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 philosophy at Utrecht University in 1723. From 1727 to 1736 he was extraordinarius in theology, and from 1736 to 1743 ordinarius in philosophy, 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 superficially assures us that the marriage remained without issue.

Ode's versatility in teaching was matched by the diversity of his publications. As a theologian, he was drawn into a protracted polemic in which he defended his colleague F.A. Lampe (1683-1729), who had been accused of sympathizing with H.A. Röell'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 producing a voluminous 1068-page Commentarius de angelis (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 philosophy is his inaugural lecture, the Oratio de landabili priscorum hominum philosophandi methodo (Oration on the Praiseworthy Method of Philosopizing of the Ancients, 27 September 1723), in which he defends a very diluted kind of Cartesian method. Since Descartes' metaphysics had received more opposition than his physics, many early Cartesian philosophers (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 metaphysics in so far as it 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 (Principia, IV, 200, trans. CSM I, p. 286): 'I have used no principles in this treatise which are not accepted by everyone; this philosophy 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 comparing different texts by different philosophers - which of course is more properly eclectic than Cartesian.

Ode's Principia philosophiæ 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, propositions, 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 opposition to the method of doubt, the cogito, and clear and distinct ideas by studying and comparing different texts by different philosophers - which of course is more properly eclectic than Cartesian.

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made very clear which free-thinkers or "esprits forts" were to be condemned: Pyrrho, Ocellus, Lucanus, Lucretius, Chersbury, Shaftesbury, Collins, Morgan, Toland, Tindal, Bolingbroke, Hume, SPDMOZA, Berkeley, Hobbes, d'Holbach, Lamettrie, Rousseau and, especially, Voltaire, although he admired the literary talents of the latter. The journal passed more positive judgements on, amongst others, DESCARTES, 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 dedicated to distinguishing the 'real' from the 'delusory' philosophers. The 'real' philosophers possessed love for the truth, diligence, perplexity, the capacity to learn and cautiousness. Unlike the 'delusory' 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 virtuousness 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 tolerant in the so-called 'Socratic war', a controversy during the 1760s about the question whether virtuous pagans (like Socrates) could go to heaven (see HOFSTEDE 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 hardly be encouraged. However, only 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, one of the greatest causes was the fact that the Christian religion supposed the occurrence of supernatural events, while these had not been witnessed during the contemporary period. This, however, did not imply that miracles had never happened. Just as it was certain that God had once revealed himself to the people, it should be asserted that miracles had once happened. However, the author claims that there is no reason to assume that God nowadays still intervenes in his perfect creation. Consequently he argues that disasters and evil should not be interpreted as punishments by God. Instead he referred to Leibniz's principle de la raison suffisante; all that is, has its sufficient ground for existing. He maintained this polemical point of view when discussing actual disasters, such as the plague of cow disease in 1769.
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, Adriaan 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. Dissimulated 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 Stolpiianum 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 philosophiae, he discussed the ethical notions imputed to the Roman Emperor Augustus, were: 'He ended my part, clap your hands.'

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 honours. 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 the Society, which was established by the will of the Mennonite merchant Pieter Teyler (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 Orangists 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, Adriaan 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. Dissimulated by the new, revolutionary regime in 1795, Van Oosten de Bruyn retired to his estate Randenbroek near Amersfoort, where he died.

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