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Further Reading

MRW

NEUHOF, Bernard (1747–1831)

Bernard Nieuhoff was born in 1747 at Lingen (in Westphalia near the Dutch border). In 1762 he went to the local Illustrious Grammar School and in 1769 he matriculated at Leiden as a student of theology and philosophy, attending the lectures of ALLAMAND and D. van de Wijngaerde. In 1773 he obtained his doctorate from the latter and became an ordained priest. In 1775 he was appointed Professor of Philosophy at the ILLUSTRIUS SCHOOL OF DEVENTER and in the next year he became Professor of Philosophy, Mathematics, and Astronomy at HARDERWIJK. In 1780 and 1789 he acted as Rector magnificus. According to the ordo lexicon of 1788 he gave lectures on logic and mathematics, on 'the precepts of happiness and the foundations of moral philosophy', on Seneca's doctrine of providence, on physics and on metaphysics. Fourteen theses were defended under his supervision. They dealt among other things with personal identity, imagination, national character, the

De Neufville’s Bespiegelingen is remarkable for two reasons. First, she was one of the few writers in the Dutch Republic who used the Wolffian deductive method in order to prove the immortality of the soul. Second, her position as a woman philosopher was unique, as only few women possessed such a thorough knowledge of contemporary philosophy and natural sciences. Amongst them were Petronella Johanna de TEMERMAN, wife of the Utrecht professor Johann Friedrich HENERT, and Elizabeth WOLFF-BEKKER, one of the most famous Dutch novelists of the eighteenth century. Wolff-Bekker deeply admired De Neufville, whose influence can be traced in Wolff-Bekker’s Bespiegelingen over het geniezen (1763).

De Neufville was also praised by other contemporaries. Jean des Champs, a propagandist for Wolff’s philosophy and translator of his writings into French, called her ‘la Saphe d’Amsterdam’ and ‘grande Wolfien- ne’. Positive reviews of her Bespiegelingen appeared in periodicals such as De Nederlandsche-Letter-Courant, VADERLANDSCHE LETER-OEFENINGEN en De DENKER.

De Neufville was praised for her cleverness, learnedness and graceful style. Present-day critics, however, pointing to the abundance of footnotes written in prose, argue that she should be remembered as a poetic philosopher rather than as a philosophical poet.

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