed to the body in itself but only to the powers that proceed from it, just as the smell [*geschmack*] from musk […] The many experimental results with *mumia* should be assessed on this basis.[82]

As for the "invisible powers", Paracelsus says elsewhere:

> In the same way that the power of the lily is expressed, so does the invisible body express its virtue. If there is such a wondrous thing in the body […] as the eyes prove and the tongue and ears can testify – then there resides in the microcosmic body something in fixed form from all those things so that great things can also be elicited from the *mumia*.[83]

The recurrent Paracelsian term "mumia"[84] in the two last quotations brings us, in the context of the *vires occultae*, to hidden animating powers which Paracelsus calls by various names: *mumia*, *Balsam*, but also *quintessence*. In 1536 he published his most important book of those to have appeared in his lifetime, *Die grosse Wundarzney* ("The great Surgery"). Here he invites physicians to follow nature and empirical knowledge instead of theoretical concepts.[85] Medicine's task is to foster the vital principle in the body, not to

79 Paracelsus, Liber Paramirum, *HE* 1,90. In: idem, *Essential Theoretical Writings*. Ed. and transl. A. Weeks. Leiden, Brill 2008 (hereafter *ETW*), p. 365; see also idem, Prologus in Librum de Herbis, *HE* 7,409: "die Süsse […] der Geschmack / die Krafft / Tugendt: Was do heyle […]."

80 Paracelsus, Liber Paramirum, *HE* 1,199; *ETW*, p. 639.

81 Paracelsus, De origine morborum invisibilium, *HE* 1,303; *ETW*, p. 877.

82 Ibid., *HE* 1,305; *ETW*, p. 883.

83 Ibid., *HE* 1,292; *ETW*, p. 849.

84 A search in the THEO database has shown 726 occurrences of "mumia"/"mummia" in the works of Paracelsus. See also Žemla, M., A balsamic mummy. The medical-alchemical panpsychism of Paracelsus. *Intellectual History Review*, 34, 2024, No. 1, pp. 75–90.

85 Paracelsus, Die Große Wundarznei. In: idem, *Sämtliche Werke. I. Abteilung. Medizinische, naturwissenschaftliche und philosophische Schriften*, vol. 10. Ed. K. Sudhoff. München, R. Oldenbourg 1929 (hereafter *SE*), p. 30: "du mußt ir nach und sie dir nit".

secure a harmony of bodily fluids as in the traditional humoral medicine. The vital principle, responsible for healing processes in the body, is the "inborn balsam" (*angeborener Balsam*).[86] Similar ideas had previously appeared in his *Das Buch Paragranum* (1529/1530) and a number of his other books where he uses the term *mumia*: "mumia is the balsam that heals the wounds".[87] *Quintessence* sometimes appears as just another term for such a reality, as in the early book *Archidoxis* where we read:

> Quintessence is a matter which is corporally drawn from all plants and all in which there is life, separated from all impurities and mortality […] quintessence is only the nature, power, virtue [*tugent*] and medicine […] It is a spirit like the spirit of life […].[88]

This is attested by the Paracelsian Oswald Croll (1563–1609) for whom the "spirit" is the true medicine, it is the "life", inner *"astra"* or "astral spirit" in the body,[89] the *quinta essentia* or "tincture",[90] *balsamus* or *mumia balsamita*.[91]

We must note that the notion of quintessence is ambiguous in the work of Paracelsus as it underwent evolution over time.[92] For us, however, it is important for its connotation with taste and smell: "some quintessences are … bitter, sweet, sharp [*acetosae*] […] some renew the body, others preserve it in health […]".[93] Quintessences had been related to specific strong and extraordinarily pleasing smells and tastes in the famous *De consideratione quintae essentiae* of John of Rupescissa (1310–1362).[94] That Paracelsus understood the special connection between the taste, smell and virtues of a quintessence is

86 Ibid., pp. 33–35.

87 Paracelsus, Opus Paramirum, *ETW*, p. 437. See also idem, Liber de matrice, *ETW*, p. 680; idem, De causis morborum invisibilium, *ETW*, p. 844. According to Weeks (idem, *ETW*, p. 228, note *a*), "mumia" is described at times as a "balsam" which preserves the living body from putrefaction, or as an innate healing power of the body.

88 Paracelsus, Archidoxis, *SE* 3,118. In Paracelsian texts, these powers are sometimes identified as coming from God: "got die selbigen kreft und tugent in die natur gossen hat, wie die sel in menschen" (*Philosophia de divinis operibus et secretis naturae*, *SE* 14,221).

89 Croll, O., *Basilica chymica*. Frankfurt am Main, G. Tampach 1608, pp. 21, 23 etc.

90 Ibid., pp. 40–41, 51 etc.

91 Ibid., pp. 59, 105.

92 See Benzenhöfer, J., *Johannes' de Rupescissa Liber de consideratione quintae essentiae omnium rerum, deutsch*. Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag 1989, pp. 72ff.; Kahn, D., Quintessence and the Prolongation of Life in the Works of Paracelsus. In: *Longevity and Immortality: Europe – Islam – Asia. Micrologus, Nature, Sciences and Medieval Societies*, No. 26. Ed. Ch. Crisciani. Firenze, SISMEL (Edizioni del Galluzzo) 2018, pp. 183–225.

93 Paracelsus, Archidoxis, *SE* 3,120.

94 Rupescissa, I. de, *De consideratione quijntae essentiae rerum omnium*. Basel, Conrad Waldkirch 1597.

attested when he says: "let the *quinta essentia* digest four days so that it is perfect in its smell [*Geschmack*], juice, taste and power";[95] or when he recommends doctors to recognise the "three parts" not according to colours but by the smell (*Geruch*).[96] In the *Liber Meteororum*, quintessence and spiritus are almost interchangeable and it is said that spiritus can be best experienced, or "sensed", by *Geschmack* – which, however, means rather "smell":

> The spirit is the right thing, the other is not. The buxus has a smell [*Geschmack*], and this smell is its spirit, the other is the corpus. The musk has its soul in the smell; if it is lost, it is like a dead wood that has been cut down and that no longer bears fruit. […] the spirit is the smell [*der Geist ist der Geschmack*] […].[97]

Taste and smell – both of which require closeness between the perceiver and the perceived – are intimately conjoined sensory perceptions which are able to reveal the inner powers or essence of a thing which can, metaphorically as well as really, also be related to the "ground" or "root".[98] We could adduce more examples of this meaningful relationship between ground, "matrix", plant, fruit, food and taste in Paracelsus' texts.[99]

Now, in the previous passages, we have discussed taste (and smell) not as metaphors but as real sensory perceptions. This, however, paves the way for better understanding the metaphorical use of taste. It would be surprising, given his familiarity with the German religious tradition, if the metaphor of taste as the highest, deepest, essential, or mystical and ineffable knowledge were totally absent in Paracelsus. Yet the examples I have found are few and rather vague. For example, we read that "the universities do not taste [*schmecken*] anything in philosophy, so as they, generally, can and know nothing".[100] Similarly, we read that "if a man is salted with the right salt, then

95 Paracelsus, Archidoxis, *HE* 6,39: "laß die quintam essentiam digeriren vier tag / so ist sie in dem Geschmack / Safft / Gustu, vnd Virtute vollkommen".

96 Idem, Fragmenta de Urinis, *HE* 5, Appendix, 173.

97 Paracelsus, Liber Meteororum, *HE* 8,189; see idem, Von Vrsprung, Herkommen vnd Anfang der Frantzosen. In: *Chirurgische Bücher vnd Schrifften*. Ed. J. Huser. Straßburg, Latzarus Zetzner 1605, p. 212a: "jhren Geschmack / jhr Krafft vnd Tugend hat"; see also idem, Archidoxis, *HE* 6,5: "Spiritus gibt Gehördt / Gesicht / Sensum vnd Empfindligkeit / vnd Gustum."

98 See, e.g., idem, Das Ander Buch der grossen Wundartzney. In: *Chirurgische Bücher vnd Schrifften*, p. 62b: "so dann jhr den Grund so eben wissend vnnd schmecken"; idem, Opus Paramirum, *HE* 1,199: "was da wachst / nach seiner wurtz schmecket…" For the closeness of both senses see Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I., The Power of the Senses and the Role of Culture in Metaphor and Language, p. 117.

99 E.g., Paracelsus, Azoth, *HE* 10, Appendix, 26 and 29.

100 Idem, Von den natürlichen Dingen, *HE* 7,142.

he tastes good to God".[101] My suggestion is that this relates to the influence of the anti-intellectualist Taulerian and Lutheran traditions.

On the other hand, Paracelsus uses many metaphors of light and seeing, most famously the pair "light of nature" and "light of grace". Importantly, he appreciates both "lights", that is, natural and inspired knowledge, as equally valuable and worthy. In particular, his emphasis on empirical knowledge in the light of nature, as opposed to the authorities and "paper books", is what is typical: "nature is so highly endowed by God that everything must be experienced by the light of nature and not by hearing".[102] Yet if we open his theological works, we can read that

> […] the eyes give no account of the highest Good […] to know the highest Good is given only by the spirit of heaven which was not with the ancient [thinkers], only with the new[born] creature.[103]

Hence Paracelsus' prayer: "may our eyes not seduce us in the lust [*wollust*] of the natural tree […] in seduction by the evil spirit".[104] These words would fit well into the Lutheran context, likewise the context of heterodox spiritualism.

To sum up, according to the Paracelsian teaching of *signatura rerum*, the inner powers should be recognised by means of outer forms and sensory qualities of things in general, that is, by their shape, colour, smell, taste, etc. We may assume that taste is less prone to a false "seduction" and, therefore, it is more reliable – both as the real sensory perception and as a metaphor for non-intellectual knowledge. However, I have only been able to find a few examples of the latter use.

Valentin Weigel: Seeing as tasting

Let us now have a look at one of the first readers of Paracelsus who was, at the same time, highly individual and influential. Although being inspired in many ways by Paracelsus, the heterodox Lutheran theologian Valentin Weigel (1533–1588) had his own primarily theological agenda, caring little

101 Idem, *Ms.* 90. (H1) UB Heidelberg, *Cod. Pal. Germ.* 476,2. In: Sudhoff, K., *Versuch einer Kritik der Echtheit der Paracelsischen Schriften. Teil II. Paracelsus-Handschriften*. Berlin, Georg Andreas Reimer Verlag 1899, p. 442.

102 Paracelsus, Elf Tractat, *SE* 1,87.

103 Paracelsus, Liber de vita. In: idem, *Neue Paracelsus-Edition. Theologische Schriften*, vol. 1. Ed. U. L. Gantenbein (hereafter *GE*). Berlin, De Gruyter 2008, p. 164.

104 Idem, Liber de potentia et potentiae gratia dei, *GE* 1,387.

for medical or natural philosophical implications. Weigel was an avid reader of German mysticism, mainly the *Theologia Deutsch* and Tauler for sure, but his inspirations were, in fact, many and quite divergent.

On the one hand, the situation seems clear when we read the following:

> […] sight surpasses hearing, *auditus*, hearing surpasses *odoratus* […] Smell surpasses *gustum*, that is, taste [*geschmakh*] […] *gustus* surpasses *tactus*, that is, grasping or feeling […] but the quickest and most skilful of the external senses is sight, which happens by means of the eyes and in the twinkling of an eye. But the *imaginatio* not only surpasses these five external senses, but includes them all […].[105]

This emphasis on seeing and, consequently, light, sides with Weigel's epistemology of the "three eyes" which he drew from the 12th-century theologian Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1097–1141) and developed further. The lowest knowledge pertains to the "sensual eye" and imagination. (This does not conform to the above hierarchy of the senses; however, Weigel does not solve this paradox.) Above this, there is the "rational eye" that rises above the senses; and, ultimately, the "intellectual or mental eye", "by which humans see and know the object in an angelic manner".[106] To make it more complicated, the "highest vision" means for Weigel, as it meant in the Eckhartian and Taulerian traditions, that the intellectual eye remains passive and God himself "sees" through the human eye. Then, there is no distance between subject and object. That is why such a knowledge is the only true knowledge because it overcomes its subjectivity. The confluence of subject and object means that it is, in fact, not seeing because that presupposes their distinction. Could it, perhaps, be a "tasting"? The short answer is yes, as attested by multiple examples:

> […] the Spirit of God, the Word of God, or Christ in us, who dwells in us through faith […] is the whole and perfect kingdom of God, but it is not manifest – it must be waited for, known, found, felt [*gefület*] and tasted [*geschmeckt*] in the inner foundation of the soul.[107]

This taste also relates to "essence" or "being" (*Wesen*) as faith is "essential feeling" and must be felt and "tasted" in the heart. However, at the same

105 Weigel, V., Gnothi seauton I,9. In: idem, *Sämtliche Schriften. Neue Edition*. Ed. H. Pfefferl. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog 1996– (hereafter *PW*), III,74.
106 Idem, Der güldene Griff 4, *PW* VIII,18.
107 Ibid. 15, PW VIII,61f.

time, Weigel assumes that this "essential" knowledge is multidimensional, so to speak, and pertains to other sensory perceptions too:

> […] true faith renews […] and enlightens the heart, and is truly a living feeling [*lebendiges befinden*], seeing, hearing, touching, and tasting [*schmecken*] […] it is no dead fanciful invention. […] Faith is essential feeling, seeing, sensing and hearing in the inner man. […] you feel and taste it in your heart […].[108]

Still, when it comes to the description of the highest knowledge – or rather the "unknowing knowledge" of Cusanus, who is one of Weigel's sources – Weigel reverts to metaphors of taste, as when he speaks of God who is "a lovely and sweet rest [*süsser Stillestand*]".[109] Here, "rest" means what it says, it "ceases all desire and movement".[110] Thus, there is a metaphorical paradox in Weigel's doctrine: even if eye and sight are exemplary for *all* sensual perception, seeing with the mind's eye may more properly be called "tasting". However, much like sight, it is a cognitive metaphor and quasi-concept.[111]

Heinrich Khunrath: The experience of Wisdom

Another Paracelsian, of a very different sort, and yet in some respects similar to Weigel, is the influential theosopher and alchemist Heinrich Khunrath (c. 1560–1605). He drew on Weigel, Paracelsus, Luther, German Mysticism and Ficino. We will limit our search to his *opus magnum* only, the *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae* (1609), which is, moreover, the most philosophically and theologically relevant.

The importance of light metaphysics to Khunrath is suggested by his use of the Ficinian-Paracelsian notions "light of nature" and "light of grace". Generally, metaphors of light are omnipresent in his work.[112] Similar to Ficino and the Neoplatonists, Khunrath makes use of the ladder of light, manifested in the hierarchy of beauty, while adding the Weigelian motif of the "eye of the mind":

108 Ibid. 19, *PW* VIII,77.
109 Weigel, V., Vom Ort der Welt 19. In: idem, *Sämtliche Schriften*. Ed. E. Zeller – W.-E. Peuckert. Stuttgart, Frommann-Holzboog 1962– (hereafter *ZW*), I,67.
110 Ibid., *ZW* I,69.
111 On quasi-concepts see Petr Pavlas' study in this special issue.
112 See Žemla, M., Ficino in the light of alchemy. Heinrich Khunrath's use of Ficinian metaphysics of Light. In: Finamore, J. F. – Nejeschleba, T., *Platonism and its Legacy*. Lydney, The Prometheus Trust 2019, pp. 281–295.

> How pleasant it is to behold this eternal and infinite Light with the eyes of the mind […] How pleasant it is to conceive this uncreated and incarnate Light by faith in the Saviour, to behold the created Light in the angels, to admire its radiance in the macrocosmic light of nature, in the heavenly lights, and to awaken its brightness in the microcosmic soul […].[113]

Importantly, the goal of the cognitive process is divine Wisdom, as the book title itself insinuates. As such, it is beyond the scope of merely human knowledge, which makes it prone to metaphors other than the visual. Indeed, Khunrath makes an extensive use of other sensory metaphors to describe how Wisdom is attained.

In a good Lutheran way (and also in the footsteps of Nicholas of Cusa), he often emphasizes that we *listen* to divine Wisdom's calling.[114] To offer but one example:

> Wisdom calls […] in the whole world […], in the books of Nature and Creation, in the Holy Scriptures and in your own conscience […] Does not wisdom cry out, does not prudence utter her voice? […] We listen to this catholic [i.e. ubiquitous] voice with our ears of the senses, of reason, of the intellect, and of the mind, in prayer, in the oratory, and in the laboratory […].[115]

The phrase "ears of the senses, of reason, of the intellect, and of the mind" is a typical Khunrathian way of pointing out that our "hearing" must happen on various levels of reality – of which only the lowest involves bodily ears and sensory perception. Thus, hearing becomes a metaphor for tracing the invisible divine Wisdom. This "hunt for Wisdom", to use another Cusanus' phrase, is understood by Khunrath, using another famous metaphor, as the reading of the "three divine books": Holy Scripture, nature, and the human conscience. In other words, it involves studying, experimenting, and experiencing.

If we now move on to the next metaphor, that of "taste", the results of our search in the *Amphitheatrum* will be even more impressive. Let us begin again with a quotation:

113 Khunrath, H., *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae*. Hanau, Guilielmus Antonius 1609, § 89 (*Ecclesiastes* 11,7).

114 On listening to God's Wisdom see ibid., § 4, 25, 32, 40, 47, 48, 49, 60, 62, 64, 65, 66, 79, 82, 278, 279, 300 etc.

115 Ibid., § 35 (*Proverbs* 8,1).

> […] the true student of Sophia [Divine Wisdom] may […] dwell on it in thought with ingenuity, and examine it often in the mind, so that the salutary mental food of this theosophical doctrine may be happily transformed into a sweet renewal of the soul, and a most efficacious nourishment of the spirit […] we are to taste [this wisdom] not superficially and lightly with our lips, but to receive it repeatedly by swallowing it often and deeply, and to truly, even quintessentially, perceive how, and how sweet, is true Wisdom, and finally how its teaching penetrates into the deepest recesses of the human heart.[116]

This passage is telling, and it brings us to the very core of Khunrath's understanding of the relationship between taste and Wisdom: "tasting" is an essential, animating, and *transforming* cognition.

The metaphorical connection between Wisdom and sweetness, mentioned in the above text, often comes with other sensory metaphors. Thus Wisdom (or Jesus) is, at one and the same time, "the flower of divine honey", "the heavenly manna of dew", "the honey in the soul and in the heart", and "light in the soul that dispels the darkness of ignorance".[117] True Wisdom gives a "sweet answer" to her lover, with the "hidden voice of the intellect and soul" and also with a "delightful kiss" which is "sweet".[118] "Sweet", that is, attractive to us, which arouses our emotions. This multisensoriality of the experience of Wisdom is sometimes made explicit when Khunrath gradually names all the senses and their functions in, to use Abraham Maslow's term, this "peak experience". For example:

> O Wisdom, open my spiritual sight to see You and my hearing to hear You, purify my senses, my mind and intellect, touch the tongue of my heart to taste You. Finally, I ask You to exalt me with the attraction of Your magnet, to refine me with the fire of Your Spirit, and to connect and unite me with You.[119]

Elsewhere, to take but one of many, many similar quotations, we are informed that we "will see it, touch it, taste it, hear it, and feel it";[120] Khunrath himself confesses (about the fundamental alchemical *desideratum*, the Catholic Green Lion): "I saw it, held it in my hands, tasted it and felt it";[121] and he

116 Ibid., *Prologue*; see also ibid., § 339.
117 Ibid., § 166.
118 Ibid., § 230.
119 Ibid., § 38.
120 Ibid., § 153.
121 Ibid., § 294.

assures the reader that the "catholic, triune, hermaphroditic, placed and finite little world […] can be seen, felt, heard, smelled and tasted".[122]

We can say that, in terms of sensory metaphors, Khunrath's text presents a mixture of light metaphysics, Lutheran primacy of hearing, and the mystical emphasis on taste. "Tasting" is true knowledge, the transforming cognition, and a "sweet" affect that can move us.

Conclusion: The 17th century

Sight has been shown to be the major metaphor for knowledge and understanding in Western thought. In the Platonic tradition, although sight allows access to beauty and divinity up the metaphysical-physical-metaphorical ladder, its inherent distance and susceptibility to illusion make it vulnerable to error. Sight, primarily, pertains to concepts which are fixed and unmoving, that is, "true". It is often considered the most objective of our senses. In contrast to sight, in Lutheranism, hearing with its passive nature offers a more open understanding of God (and the world), allowing us to move beyond the limitations of active visual perception, beyond "erring eyes". For mystics and Paracelsians, taste (and smell, as we have seen), as the most intimate and therefore most subjective sense, provides a visceral and transformative experiential cognition, an "unknowing knowledge" from the perspective of visual metaphors, that leads to a deeper, "living" understanding which transcends the limitations of language and communication. As such, taste can reveal the "true nature" of a thing, its "hidden powers" (*vires occultae*); on the other hand, metaphors of taste have a strong effect on our emotions: they can "move us" toward or away from something.

Thus, we can say, by recognizing the limitations of sight and exploring the unique insights offered by hearing and taste, a more nuanced and transformative understanding of the (divine) world might have been unlocked. Conversely, the ban on non-visual metaphors could have narrowed the world as we "see" it, especially if the visual metaphors had remained in use and as such went unnoticed.

As stated above, it would be necessary to broaden and deepen the scope of this paper to fully understand the role of sensory metaphors, and especially the metaphor of taste, in the development of philosophical and early scientific thought. Thus, allow me just a few remarks.

One important current of thought was articulated by the Rosicrucian movement that started with the three Manifestos published in 1614, 1615

122 Ibid., *Isagoge* 2.

and 1616. They called for a general change, a "universal reform". If we look here for sensory metaphors, overall the results are not rich. However, the *Confessio fraternitatis* (1615) makes one important claim: "there have been ages which have seen, others which have heard, others again that have smelt and tasted [*gerochen unnd geschmecket*]".[123] It is not clear how to understand it: perhaps in the sense of a Neoplatonic emphasis on seeing, Lutheran on hearing, and mystical on tasting? Anyway, the text claims (as the Paracelsians did) that God opened his hidden knowledge in the "book of nature" which "stands open truly for all eyes". This involves a new and special task: now "honour should be likewise given to the tongue, that which formerly saw, heard, and smelt shall finally speak"; and after intoxicated sleep we shall "joyfully go forth to meet the sun rising in the morning". It seems that the old possibilities of sensory metaphors have been set aside for the sake of the age of activity and "speaking".

Although this call often remained only vague and theoretical, some authors tried to devise practical steps, such as Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654, a co-author of the Manifestos) in his utopic *Christianopolis* (1619) and Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670) with his pedagogical treatises. Andreae himself makes good use of sight and of images in his *Christianopolis*: images are the best instrument for learning things, they are an aid to memory,[124] because "learning enters us altogether more easily through our eyes than through our ears, and more pleasantly".[125] That is why, in Christianopolis, "they attract the children by giving them pictures to examine, they develop the older ones, and they advise the adolescents".[126]

Authors who subscribed to Rosicrucian ideas often developed highly imaginative methods based, obviously, on images, that is, largely on sight. A typical representative of this is Robert Fludd (1574–1637). However, like Khunrath, Weigel and Paracelsus – all of them usually being the Rosicrucian sources – they used other sensory metaphors as well and they used them as both cognitive and affective metaphors.

Yet there is also the other party, promoted by Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), Fludd's opponent and a follower of René Descartes (1596–1650). For them, imagination is an obstacle on the path to true knowledge. In fact, the origins of modern science are closely related to a cleansing process in early modern

123 *Confessio Fraternitatis*, ch. 8. Frankfurt am Main, J. Bringern 1617, p. 48.
124 Andreae, J. V., *Christianopolis* 47. Ed. and transl. E. H. Thompson. Dordrecht, Kluwer 1999, p. 213.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid. 51, p. 218; see also ch. 49–50.

philosophy, whose language was to be free of any imaginative, that is, vague and misleading terms. Yet, at the same time, they often make extensive use of visual metaphors.

Francis Bacon (1561–1626), in his *Instauratio magna*, published 1620, emphasised the role of the "eye of the human understanding", of "deceitful resemblances of objects and signs", of "the uncertain light of the sense, sometimes shining out, sometimes clouded over".[127] He claims: "I admit nothing but on the faith of eyes, or at least of careful and severe examination".[128] For him, "all depends on keeping the eye steadily fixed upon the facts of nature and so receiving their images simply as they are. For God forbid that we should give out a dream of our own imagination".[129] The crown of the creation is "the intellectual light".[130] Here, the eye is the leading instrument in the new science as well as its leading metaphor – although it wants to get rid of imagination.

Descartes' rejection of figurative language, coupled with his method of *clare et distincte*, is well known.[131] Significantly, Descartes begins his *Dioptrique* (1637) – with an introductory *Discours de la méthode* – as follows:

> All the conduct of our life depends on our senses, among which that of the sight is the most universal and noblest, there is no doubt that the inventions which serve to increase its power, are of the most useful that can be.[132]

Descartes' contemporary, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), writes in 1651:

> Metaphors, and senselesse and ambiguous words, are like *ignes fatui*;[133] and reasoning upon them, is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention and sedition, or contempt.[134]

127 Bacon, F., The Great Instauration. In: *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*. Ed. and transl. J. M. Robertson. London, George Routledge and Sons 1905, Preface, p. 245.
128 Ibid., p. 252.
129 Ibid., p. 253; see also Bacon's critique of Paracelsus in *The New Organon*. Book 2, Aph. 48, ibid., p. 371: "let no one adopt the wild fancy of Paracelsus […] blinded I suppose by his distillations […]."
130 Bacon, F., The Great Instauration, p. 254.
131 See, e.g., Blumenberg, H., Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie, pp. 7f.
132 Descartes, R., La Dioptrique I (De la lumière). In: idem, *Œuvres*, vol. 6. Ed. Ch. Adam – P. Tannery. Paris, Léopold Cerf 1902, p. 81.
133 "Foolish fires", i.e., will-o'-the-wisps, in the sense that they attract our attention, seduce us, but they are nothing in themselves.
134 Hobbes, T., *Leviathan, or, The Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* I,5. London, Andrew Crooke 1651, p. 22.

About four decades later, John Locke asserts that "figurative Speeches" in scholarly treatises "insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat".[135]

Of course, such claims make sense only if figurative language were in use not only in popular speech but also in philosophy. The early modern raid against "misleading" and overly emotional and "disturbing" metaphors, however, was directed against everything but the fundamental visual metaphors, which were used rather uncritically. "Hearing", "smell" and "taste" as privileged experiential ways to the truth remained episodic and marginal, reserved for poetry and personal religiosity where they can open the door to another "reality" – which mainstream science, driven by visual metaphors, does not consider real at all.

135 Locke, J., *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* III,10. London, Awnsham et al. 1700 (1st edition 1689), p. 301.