ODE, Jacobus (1698-1751)

Jacobus Ode was born on 11 December 1698
in Zutphen, in the province of Gelderland. He
studied theology at Harderwijk University
and became professor extraordinarius in philo-
sophy at Utrecht University in 1723. From 1727
to 1736 he was extraordinarius in theology;
and from 1736 to 1743 ordinarius in philo-
sophy, teaching astronomy, mathematics, and
physics. On 22 July 1748, three years before
his death, he married a bride of sixty-two; Van
der Aa (Biographisch woordenboek der
Nederlanden, vol. 5, p. 7) somewhat super-
fluously assures us that the marriage remained
without issue.

Ode’s versatility in teaching was matched by
the diversity of his publications. As a theolo-
gian, he was drawn into a protracted polemic
in which he defended his colleague F.A. Lampe
(1683-1729), who had been accused of sympa-
thizing with H.A. Roëll’s heterodox views
concerning the eternal generation of the Son of
God. Ode sympathized with a rational natural
theology, but this did not stop him from pro-
ducing a voluminous 1068-page Commentarius
de angeli (1739) in which the names, numbers,
and natures of good angels and evil demons are
discussed at great length.

Ode’s most interesting contribution to phi-
sophy is his inaugural lecture, the Oratio de
landabili priscorum hominum philosophandi
methodo (Oration on the Praiseworthy
Method of Philosophizing of the Ancients, 27
September 1723), in which he defends a very
diluted kind of Cartesian method. Since
Descartes’s metaphysics had received more
opposition than his physics, many early
Cartesians (e.g. J. de Raey) had looked for
ways of salvaging the latter by sacrificing the
former. In later decades this trend was to be
reversed, and Ode is a good example of this
reversal. He is an adherent of Cartesian meta-
physics in so far as this metaphysics pertains
to the method of doubt, the cogito, and clear
and distinct ideas, but largely rejects Cartesian
physics (pp. 35-48). However, Ode defends
his method by presenting it as the most recent
development in a venerable tradition. Ancient
philosophers had not limited themselves
dogmatically to any one text: according to
Ode, Plato had used Italian, Egyptian, Persian,
and even Mosaic sources and the same open-
mindedness had characterized Aristotle;
Descartes had used the same method, and the
Frenchman was therefore justified in writing
have used no principles in this treatise which
are not accepted by everyone; this philo-
sophy is nothing new but is extremely old and
very common.’ Ode then argues that the use
of doubt was already defended by Aristotle;
that Cicero taught us to turn away from the
senses, and that the cogito had already been
formulated by Augustine (pp. 17-19). In a
similar way, Ode tries to obtain Cartesian
clear and distinct ideas by studying and com-
paring different texts by different philos-
ophers – which of course is more properly
eccentric than Cartesian.

Ode’s Principia philosophiae naturalis
(1727) forms the self-confessed application
of his ‘Cartesian’ method to physics (see the
dedication). This textbook can be read as a
critique of the physics of Descartes and of
some of his Dutch followers, notably R.
Andala, in favour of the physics of Newton
and his followers. The Principia is written as
a geometrical treatise with definitions, propo-
sitions, hypotheses and scholia. Nevertheless,
the result is oddly conventional. Although
Ode defends Newtonian physics, he does not
consult nature itself. He remains a scholastic
philosopher who compares texts rather than
experiences. Thus his inaugural lecture can
be considered a retrogressive answer to the
inaugural lecture (Oratio de cotta methodo
philosophiae experimentalis) held only
fourteen days earlier by his colleague in
Utrecht, P. van Misschenbroek, who was a
vigoroust proponent of Newtonian experi-
mentalism.

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made very clear which free-thinkers or spirits forts were to be condemned: Pyrrho, Ocellos, Lucanus, Lucretius, Cherbury, Shaftesbury, Collins, Morgan, Toland, Tindal, Bolingbroke, Hume, Spinoza, Berkeley, Hobbes, d’Holbach, Lamettrie, Rousseau and, especially, Voltaire, although he admired the literary talents of the latter. The journal passed more positive judgments on, amongst others, Destille, Locke, Newton, Mendelssohn, Haller, Fontenelle, Euler, Wolff, Bonnet, Reid and, most of all, Leibniz, whose idea of ‘the best of all possible worlds’ was extensively praised.

Many issues were devoted to distinguishing the ‘real’ from the ‘delusionary’ philosophers. The ‘real’ philosophers possessed love for the truth, diligence, pericpency, the capacity to learn and cautiousness. Unlike the ‘delusionary’ philosophers, they never treated subjects they did not understand themselves nor did they dispute certain issues by using irony. De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker attached great importance to the right way of practising philosophy for two reasons: first, true knowledge made up the foundation of virtue and progress. Second, it was the most effective weapon against unbelief and atheism. As for the first, the author of both periodicals attached great value to religious tolerance. He sided with the tolerantists in the so-called ‘Socratic war’, a controversy during the years 1769-70 about the question whether virtuous pagans (like Socrates) could go to heaven (see Hofsteede and Nozeman). He argued that a ‘natural ethics’ existed besides a ‘Christian ethics’, which implied that people of other religions could also live virtuously. His liberal attitude also became evident from his plea for the freedom of the press. Atheist books should not be forbidden, although they could be harian out, just as religious books. In extreme cases should books be censured, such as offending or pornographical literature.

The best weapon against superstition (such as the belief in ghosts, spirits, angels and devils), unbelief or atheism was an analysis of their causes. According to De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker made very clear which free-thinkers or spirits forts were to be condemned: Pyrrho, Ocellos, Lucanus, Lucretius, Cherbury, Shaftesbury, Collins, Morgan, Toland, Tindal, Bolingbroke, Hume, Spinoza, Berkeley, Hobbes, d’Holbach, Lamettrie, Rousseau and, especially, Voltaire, although he admired the literary talents of the latter. The journal passed more positive judgments on, amongst others, Destille, Locke, Newton, Mendelssohn, Haller, Fontenelle, Euler, Wolff, Bonnet, Reid and, most of all, Leibniz, whose idea of ‘the best of all possible worlds’ was extensively praised.

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soul and body. However, in both periodicals, questions like the mind-body problem remained subordinate to ethical topics. In 1778 De Opmerker ceased to exist, because the author felt that he had exhausted his material. He also complained that spectatorial papers in general had little influence on the moral behaviour of people; Steene, Van Effen, De Philantrop, De Denker and De Philosoph undoubtedly had not managed to effectuate real changes in society. This was not caused by a lack of readers, but by the fact that most people followed the customs and prejudices that they had learned in their youth, instead of the prescriptions of reason — once more an argument for the importance of a proper education. Yet, at the same time, the author of De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker must have been convinced of the value of his own work, since he had continued his weekly efforts to uplift the people for such a long time. His parting words, quoting the last words imputed to the Roman Emperor Augustus, were: ‘I have ended my part, clap your hands.’

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OOSTEN DE BRUYN, Gerrit Willem van (1727–97)

Born in Amersfoort on 17 October 1727, Gerrit Willem van Oosten de Bruyn combined in his surname the names of his parents, Cornelis de Bruyn, a minister of the Reformed Church, and Elisabeth van Oosten, scion of a wealthy family. His extended surname was intended to reflect a certain social standing. Van Oosten de Bruyn attended the Latin school at Haarlem after his family had moved there in 1739. Later he read law at Utrecht, where he obtained the juridical doctorate with a dissertation on suicide. In this work Oosten de Bruyn adopted the Wolfian definition, and argued that suicide is against civil and natural law. He defended the concept of natural religion. After his studies Oosten de Bruyn settled in Haarlem. Wealthy enough to live off his own means (having married also into a well-to-do merchant family in 1754), he was free to pursue his personal interests, which included law, philosophy, history and neo-Latin poetry. He fulfilled several honorary offices; in 1778 he became a director of Tejler’s Second Society, which was established by the will of the Menonite merchant Pieter Tejler (1702–78) to promote the studies of the sciences.

His appointment as town historian in 1758 resulted in a well-informed volume on the late medieval history of Haarlem. A manuscript treating the sixteenth century was never published, probably because of Van Oosten de Bruyn’s political leanings. A pupil of the Orangist Petrus Wesseling, whose lectures he had attended at Utrecht, Van Oosten de Bruyn shared his nation’s political preferences. Other pupils of Wesseling, such as Meinard Tydeman, Adrian Kluit, and Jona Willem te Water, similarly supported the stadholderist regime. Anticipating Kluit’s historical work, Van Oosten de Bruyn in his history of Haarlem implicitly rejected the traditional claim of the (anti-stadholderist) States Party that the sovereignty of the States dated back to the Middle Ages. Not surprisingly, William V made Van Oosten de Bruyn a member of the town council after the restoration of his regime in 1787. He fulfilled the office of burgomaster in 1789 and 1790. Dismissed by the new, revolutionary regime in 1795, Van Oosten de Bruyn retired to his estate Randenbroek near Amersfoort, where he died.

In 1758, Van Oosten de Bruyn was one of the six victorious contributors to an essay competition organized by the Legatum Stolpianum at Leiden, concerning the contribution of ‘heathen’ philosophers to moral thought. In the first half of his award-winning essay, making good use of Johann Brucker’s Historia critica philosophiae, he discussed the ethical notions of the ‘best authors’ of pagan antiquity, in particular Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and the Stoics. These philosophers, according to Oosten de Bruyn, outlined the powers of natural reason. Although he put great store by the achievements of these philosophers, he pointed out, in the second half of the essay, that due to the intrinsic weakness of natural reason only the revealed religion and Revelation teaches man nothing essentially new. On the other hand he remained in accordance with Calvinism — at the end of the essay a long quotation of Calvin is to be found — since in practice man needs Revelation. The ambiguity in Oosten de Bruyn’s essay induced the governors of the Legatum Stolpianum to hold a new competition dealing explicitly with the need of Revelation.

Van Oosten de Bruyn also wrote two essays on native Dutch (as opposed to Roman) law for the Groningen-based society Pro excelen dovere Patrio. He possessed a significant personal library, auctioned only in 1860, which included a number of medieval manuscripts and incunabula, and many rare books.

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