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# The Highest Virtue of the Philologist, or: How to Do Things with Virtues and Vices

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**Abstract**

Scholarly virtues and vices are a well-established research topic in the history of the humanities. Drawing on a rich array of sources in which scholars invoked concepts of virtue and vice to express their standards of good scholarship, historians try to map how epistemic virtues and academic performance criteria evolved over time. A complicating factor, however, is that virtues and vices were often also used for other purposes. In scholarly controversies, for instance, virtues and vices sometimes served primarily as rhetorical weapons, used to discredit opponents. This prompts two questions: Should historians attend to the full range of scholars' virtue talk? And, if so, what would be an appropriate way of studying this language? Answering the first question in the affirmative, this article proposes a rhetorical approach that helps historians grasp not only the referential aspects of scholars' language but also its performative dimensions (things that scholars did with words).

**Keywords**

History of humanities, scholarly virtues, scholarly vices, epistemic virtues, epistemic vices, history of philology, German literary studies

## Introduction

Jakob Minor's commentary on Goethe's *Faust*, published in two volumes in 1901, caused a small stir in the field of German literary studies. One cause of surprise was the book's dedication "to the philologists of the twentieth century."[1] To what extent did this imply distrust or even disdain of nineteenth-century Goethe philology, despite the fact that this field had been founded by Minor's own former teacher, Wilhelm Scherer? The book's "sourish" preface,

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[1] Minor, *Goethes Faust*, vol. 1, iii*. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

as one reviewer called it, took away all doubt.[2] It expressly deplored the specialization and increased attention to details that had become characteristic not only of Goethe scholarship but of nineteenth-century philology at large. Who still dared to interpret *Faust*, not at the word or sentence level, with the help of learned lexicons and encyclopedias, but as a work of art, comprehensible only in an act of poetic imagination, by understanding (*verstehen*) rather than counting words or tracing allusions? In marked opposition to positivist ideals of methodological rigor, Minor sought to rehabilitate the imagination (*Phantasie*) as an indispensable resource for philological research: "The gift of imaginatively putting oneself in the situation presented to us by the poet is, therefore, the highest virtue of the philologist."[3]

What does this phrase, "the highest virtue of the philologist," reveal about Minor, German-language Goethe philology, and the *Geisteswissenschaften* around 1900? There are at least three ways in which this line can be interpreted, corresponding to three more general approaches that can be distinguished in the historiography on scholarly virtues and vices. First, one might read Minor's "highest virtue" as reflecting a methodological dispute in German literary studies or, more specifically, as a contribution to what Wilfried Barner and others have described as a fin-de-siècle revolt against the hegemony of philological methods in the study of German literature.[4] In terms of approaches, this first reading fits the history of disciplines as it came to fruition in the 1980s and, in the case of German literary studies, yielded monumental works like Jürgen Fohrmann and Wilhelm Voßkamp's *Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Germanistik im 19. Jahrhundert* (A History of Germanic Philology in the Nineteenth Century, 1994).[5] Alternatively, one might read Minor's defense of the imagination as a reflection on scholarly virtues or personal qualities needed for research and teaching in the humanities.[6] In this second reading, Minor's polemic offers further evidence of what recent studies describe as the essentially contested character of virtues like precision, carefulness, and objectivity.[7] The frame of reference, in this case, is not the history of disciplines but the history of scholarly virtues and vices that Lorraine Daston and others have been practicing

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[2] Köster, review, 80.
[3] Minor, *Goethes Faust*, vol. 1, vi.
[4] Barner, "Gravitation"; Kolk, "Liebhaber," 109–14.
[5] Fohrmann and Voßkamp, *Wissenschaftsgeschichte*; Fohrmann, *Projekt*.
[6] Following common practice, this article translates *Geisteswissenschaften* as "humanities," even though the terms are not entirely congruous.
[7] Krajewski, "Genauigkeit"; Paul, "Virtue Language"; Creyghton, "Impartiality."

since the early 2000s.[8] Compared to the first approach, this second one has the advantage of focusing not on single disciplines but on standards that were shared and negotiated across the humanities (and beyond).[9]

Although, over the past decade, I have contributed my share to this second approach, it is fair to add that its focus on qualities perceived as conducive to research and teaching also has some potential blind spots. Minor's "highest virtue" helps us see why both the first and second approaches miss something important. Insofar as they treat Minor's virtue talk – that is, the way he wrote about scholarly virtues and vices – as mirroring his place in the discipline or his ideal of the scholarly persona, they ignore the rhetorical aspects of Minor's language. What they fail to notice is that "the highest virtue of . . ." was a stock phrase, with "virtue" being just as highly charged a term as "imagination." Moreover, they overlook both the historically grown connotations of Minor's vocabulary and the rhetorical ploys that the Viennese Goethe expert used in appealing to "the philologists of the twentieth century."

To remedy these deficiencies, this article presents a third approach, complementary to the former ones, in which the rhetorical aspects of scholars' virtue talk take center stage. The aim of this exercise is not to introduce a new mode of reductionism, in which scholars' virtue talk appears as "nothing but" rhetoric. On the contrary, it aims to add nuance and complexity by drawing attention to a so-far-neglected aspect of scholars' virtue talk. While granting that virtues usually refer to personal qualities, habits, or attitudes, which in turn may affect a field's methods and sense of identity, the article assumes that language is not exhausted by this referential aspect. Language also has performative dimensions insofar as speakers and writers "do things with words."[10] By examining these dimensions of Minor's virtue language, this article draws attention to a specific form of "doing": not to illocutionary verbs (J. L. Austin) or speech acts (John Searle) but to means of persuasion that scholars used to get their message across. It asks: What were the historically grown connotations of terms like "imagination"?

[8] Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*; Kivistö, *Vices*; Murphy and Traninger, *Emergence*; Creyghton et al., "Virtue Language." See also, more recently, Ohara, "Virtue Language"; Saarloos, "Scholarly Self"; Eskildsen, "Virtues"; Stöger, *Epistemische Tugenden*; Garritzen, *Reimagining*; Lochmatow, *Public Knowledge*.

[9] Van Dongen and Paul, *Epistemic Virtues*; Gelhard, Hackler, and Zanetti, *Epistemische Tugenden*.

[10] Austin, *How to Do*.

How did scholars like Minor draw on such inherited vocabularies? What rhetorical techniques did they use? And how did their readers respond?

To bring out the complementarity of the three approaches, the article does not attend to these questions immediately. It starts with a disciplinary perspective in section 1, followed by an exploration of Minor's views on the personal qualities needed for philological scholarship in section 2. It is only against this background that the questions featured in section 3 can be answered. This is to say, on the one hand, that a rhetorical analysis as proposed in this article adds to existing approaches but also, on the other, that knowledge of Minor's work, his position in the field, and his ideals of virtue are indispensable for understanding how and why he made use of the idiom of virtue and vice. If this implies that the article must pay attention to some details of Minor's life and work, it goes without saying that his case has been chosen primarily for its illustrative potential. The goal is not to enhance our understanding of Minor but to exemplify certain dynamics at work throughout the humanities at the time. To that end, the article occasionally points to analogies in other corners of the humanities than those inhabited by Minor and his colleagues. In its concluding section, the article zooms out from the case study to reflect in broader terms on the historiographical relevance and timeliness of its methodological intervention.

**First approach: the history of academic disciplines**

*Nomen est omen*: Jakob Minor occupies only a small place in the historiography of German literary studies.[11] He is primarily known as a member of the "Scherer school" that dominated the largely overlapping fields of *Neugermanistik* and *Goethe-Philologie* near the end of the nineteenth century. When Scherer in an influential article of 1877 advocated the application of historical-critical methods as employed by classical and old Germanic philologists to modern authors like Goethe,[12] the then 22-year-old Minor was still writing his doctoral dissertation at the University of Vienna. But as soon as the thesis was finished, Minor traveled to Berlin, where together with his friend August Sauer he attended Scherer's seminar. Encouraged by their teacher, the two young Austrians co-authored a collection of *Studien zur Goethe-Philologie* (Studies in Goethe Philology, 1880), which faithfully followed in Scherer's footsteps insofar as

[11] Biographical details are taken from Faerber, *Chinese*.
[12] Scherer, "Goethe-Philologie," esp. 171.

they situated Goethe's work in its biographical context, traced its development (*Entwicklung*) over time, and compared manuscript variants, partly to map continuity and change in Goethe's thinking but also in the hope that Goethe's stylistic revisions would shed light on his aesthetic aspirations.[13] Methodologically, this book set the tone for much of Minor's later work. With book-length studies on Hamann (1882) and Schiller (1890), not to mention dozens of articles, Minor developed a solid reputation as a conscientious philologist. Writing in 1900, an Austrian colleague judged that "Minor is one of the greatest masters" of meticulous, "microscopical" philology.[14] It is not surprising, therefore, that Minor, after succeeding Erich Schmidt as chair of literary history in Vienna, came to be seen as representing an Austrian branch of the Scherer school (together with Sauer and Bernhard Seuffert, among others).[15] In light of all this, Minor's dismissive remarks on "Scherer and his epigones" in the preface to his *Faust* book may cause surprise. What made Minor so critical of the school to which he himself was perceived as belonging?

Three explanations present themselves. First, from his student days onwards, Minor had hoped that philological inquiry would prepare the way for an aesthetic appreciation of Goethe's genius.[16] This was hardly an original thought: much of the prestige that philology enjoyed in nineteenth-century German-speaking Europe was based on the idea that it would provide a solid, "scientific" foundation for the aesthetic education of the youth.[17] By the late 1870s, it had seemed as if Scherer had been able to fulfill this hope. Sauer, for one, had been greatly impressed by Scherer's "sparking spirit."[18] Minor, however, had responded more reservedly. As early as 1878, he had confessed to Sauer that Scherer appeared to him as having "no personality, no character." Although Scherer brought the most diverse of sources to bear on one another, it was more a "combining" of insights than a "truly creative imagination" (*eigentlich schaffende Phantasie*), which Minor believed to be crucial for seeing the whole in the parts.[19] After Scherer's death, Minor had written more appreciatively about his teacher's

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[13] Minor and Sauer, *Studien*.
[14] O[tto] R[ommel], undated and unpublished report on *Goethes Faust* (1900), in Faerber, *Chinese*, 228.
[15] Egglmaier, "Entwicklungslinien," 232.
[16] Faerber, *Chinese*, 8–10.
[17] Kruckis, *Potenziertes Abbild*, 93–102.
[18] August Sauer to Jakob Minor, October 28, 1877, in Faerber, *Chinese*, 320.
[19] Jakob Minor to August Sauer, December 26, 1878, ibid., 350.

ability to proceed from philological details to “the most inner secrets of Goethe’s art.” He had added, however, that even Scherer, a man more learned and less afraid of original hypotheses than any of his colleagues, had struggled all his life with a tension between information and insight, causing him at times to become a “victim” instead of a “high priest” of science.[20] This was a sobering thought. If even Scherer had not been able to live up to Minor’s ideal, how much less could his students, living in an age of relentless specialization, be expected to do so?

Minor’s worries seemed to be confirmed by a second factor: the transformation of the field of Goethe philology since Scherer’s pioneering article of 1877. After the death of Goethe’s last descendent in 1885, the writer’s personal papers had become available for research. Within months, a Goethe Archive and a Goethe Society had been founded, the latter of which had begun work on a new, critical edition of the master’s oeuvre, known as the Weimar edition (143 vols., 1887–1919).[21] These initiatives had profoundly changed the field, if only by creating job openings, many of which Scherer had managed to fill with his own former students.[22] More importantly, however, the sheer size of archival material made available to students of Goethe affected scholars’ scope of research: it stimulated detailed investigations rather than overall assessments. Tellingly, when in 1887 Hermann Grimm issued a new edition of his then ten-year-old Goethe lectures, he saw no need to revise the book in the light of new findings, as he judged that Goethe philologists occupied themselves only with “trivia” (*Unbedeutendes*).[23] To what extent Minor shared this assessment is apparent from an 1894 article on the dangers of specialization, in which he argued that an over-abundance of “dead and sterile material” – letters, diaries, and draft manuscripts of the sort kept in literary archives – stifles readers’ interpretive powers. How can scholars hope to grasp the aesthetic unity of Goethe’s work if they spend long years comparing variants and tracing allusions, resulting in *Habilitationsschriften* (second dissertations) devoted to only a handful of Goethe poems?[24] By the 1890s, the realization of Minor’s ideal – an aesthetic appreciation of Goethe’s art as a whole – seemed further away than ever.

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[20] Minor, “Wilhelm Scherer,” 123, 124.
[21] Mandelkow, *Goethe*, vol. 1, 211–32; Raabe, “Weimarer Goethe-Ausgabe.”
[22] Kruckis, *Potenziertes Abbild*, 233.
[23] Grimm, *Goethe*, xix.
[24] Minor, “Centralanstalten,” 17, 24.

If these two factors go a long way to explaining why Minor in 1901 found himself dissatisfied with the direction that his field had taken, one may add, in the third place, that Minor was not alone in rebelling against an overestimation of detailed philological work. Goethe philology as practiced by Scherer's pupils in the late 1880s and early 1890s prompted a whole chorus of anti-philological voices. The Tübingen *Gymnasium* professor Friedrich Braitmaier, for instance, wrote a widely read pamphlet against "the micrological spirit of current research" that he held responsible for the field of Goethe studies losing itself in pedantic "donkey work" (*Kärrnerarbeit*).[25] Although Richard Weltrich was less dismissive, he agreed with Braitmaier that Scherer's philological paradigm had become too powerful.[26] The future Leipzig professor Georg Witkowski, in his turn, historicized the "Schererian deluge" of philological studies as a typical product of the 1880s, prompted by the opening of the Goethe Archive. The challenge for the 1890s, Witkowski continued, was to reclaim "the aesthetic and philosophical method as it prevailed before Scherer's influence," albeit in a more critical, non-speculative vein.[27] Even Erich Schmidt, Scherer's successor in Berlin, who as director of the Goethe Archive and editor of the Weimar edition bore no small amount of responsibility for the state of the field, agreed that the endless "quest for parallels" pursued by "tireless philological interpreters of details [*Detailerklärer*]" did not contribute much to a better understanding of Goethe.[28]

Against this background, Minor's musings on "the highest virtue of the philologist" may be interpreted as part of a broader debate about the benefits and limitations of philological inquiry in German literary studies. Without mentioning them by name, Minor agreed with Witkowski *et alia* that aesthetic appreciation suffered from the hegemony of philological research. Like Schmidt, he singled out philologists' obsession with parallel passages as an example of a practice gone astray.[29] Also, like Braitmaier, he believed that a remedy would require rehabilitation of the reader's imagination (*Phantasie*) and intuitive perception (*Anschauung*) in Goethe's sense of the word.[30] To some extent, Minor even joined the company of commentators calling for "aesthetic" or "philosophical" alternatives to the

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[25] Braitmaier, *Göthekult*, 2, 68.
[26] Weltrich, "Goethekult [I]," 1–2; "Goethekult [II]," 6.
[27] Witkowski, "Neue Faustschriften," 626.
[28] Schmidt, "Aufgaben," 15, 11.
[29] Minor, *Goethes Faust*, vol. 1, x.
[30] Ibid., vi–ix; Braitmaier, *Göthekult*, 65.

philological ethos that had dominated German literary studies in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Although Minor was too much of a philologist to give up on philology as such – his focus remained on the "virtues of the philologist" – he broadly shared the critics' dissatisfaction with excessive carefulness, precision, and attention to detail. Minor's 1901 preface can therefore be situated in what historians of German literary studies have described as a revolt against the field's "philological ethos," which in turn paved the way for hermeneutical (*geistesgeschichtliche*) modes of literary studies.[31]

**Second approach: the history of scholarly virtues and vices**

One does not have to question the importance of the history of disciplines to recognize that the first perspective leaves a couple of things invisible. First of all, revolts against philology, or protests against the narrow-mindedness of an ethos built on carefulness, took place across the humanities. In the field of history, for instance, Johann Gustav Droysen famously railed against the barrenness of projects like Georg Heinrich Pertz's *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*: "We in Germany have, through the Rankean school and the Pertzians, got grumpily bogged down in so-called criticism, whose entire enterprise consists of deciding whether one poor devil of a chronicler has transcribed something from another."[32] Similarly, his lifelong indebtedness to classical philology notwithstanding, Friedrich Nietzsche struck a chord among academic and non-academic readers alike when exposing the sterility of a field that had gotten used to treating philological techniques as ends in themselves.[33] (In 1912, the Swiss Germanist Jonas Fränkel even hinted at a parallel between Minor's and Nietzsche's criticisms of modern philology.)[34]

Moreover, the language of virtue on which Minor drew was spoken not only by German literary scholars. Throughout the humanities, virtue terms like loyalty, carefulness, impartiality, empathy, and objectivity served as a privileged idiom for discussing the scholar's vocation. In some cases, such virtue terms traveled from one field to another, thereby illustrating the

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[31] Barner, "Gravitation"; Kolk, "Liebhaber," 109–14. On the "philological ethos," see ibid., 74–9. As we shall see in a moment, Minor's contributions to this revolt had only limited impact.
[32] Johann Gustav Droysen to Wilhelm Arendt, March 20, 1857, in Droysen, *Briefwechsel*, vol. 2, 442. The English translation is taken from Klaus Meister, "Thucydides," 211.
[33] On Nietzsche's complicated relationship with classical philology, see Porter, *Nietzsche*; Benne, *Nietzsche*.
[34] Fränkel, "Jakob Minor [II]," 2*.

phenomenon that Rens Bod and others call "the flow of cognitive goods."[35] More often, however, scholars' virtue talk was indebted to a discourse of virtue that was close to omnipresent in German middle-class society, permeating etiquette books, sermons, children's books, and educational manuals alike.[36] This is true for the category of "virtues" (*Tugenden*) as such, which in everyday language was often used loosely to denote personal "qualities" (*Eigenschaften*) that people needed to fulfill their social and professional duties. To some extent, however, it also applies to specific virtue terms like industriousness, loyalty, and impartiality. The firmer these virtues were embedded in the moral imagination of middle-class society, the more scholars also agreed on their importance in the academic realm.

Industriousness is a case in point. When Minor was posthumously praised for his "perhaps unprecedented amount of work" – "Work was his duty and pleasure" – this could refer to his remarkable productivity (of which Minor himself had kept track in an 883-item-long bibliography).[37] At the same time, readers of Minor's obituaries must have recognized that commitment to hard work was a *topos* attributed to almost every university professor. Scholars from all backgrounds were routinely depicted as men whose joy lay in their work ("labor ipse voluptas," as Leopold von Ranke liked to say).[38] This commonplace character testifies to the importance that European middle-class citizens, scholars included, attached to industriousness.[39] Similarly, loyalty was a virtue that nearly everyone recognized as important. Although *Treue* by the turn of the century had acquired a somewhat old-fashioned connotation, especially in comparison to the modern notion of *Vertrauen*,[40] loyalty remained a favorite virtue. Obituary writers in particular often hailed scholars' loyalty to science, the truth, the nation, or their professional duties (*Pflichttreue*).[41] In a similar vein, scholars were expected to be loyal to their former teachers and students. When Minor at one point broke off his correspondence with Scherer, his teacher experienced this as a painful breach of good

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[35] Bod et al., "Flow."
[36] Maurer, *Biographie*; Hettling and Hoffmann, *Bürgerliche Wertehimmel*.
[37] Arnold, "Jakob Minor," 794; Weilen, "Jakob Minor," 164; [Minor], "Verzeichnis."
[38] Paul, "Labor Ipse Voluptas."
[39] In book reviews, however, industriousness sometimes served as a dubious compliment, especially if the study under review did not exhibit other, more important virtues. See Scheutz, "Turba," 67.
[40] Frevert, *Vertrauensfragen*, 124–5, 165–9.
[41] E.g., Horawitz, *Wilhelm Scherer*, 28. *Pflichttreue* also featured prominently in Minor's obituaries: Arnold, "Jakob Minor," 800; Hock, "Jakob Minor," 33.

manners.[42] When Minor reestablished contact two years later, Scherer urged him never again to cease writing about his joys and sorrows, private as well as professional, as befitting a mentoring relationship that was supposed to last until well after the student had become an established scholar.[43]

Arguably, industriousness and loyalty were uncontested virtues, not only because of their solid position in the middle-class moral universe, but also because they were compatible with different scholarly methods and habituses. This cannot be said, however, about "the gift of imaginatively putting oneself in the situation presented to us by the poet" that Minor regarded as "the highest virtue of the philologist." Early nineteenth-century philologists like Friedrich Schleiermacher and August Boeckh had granted the imagination an important role in the interpretative process.[44] "Since poetry is created for the imagination," Boeckh had argued, "the interpreter must also be able to recreate it imaginatively."[45] Meanwhile, however, scholars like Richard Heinzel, Minor's one-time teacher in Vienna, had begun to differentiate more strictly between *Wissenschaft* and the personal, relegating all empathy and imagination to the personal realm and advocating a positivist-inspired method of literary analysis that Minor called "sober and mechanical."[46] Similarly, in the field of history, scholars like Heinrich Ulmann rejected all romantic talk of imagination and inspiration as a relic of pre-scientific thought.[47] Even more nuanced authors like Ernst Bernheim agreed that the scholar's imagination is very different from the poet's in that it is "curbed" or "restrained" by the facts.[48] What these examples show is that imagination was a more contested "gift of nature" than industriousness or loyalty: both its nature and its importance for scholarly work in the *Geisteswissenschaften* were subject to debate.[49]

This is even more true for objectivity, one of the most modern and scientific of all scholarly virtues. As Lorraine Daston argues, objectivity gained wide acceptance in the

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[42] Wilhelm Scherer to Erich Schmidt, March 2, 1883, in Scherer and Schmidt, *Briefwechsel*, 183.
[43] Wilhelm Scherer to Jakob Minor, early 1884, as quoted in Faerber, *Chinese*, 111. On lifelong mentoring relationships, see Manteufel, "Three-Story House."
[44] Horstmann, *Antike Theoria*, 158–72.
[45] Boeck, *Enzyklopädie*, 144.
[46] Heinzel, review; Minor, "Richard Heinzel," 316.
[47] Ulmann, "Wissenschaftliche Geschichtsdarstellung," 47, 49.
[48] Bernheim, *Lehrbuch*, 87–8, 429–31, 437–42.
[49] See also, for the sciences, Daston, "Fear."

humanities insofar as it denoted an attitude of unbiased primary source reading that students encountered most directly in historical and philological exercises of the sort established at almost every nineteenth-century German-language university.[50] What should be added, however, is that this rise of objectivity prompted no less than three strands of debate: on the meaning of the term, on the desirability of what Julian Schmidt, speaking about Ranke-style objectivity, called a depoliticized and demoralized mode of history writing,[51] and on the relative importance of objective source criticism compared to political analysis, moral edification, aesthetic education, and other tasks traditionally associated with historical and philological study.[52] Droysen, whom Daston cites as one of her key witnesses, had nothing but contempt for what he dubbed "eunuch-like" objectivity, given its tendency to privilege source-critical questions over everything else.[53] Similarly, Nietzschean charges against fetishized, "bloodless objectivity" were made throughout the *Geisteswissenschaften*, especially by scholars who were worried about the rise to dominance of a scholarly persona that seemed to sever its ties with a wider culture of *Bildung*.[54]

This explains why scholars' debates over the virtues conducive to their work focused less on individual virtues than on their relative importance. While the significance of carefulness *as such* was seldom called into question, an issue capable of dividing scholarly communities was just *how* important the virtue of carefulness was in relation to, say, creativity or intellectual courage. How acceptable was it to privilege one virtue at the cost of others? Were some virtues more negotiable than others? Were all scholars subject to the same standards of virtue or would the field benefit from some (senior) researchers taking greater liberties in launching new hypotheses than others? As Christiaan Engberts has argued, many nineteenth-century scholars were committed to an ideal of balance. Facing the potentially conflicting demands of loyalty and independence, many preferred not to choose but to aim for some kind of equilibrium, without necessarily agreeing on what this would entail.[55]

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[50] Daston, "Objectivity," 31–3.
[51] Schmidt, *Geschichte*, vol. 1, 322–4.
[52] Sybel, "Georg Waitz," 484.
[53] Johann Gustav Droysen to Georg Beseler, January 16, 1853, in Droysen, *Briefwechsel*, vol. 2, 145.
[54] E.g., Heinrich von Treitschke to Eduard Heinrich von Treitschke, November 19, 1864, in *Treitschkes Briefe*, 351. Similarly: Sybel, *Stand*, 7.
[55] Engberts, *Scholarly Virtues*, esp. 197–8.

This commitment expressed itself in different ways. Implicitly, a notion of balance was invoked by book reviewers who accused authors of privileging breadth over depth, displaying a regrettable lack of thoroughness, being excessively skeptical ("hypercritical") in matters of source criticism, or exhibiting a patriotism that detracted from the scholarly merits of their work.[56] Minor did not escape such criticism either. The examiners of his doctoral dissertation found his work wanting in precision, whereas Scherer, in response to Minor's first book, urged his pupil to greater carefulness (*Sorgfalt*).[57] Minor often made similar judgments, thereby stylizing himself as a guardian of precisely those virtues that his early work had failed to honor sufficiently. Interestingly, he could also imagine colleagues perceiving his work as being too exact. In their *Studien zur Goethe-Philologie*, Minor and Sauer stated: "We do not expect or shy away from the charge of having gone too far in accuracy."[58] All these examples illustrate that virtues could be practiced both too much and too little.

If book reviewers seldom elaborated on what they saw as the right dose of accuracy, skepticism, or patriotism, Minor's obituary writers engaged more explicitly in a weighing of virtues and their importance.[59] Some spoke highly about Minor's "happy union of two qualities that are seldom found together in one human being . . . : imagination and common sense."[60] Others argued more critically that avoiding extremes was not a talent that Minor had possessed.[61] Also, while some former pupils emphasized that Minor's virtues had kept him free from various vices and temptations, others regarded his high degree of "determination" (*Entschiedenheit*) as a virtue turned into a vice.[62] No matter how different these assessments were, both praise and criticism testify to a moral economy in which virtues were supposed to complement and balance each other.

Interestingly, it was in reflections on the "first," "highest," or "cardinal virtue" of researchers that such implicit standards become most explicit. Premised on a notion of hierarchy rather than equilibrium, "the highest virtue" formula was usually invoked to

[56] Ibid., 103–37; Paul, "Hypercriticism"; Ten Hagen, "Evaluating Knowledge."
[57] Karl Tomaschek and Richard Heinzel, undated *Gutachten* on "Schillers Theorie des Dramen" (1878), in Faerber, *Chinese*, 36–7, at 36; Wilhelm Scherer to Jakob Minor, undated (early 1880), ibid., 44–5.
[58] Minor and Sauer, *Studien*, vi.
[59] On the genre, see Echterhölter, *Schattengefechte*, esp. 44–58.
[60] Hock, "Jakob Minor," 31.
[61] Weilen, "Jakob Minor," 168.
[62] Hock, "Jakob Minor," 31, 32; Sauer, "[Jakob Minor]," 475–6.

articulate a scholarly ideal. While, for instance, the historian Wilhelm Maurenbrecher claimed that a "thorough practicing of historical criticism" was "the first commandment that science imposes" on students of the past, an Austrian colleague of his begged to differ: Ottokar Lorenz preferred to rank empathy as "the highest and most necessary quality of the historian."[63] In more polemical contexts, the formula could serve as a standard for measuring the accomplishments of colleagues past or present. Heinrich von Treitschke illustrated this practice when he accused Friedrich Christoph Schlosser, a few years after his death, of lacking "one of the first virtues of the historian."[64] If this was a verdict about an individual author, "the highest virtue" also figured in assessments of entire fields. As a well-known German *Gymnasium* director wrote about the persona of the late nineteenth-century classical philologist: "Meticulousness [*Akribie*], the highest virtue of the philologist, becomes his curse; he no longer dares to err and therefore anxiously entrenches himself behind the fences of his subject. Where are the times when bold audacity [*kühner Wagemut*] tried to master larger scholarly areas, notwithstanding the certain danger of falling into error in individual points?"[65]

Seen from this perspective, Minor's "highest virtue of the philologist" was not so much a sign of shifting paradigms in the field of German literary studies as a contribution to an ongoing discussion about the relative importance of the imagination for students of the humanities. More specifically, it was an ode to a quality that had come under pressure due to the rise of scholarly personae that put a premium on the "mechanical" labor of finding parallels, tracing allusions, and identifying quotations.[66] Minor's panegyric on the imagination was, in other words, the manifesto of a scholar who worried that *Phantasie* was about to disappear from the catalog of philological virtues. It was a plea in favor of a persona that paired critical acumen to a lively imagination.

**Third approach: the history of a vocabulary**

As much as this second approach can be applauded – as I am obliged to say, given my own attempts to advance it – it still resembles the first one in a crucial respect: it treats scholars' virtue talk as a more or less transparent window on an underlying reality of ideals, aspirations,

[63] Maurenbrecher, *Ueber Methode*, 6; Lorenz, "Friedrich Christoph Schlosser," 189.
[64] Treitschke, "F. C. Dahlmann," 411.
[65] Aly, "Universität," 69.
[66] Minor, *Goethes Faust*, vol. 1, ix.

beliefs, and commitments. Instead of looking *at* the idiom of virtue, one might say, it tries to look *through* it.[67] This is, of course, common practice: historians read historical sources, not to contemplate their literary qualities, but to gain information.[68] This, however, comes at a price: the rhetorical features of a text like Minor's preface – the commonplaces it contains, the repertoires on which it draws, the appeals to authority that it makes – remain out of sight. This is regrettable, partly because virtue terms were often charged concepts, richly imbued with historically-grown connotations, but also because virtues and vices were often invoked in the service of polemical agendas. In more technical language, one might say that the first and second approaches tend to focus almost exclusively on the *referential* aspects of scholars' virtue talk. Language is, however, not exhausted by its referential qualities: it also has *performative* dimensions insofar as speakers and writers "do things with words" (John Austin) – be it eulogizing a predecessor, criticizing a colleague, articulating an ideal of *Wissenschaft*, or keeping the doors of a profession closed to women.[69]

In addition to the two previous approaches, therefore, we need a third approach: one that is attentive to the idiom that scholars drew upon in articulating their views on the personal qualities needed for research or teaching. Such a rhetorical approach, as I will call it, asks: What were the historically grown connotations of terms like "imagination"? How did scholars like Minor draw on such inherited vocabularies? What rhetorical techniques did they use? And how did their readers respond? In more abstract terms, this amounts to saying that a rhetorical approach should attend to four features of scholars' virtue talk: (a) the *repertoires* on which it drew, or the cultural lexica that provided scholars with a vocabulary for discussing the personal qualities required for research or teaching; (b) the *rhetorical techniques* that authors employed to lend force to their diagnoses of virtue and vice; (c) the *occasions* on which they did so; and (d) the *responses* that scholars' talk of virtue and vice elicited.

The idea of a *repertoire* or cultural lexicon is fairly straightforward. In communicating with their peers, scholars usually don't invent their own terminology, but draw instead on what Quentin Skinner calls "pre-existing language." In many cases, this inherited vocabulary is imbued with cultural connotations, which especially in the case of highly charged concepts,

[67] This phrasing is indebted to Ankersmit, *Meaning*, 197.
[68] LaCapra, *Rethinking*, 32 calls this a "documentary approach to the reading of texts."
[69] Austin, *How to Do*.

such as virtues and vices, affect their meanings and emotional associations.[70] For instance, in nineteenth-century Europe, the word dogmatism recalled not only Kant's distinction between critical and dogmatic thinking but also the cultural stereotype of dogmatic Catholicism. Accordingly, scholars accused of dogmatism not seldom found themselves depicted as pope-like figures clinging to infallible creeds (an image that became especially popular after the Vatican Council).[71] Charlatanry, likewise, was not just a technical term for a cluster of scholarly wrongdoings but also a word evoking a centuries-long tradition of scholarly satire, not to mention the authority of Johann Burkhard Mencke, the Enlightenment historian whose treatise on the theme served as a *locus classicus* for all critics of charlatanry.[72] Also, despite the fact that objectivity was a semantically flexible term, German historians around 1900 could not mention it without evoking, voluntarily or not, the image of Ranke, the "master of objectivity."[73]

Much the same is true for Minor's beloved notions of *Phantasie* and *Anschauung*. Concepts with ancient philosophical roots, imagination and intuitive perception had enjoyed high esteem in German Idealist philosophy, with Kant, among others, considering the two as constitutive elements of the *Einbildungskraft*. Expanding on Kant's aesthetics, Goethe had distinguished several forms of *Einbildungskraft*, granting especially the "synthesizing" or "encompassing" imagination a central place in his understanding of knowledge.[74] Even if much of this shining legacy had dimmed over the course of the nineteenth century, Wilhelm Dilthey (in whom Minor recognized a kindred spirit) had tried to recover the poetic imagination as both a subject and a method of literary research, firmly placing it in "the center of all literary history."[75] Consequently, when Minor sang the praises of the imagination, he was echoing a tradition familiar to all German literary historians at the time.

The expression "highest virtue of . . ." likewise, did not originate with Minor. In nineteenth-century Europe, academics and non-academics alike used the formula to discuss

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[70] Skinner, "Idea."
[71] Paul and Stoeger, *Dogmatism*, 37–47.
[72] Bazarkaya, *Gelehrte Scharlatan*. Indicative of Mencke's authority is [Büschel], *Charlatanerie*, 4: "What would good Menke say if he were currently alive?" I owe these references to Marian Füssel.
[73] Lindner, "Weihe," 265.
[74] Abel, "Einbildungskraft"; Kaulbach, "Anschauung."
[75] Quoted in Wels, "Vorgeschichte," 199.

the cardinal duties of citizens, soldiers, judges, or teachers. "What shall be the first virtue of the soldier?" asked an Austrian military textbook in 1855. "The first virtue of the soldier shall be love to God and his monarch. What shall be the second virtue of the soldier? The second virtue is a mannered way of life."[76] It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the catechism style highlighted the gravity of the topic under discussion. "The highest virtue" denoted a calling and lent that vocation an aura of solemnity. The flip side of this earnestness was, in Minor's case at least, an attitude of ridicule toward the *vitia sive errores eruditorum* ("vices and errors of the learned").[77] On one occasion, he mockingly remarked that "the modern philologist is $^{4}/_{8}$ industrialist, $^{3}/_{8}$ sportsman, and only $^{1}/_{8}$ scholar."[78] Original as this calculation may seem, it drew on existing models, too. The historian Heinrich von Sybel once described himself as "four-seventh of a professor and three-seventh of a politician," while seeing this ratio inverted in Johann Kaspar Bluntschli: "You are four-seventh of a politician and three-seventh of a professor."[79] In the background of this, moreover, was a centuries-long tradition of scholarly satire, in which academics were unmasked as pursuing other goals than pure learning.[80] Minor was of course aware of this tradition; he even presented the calculation just cited as one that was indebted to Johann Michael Moscherosch, a seventeenth-century master of the genre. Clearly, the shadow of the past loomed large over Minor's polemics.

This brings us to a second line of analysis: the *rhetorical techniques* or means of persuasion that scholars used to lend weight to their discussions of virtue and vice. Take the *argumentum ab auctoritate*, or appeal to authority. Such appeals took place whenever Polybius was quoted on the importance of practical experience or Tacitus on the need to study *sine ira et studio* (a tag often used as a tool of defense in scholarly controversies).[81] In addition to these ancient authorities, scholars in Minor's generation cited modern ones like Scherer on caution as "one of the most disgusting vices of scholars, closely related to cowardice," or Ranke on the "duties of the historian: criticism, precision, penetration."[82] Such appeals were especially helpful when scholars found themselves writing against the current. In a polemic

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[76] Wytlačil, *Lehr-Buch*, 47.
[77] Kivistö, *Vices*, 1.
[78] Minor, review (1905), 2788.
[79] Quoted in Varrentrapp, "Biographische Einleitung," 128.
[80] Košenina, *Gelehrte Narr*.
[81] E.g., Schulze, "Berichtigung."
[82] Scherer, "Bemerkungen," 67; Waitz, *Historischen Übungen*, 4.

against the "hypertrophic virtue" of objectivity, the literary historian Karl Hillebrand ridiculed the pedantry of Germany's youngest cohort of scholars by comparing them to Thucydides: "If Thucydides appeared in public today, a *Privatdocent* from Leipzig or Göttingen would know well how to expose, in one or another literary periodical, the lack of method of the unfortunate historian who is not a product of Ranke's or Waitz's seminar."[83] More subtly, scholars appealed to authority by using *bons mots* – a genre of which Minor was particularly fond. Although Goethe was, unsurprisingly, his greatest source of aphoristic wisdom ("to reverse a line from Faust, we might say . . ."),[84] other literary classics also provided Minor with quotable phrases: "What has been said of Lessing applies doubly and thrice to Goethe."[85] Or: "One might well raise again the question, with Lichtenberg, whether the writing of books is really the ultimate goal of study."[86] Time and again, Minor invoked the fourth of Karl Lehrs's "Ten Commandments for Classical Philologists": "Thou shalt not take the name Method in vain."[87] On some occasions, he even quoted the Austrian emperor Franz Joseph I: "*Viribus unitis* [with united forces] is the motto of a philology-friendly monarch! It should also become ours."[88]

"Temporal othering" was another well-known rhetorical strategy. A famous example is Kant's diatribe against Christian Wolff's "worm-eaten" dogmatism, which made Wolffian philosophy appear as a relic from a precritical past, out of place in an "age of criticism."[89] Following in Kant's footsteps, many nineteenth-century philosophers and Biblical scholars (not to mention other *Geisteswissenschaftler*) similarly tried to relegate their opponents to an unenlightened past by imposing Whiggish storylines on the histories of their fields.[90] Given Minor's dissatisfaction with modern Goethe philology, such teleological storytelling was not an option available to him. Minor nonetheless also engaged in temporal othering, especially by placing his hope in "the philologists of the twentieth century." This made the present age appear as an era of vice rather than virtue – a time dominated by "pseudo philology," as Minor had put it on an earlier occasion, whose highest idol was an "artificially conserved mummy of

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[83] Hillebrand, "Historisches Wissen," 317–8.
[84] Minor, "Festrede," 55.
[85] Ibid., 56.
[86] Minor, "Aufgaben," 37.
[87] J. Minor, review (1894), 659; "Erwiderung," 490; "Aufgaben," 36. On Lehrs's ten commandments, see Calder, "Lehrs' Ten Commandments."
[88] Minor, "Centralanstalten," 26, quoted again in "Aufgaben," 39.
[89] Kant, *Critik*, x*, xi*.
[90] Schep and Paul, "Denial."

Scherer."[91] Apparently, for the sake of polemics, virtues or vices could be indexed to particular periods of history.

A third and final rhetorical strategy that must be mentioned is *ad hominem* reasoning. As Lutz Danneberg has argued, in a culture where personal categories of virtue and vice were almost routinely invoked as evaluative categories, it could come as no surprise that scholarly controversies often deteriorated in *ad hominem* attacks, with both parties questioning each other's virtuousness.[92] In the 1890s, Minor took up such a line of attack against his younger colleague Max Herrmann, whom he accused of being dispositionally unfit for academic work.[93] Such arguments could also be made collectively, against entire groups of people, such as women with academic aspirations. A recurring objection raised by critics of *Frauenstudium* was women's presumed lack of aptitude for certain male-gendered virtues: thoroughness, perseverance, balanced judgment, and the "gift of combination" (*Combinationsgabe*).[94] (Interestingly, when Minor sought to counter this argument, he did so with an appeal to the authority of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: if that great scholar "didn't think women's collaboration in the field of science was impossible in the seventeenth century, then we can hardly doubt it today.")[95] Similar ad hominem charges were leveled by Protestant scholars against Catholic colleagues – how could Catholics be objective if they were obliged to obey the pope? – or, some decades later, by European professors against students from Asian backgrounds.[96] Virtue talk, it seems, could easily be abused for ad hominem purposes.

Could this take place in every piece of writing, or in every academic genre? If we turn to the *occasions* on which scholars talked about virtues and vices, a somewhat ambiguous picture emerges. On the one hand, virtue terms can be found everywhere, in book reviews and controversies as well as in recommendation letters and obituaries.[97] On the other hand, the personal qualities denoted by these terms mattered on some occasions more than on others. It has been noted that Minor's dissertation *Gutachten*, written in his Viennese years,

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[91] Jakob Minor to August Sauer, January 16, 1897, in Faerber, *Chinese*, 440.
[92] Danneberg, "Dissens."
[93] Minor, "Stichreim [I]," 703; Minor, "Unehrliche Fehde," 800.
[94] Kirchhoff, *Akademische Frau*, 117, 126, 166, 197, 299.
[95] Minor, "Historisches," 88.
[96] Paul, *Historians' Virtues*, 32–43.
[97] See the examples in Paul, "Ethos."

included virtue terms only in exceptional cases, to convey high praise or serious criticism.[98] Similarly, in his book reviews, categories of vice feature most prominently in the harshest pieces, in which Minor found it necessary to spell out the dangers of virtues turned into vices.[99] This pattern can be seen in other book reviewers, too. The German classicist Benedikt Niese usually limited himself to assessing arguments and evidence but invoked authors' character traits as soon as he felt a need to explain either notable weaknesses or remarkable accomplishments (thereby drawing on the ancient *oratio speculum mentis*, or the idea that texts are mirrors of the mind, reflecting their author's characters).[100] Does this suggest that virtues and vices were invoked with particular force when, in the eyes of those involved, something important was at stake? Although the current state of research does not allow for anything close to a definitive answer, it is worth noting that book reviewers used the formulaic expression "the highest virtue" also only on rare occasions, to justify either lavish praise or strong criticism.[101] It seems as if the phrase was imbued with the weight of a gold standard. This in turn would imply that Minor's words must have carried a certain gravitas. "The highest virtue of . . ." was not a phrase used lightly.

Finally, a rhetorical analysis of virtue talk must attend to *audiences* and their responses to attributions of virtue or vice. In a culture where honor was as important a moral category as virtue,[102] it comes as no surprise that charges of vice often met with cries of indignation from the accused, who felt that their sense of honor had been violated.[103] While this explains the large number of rebuttals and rejoinders submitted to review journals like the *Literarisches Centralblatt*, it also suggests that Minor's criticism of Herrmann's lack of virtuousness cannot be understood without taking Herrmann's responses into consideration. Only when read in tandem with the latter, it becomes apparent that Minor was not simply assessing the scholarly merits of the latter's monograph on Hans Sachs but fighting a personal feud in which the most terrible reproaches went back and forth.[104] Similarly, to appreciate the rhetorical strength of Minor's appeal to "the philologists of the twentieth century," the surprised responses that this

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[98] Grabenweger, "Selbstverständlichkeit," 112, 114.
[99] E.g., Minor, "Stichreim [II]," 247, 249–50; Minor, review (1894).
[100] Niese, review (1887); review (1889): 39; review (1891): 255; review (1893): 267.
[101] N. N., review, 82; Ziemer, review, 485.
[102] Frevert, *Ehrenmänner*; Goldberg, *Honor*.
[103] E.g., Lehmann, *Stein*, 37; Schmoller, "Andenken," xiii.
[104] See esp. Minor, "Unehrliche Fehde," and Herrmann, "Unehrliche Fehde."

dedication provoked are a factor to take into account. Commenting on Minor's apparent frustration with the current state of scholarship, one reviewer wondered aloud: "Is it justified?"[105] The Leipzig Goethe scholar Albert Köster believed it was not. Drawing on the Biblical story of the flood, he argued that Minor made a fool of himself: "In M[inor]'s terrible verdict, the whole sinful philology of the 19th c[entury] is wiped out; for the earth was full of violence [*Genesis* 6,11]. Only one must have found grace in this deluge, another Noah: the author himself. All coming generations of philologists will take their beginning out of him."[106] Judging by these reserved responses,[107] Minor's appeal to the future was perhaps not very successful.

**In lieu of a conclusion**

How, then, does a rhetorical analysis enrich our understanding of "the highest virtue" invoked in Minor's preface? What the third approach adds to the two previous ones is an appreciation not of *what* Minor said but *how* he said it: in a time-honored idiom of virtue, charged with emotional meaning; drawing on formulaic expressions, some of which could be used only on the most solemn occasions; anchoring his critique of mind-numbing counting and checking in a tradition of scholarly aphorisms and *bons mots*; appealing to the authority of classical authors; and invoking a grand narrative in which the present age appeared as era of vice rather than virtue – all for the purpose of settling scores with colleagues whose work he disliked. The approach introduced in this article seeks to do justice to such rhetorical features of scholarly virtue talk. More than the two older approaches discussed in the introduction, it attends to the power of words in the hope of unraveling how and why time-honored and value-laden concepts of virtue and vice were employed by scholars and non-scholars alike in assessing scholarly monographs or academic trends.

One might wonder: How important is such a fine-grained understanding of scholarly virtue talk? It is possible to accept the argument – understanding scholars' language requires a rhetorical approach – while having doubts about the need to draw attention to the idioms on which authors in and outside of the university drew in discussing scholars' work. Haven't

[105] Michels, "Neue Faustschriften," 403–4.
[106] Köster, "Goethes Faust," 80.
[107] See also, more ironically, Collin, review, 360: "I dedicate this review to the philologists of the twentieth century."

recent years seen a surge of interest in scholarly practices rather than scholarly discourse? If one compares the rhetorical approach laid out in this article to praxeological work of the sort advocated by Steffen Martus and Carlos Spoerhase, isn't one of the major advantages of the latter that it prioritizes the study of what scholars actually did over what they said they were doing?[108] In light of this, wouldn't it be more instructive to examine, say, the demand that the study of *Faust* really made on scholars' imagination than to analyze the rhetorical connotations of the concept of imagination in fin-de-siècle Vienna?

Two responses are in order. First, even if research priorities shift toward practices, one cannot afford to ignore what this article has tried to show, namely that scholars' language is not a transparent window on an underlying reality but an instrument used for all sorts of purposes. Language is not merely referential but also performative: speakers always "do things with words." This Austinian lesson should not be forgotten, especially not by historians relying on eyewitness accounts of scholars' practices like the "exercises" (*Übungen*) in which aspiring philologists or historians were socialized into an ethos of meticulous source criticism. Tempting as it may be to read such accounts as faithful descriptions of *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, it is important to realize that most of them were written for a purpose, in a language imbued with powerful connotations ("science," "method," "laboratories").[109] It is no exaggeration to say that the more attention practices receive, the more important it becomes not to lose sight of the rhetoric of scholarly language.

More fundamental, however, is a second response. This article has featured a man who spent significant amounts of time reviewing other people's work, engaging in controversy, identifying alarming trends in the field, and defending a particular philological persona. Is all this work to be dismissed as "rhetoric"? Or should it instead be seen as a practice, or a set of practices, that could occupy scholars just as much as their research and teaching?[110] We might indeed regard Minor's peer-review activities and polemical interventions as practices in their own right. Although comparing manuscript versions of Goethe's *Götz* may seem a more appropriate practice for a philology professor than attacking the reputation of an untenured *Privatdozent*, it is a matter of fact that scholars (not only of Minor's generation) often devoted much energy to assessing each other's work, quarreling with colleagues, and warning against

[108] Martus and Spoerhase, *Geistesarbeit*.
[109] Paul, "Ethos," 199.
[110] Cf. Minor, "Stichreim [II]," 249 about "the loss of my valuable time."

vices threatening the integrity of academic work.[111] Arguably, historians of scholarly virtues and vices pursue their own kind of praxeological inquiry when trying to understand why objectivity, carefulness, and imagination played such important roles in these rhetorical practices. If the category of practices is sufficiently broad to encompass the whole range of activities in which scholars engaged, then a rhetorical approach to scholars' talk of virtues and vices will contribute to, rather than detract from, the study of scholarly practices.

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[111] E.g., Scheutz, "Turba"; Ottner, "Referat"; Engberts, *Scholarly Virtues*, 103–37; Huber, Strohschneider, and Vögel, "Rezension."

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