in that, if true, it suggested that Bacon was actually a “cryptocatholic” (p. 432). Cantor’s own religious stance was quite a cocktail, for his father was a Jew converted to Lutheranism while his mother was Catholic; nominally a Protestant, he himself did not belong to any organized brand.

Occasional topics in the letters include recent or possible professorial promotions and appointments in German universities. The principal issue for Cantor’s correspondents was the place of the actual infinite in religion and nature, and his apparent refutation of the traditional view that it lay in God’s hands and outside human reach, “beyond” the finite numbers. Cantor replaced this view by the simple ruse of proposing that \( \infty \) was a new beginning, as the smallest transfinite ordinal; it launched a new series of successors \( \infty + 1, \infty + 2, \ldots \) but had no predecessor. For him the study of these numbers was indeed human work; God was to be found in connection with the absolute infinite, where the greatest ordinal and cardinal numbers are to be found, but only to perplex mankind (p. 426). I was a little surprised that he did not regularly explain his theory in such terms; instead he usually preferred to claim that his theory was consistent, which he could only offer as a belief unsupported by any mathematical proof.

There is little new to learn from these letters about Cantor’s conception of set theory itself. However, the edition highlights aspects of it that were important to him, and of which he clearly possessed a remarkably detailed historical knowledge.

References


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Equipped with a scholarly introduction of 83 pages, this carefully prepared volume of Hausdorff’s philosophical publications (all in German) supplements the volumes comprising the mathematical works for which he is most famous. (Vol. VIII will contain Hausdorff’s literary publications.) Impressed by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), whose influential work Also sprach Zarathustra had appeared in four volumes [Nietzsche, 1883–1885], Hausdorff (under the nom de plume of Paul Mongré) published his Sant’ Ilario (378 pages) in 1897 with the same publishing house that had issued Nietzsche’s volumes. In an announcement for the journal Die Zukunft (The Future), Hausdorff emphasized that this collection of aphorisms is addressed first of all to “the species of free, Epicurean, well-humored men, who have outgrown all solemn narrow-mindedness and rattling obstinacy of inferior stages of civilization.” He had written it “in good humor, good air and a radiant sky” near the Ligurian sea, pondering the thoughts of Nietzsche.

One year later [1898], again under the pseudonym Paul Mongré, Das Chaos in kosmischer Auslese: Ein erkenntnis-kritischer Versuch (Chaos in Cosmic Selection; An Attempt of a Theory of Cognition) was published, a book of more than 200 pages. It is a testimony of Hausdorff’s wide-ranging intellectual talents that he composed the announcement,
which again he inserted in *Die Zukunft*, in the form of a poetic epilogue. This conversation between a philosopher and the Kantian “Ding an sich” is opened by the latter with the following lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nun laß mich los! Du schlangst die Löwenpranken} \\
\text{um meines glatten Leibs Unendlichkeit,} \\
\text{Dein Griff hat liebend mich entblößt, es sanken} \\
\text{Die morschen Hüllen: ‘Ursach,’ Raum und Zeit.} \\
\text{Nackt bin ich nun und Riesin, von den Schranken} \\
\text{Des engen Menschen-Zwerggehirns befreit;} \\
\text{Es sitzt mir wieder – darauf bin ich eitel –} \\
\text{Die Krone des “An-sich-seins” auf dem Scheitel.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Cause, space, and time are the categories by which the limited human brain attempts to understand the “Ding an sich.”) Three short articles from the years 1900–1902 on special aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy supplement these two main philosophical works, for which the editor has provided detailed commentaries (with line references), giving invaluable assistance to the modern reader.

In his extensive introduction, the editor first describes Hausdorff’s precarious biographical situation in 1897–1898 (as a Jew, he had a limited chance of obtaining an academic position), and then outlines his philosophical horizon (influence of Nietzsche and Kant) and spiritual orientation (devoting separate sections to Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Arthur Schopenhauer, Max Stirner, Eduard von Hartmann, Rudolph Hermann Lotze, Hermann von Helmholtz, and Otto Liebmann). He discusses the forms and main ideas of Hausdorff’s philosophical thought and, in great detail, his relation to Nietzsche and Kant. In a special subsection, 16 minor articles by Hausdorff (not contained in the present volume) are briefly summarized. Another section is devoted to Hausdorff’s attitude toward the difficult situation in the Nietzsche archives, dominated by Nietzsche’s sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. A special testimony of the editor’s great care is the section on the perception and impact of Hausdorff’s philosophical publications: reviews, repercussions, articles in standard philosophical works and encyclopedias, and references up to the 1990s are quoted or mentioned. The editor closes his introduction with a summary “Hausdorff als Philosoph.” Here he calls special attention to Hausdorff’s wrestling with the problem of grasping the world in its contingency and temporality—a problem investigated also by Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, Martin Heidegger, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. He ends by hinting at the limitations of Hausdorff’s philosophical efforts.

This most welcome volume displays a lesser known side of the mathematician’s creative activity, before he definitively turned his intellectual power to a career in mathematics (cut short by his tragic suicide to avoid deportation to a Nazi concentration camp). In addition, the volume comprises a full bibliography of Hausdorff’s publications, a list of works mentioned in the editor’s introduction, and an index of names.

**References**


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