Wolff, Christian F. von (1679–1754)

Wolff studied theology and *mathematics, became a professor of mathematics at Halle in 1707, and, on *Leibniz' recommendation, became a member of the Berlin Academy in 1711. Because of the hostility of Prussian pietists, Wolff was exiled by Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia. Later he taught at Marburg, on the initiative of Friedrich II. In 1740 he was made a professor of law at Halle.

The semiotics of Wolff is, alongside that of Leibniz, fundamental for the semiotics of the *German Enlightenment. It aims at an art of invention and attempts to establish an inventory of preliminary truths as a prerequisite: "artis inveniendi praecepta maxima partem pendeant a veritatibus iam ante cognitis" (Wolff 1719:6). For representing the truths, an ideal sign language (*Disquisito de Loquela*) has to be developed which, by avoiding the difficulties inherent in colloquial speech: (1) assigns a *sign to each concept; (2) correlates distinctions between signs with distinctions between concepts; and (3) correlates the relationships between signs with the relationships between objects (Wolff 1755:244–67; Arndt 1979).

A model for such an ideal language is algebra, conceived independently from Leibniz and developed directly from *Descartes. When this ideal is realized, thinking can be restricted to movements within this ideal language ("Solutio nonnullarum difficultarum circa mentem humanam obviarum, ubi simul agitur de origine notionum et facultate ratiocinandi" Wolff 1755:11–21). In the *Psychologia Empirica*, the achievement of such a *cognitio symbolica* is discussed (1732:§.289); the *ars inveniendi* is based on the *ars combinatoria characteristica*. In the latter, the concept of a calculus which rules the substitution of signs by other signs has the central position (Wolff 1732:§ 289–312).

In contrast with concepts (*notio*), in which the representation of objects is incumbent, signs have only the secondary function of making concepts communicable. Signs refer to objects only via concepts. The classification of signs therefore follows directly from the classification of concepts according to their clearness, distinctness, and detail, as well as their completeness.   C.H.