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; from 1736 to 1743 ordinary 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 superfluously 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. 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 producing a voluminous 1686-page Commentarius de angeliis (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 Oration de laudabili priscorum hominum philosophandi methodo (Oration on the Praiseworthy Method of Philosophizing of the Ancients, 27 September 1723), in which he defends a diluted kind of Cartesian method. Since Descartes’s metaphysics had received more opposition than his physics, many early Cartesianists (e.g. J. de Raye) had looked for ways of salvaging the latter by modifying 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 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 (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 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, 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 inaugural lecture (Oratio de certa methodo philosophandi experimentalis) held only fourteen days earlier by his colleague in Utrecht, P. van Musschenbroek, who was a vigorous proponent of Newtonian experimentation.

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Other Relevant Works

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Musschenbroek, Petrus van, Oratio de certa methodo philosophandi experimentalis (Utrecht, 1723).

Further Reading

Aa, A.J. van der, Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden (Amsterdam, 1969).

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toral tradition the author of De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker presented himself as a well-educated, unmarried, middle-aged man, who now led a life of leisure. He claimed that he was born in Amsterdam in 1713 (the year in which 'the peace of Utrecht was signed'), that he was trained as a lawyer, and that he had earlier written some contributions to the periodical De Denker. There are good reasons to assume that this character was modelled on Johannes Petsch, one of the most active propagators in the Dutch Republic of Leibniz-Wolffianism. His intellectual interests seem to match well with the Leibnizian, anti-orthodox and enlightened content of De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker. Other clues are the references in both periodicals to translations of the works of Mendelssohn, Tollner and Spalding by Petch, the critique in De Onderzoeker of Allard Hulshoff's ideas about moral principles (Petsch also criticized Hulshoff's ideas in two other publications which were also printed by Van Schoonhoven), and a series of essays in De Opmerker on religious tolerance, which remind one of Petsch's defence of the Wolffian David Kleman during the controversy about the latter's book, De orde des heils (1774).

In De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker many typical spectatorial themes were treated, such as education, religion, love and all kinds of vices and virtues. However, both periodicals differed in one crucial aspect from other spectatorial papers: they were far more learned and philosophical. A substantial part of the issues was dedicated to philosophical subjects and it contained an abstract style. The author obviously had a profound knowledge of contemporary philosophical discussions and did not hesitate to include long (translated) fragments of the original works. He was aware of the distinctive character of his publications: he often apologized for his theoretical, philosophical approach and made great effort to meet the wishes of a broader audience. The incompatibility he feared with the taste of the general public remained a recurring subject until the end. However, in the last issue he claimed that from the beginning it had been 'persons with a philosophical mind' he had most tried to please, as he had come to the conclusion that most of his readers were to be found in these circles.

Most contributions to De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker were probably written by Petsch himself, although three other contributors are known: the Amsterdam merchant and poet Hendrik Rimensnyder, who wrote some short poems and a piece of prose; W.E. de Perpencher, the author of a translated fragment of Plato's Republic; and the prominent pamphleteer of Leibnizianism Abraham Perrenot, most likely the author of a poetical piece signed by 'Arnobius Philomousa'.

The aim of De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker was to present an ethics, based upon a sound philosophical foundation. In the context of the debate on 'the moral sense' this was a polemical statement in itself. In the Dutch Republic this debate was occasioned by a prize-winning essay by Halshoff of 1766, who, following sceptics like Shaftesbury, Harschon and Hume, claimed that moral principles were founded in 'the moral sense'. However, Petsch and Perpenot, amongst others, were of the opinion that moral principles were ultimately based upon reasoning. The author of De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker also supported this view, which was a necessary ingredient of his optimism and belief in progress through education. According to him human beings had the capability to strive for moral perfection through the development of their intellects. He was convinced of the excellence of his own century; no other century had brought so much progression in the field of the arts, sciences and philosophy. In the controversy between Ancients and Moderns, the Querelle des anciens et des modernes, he argued in favour of the '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 hazardous for virtuous readers. Only in extreme cases should books be censored, 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, Ocellus, Lucanus, Lucretius, Chervy, 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 judgments 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 'delusionary' philosophers. The 'real' philosophers possessed love for the truth, diligence, perspicacity, the capacity to learn and cautionfulness. 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 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 tolerants 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 hazardous for virtuous readers. Only in extreme cases should books be censored, 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.

Because of the significant role of true knowledge De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker also offered an extensive epistemological framework. Skeptical tendencies in knowledge (and consequently in morals), as in particular put forward by Hume and Berkeley, were strongly rejected. The author of both periodicals was an adherent of the principles of common sense, as formulated in An Inquiry into the Human Mind by Thomas Reid, the founder of the Scottish School of Common Sense. For the contemporary practitioners of the arts and sciences, who, in his opinion, were superior to those of the ancient classics. Yet at the same time, he admitted that the eighteenth century was an age that had seen a sharp increase in unbelief. De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker
OOSTEN DE BRUYN, Gerrit Willem van (1727–97)

Born in Amersfoort on 17 October 1727, Gerrit Willem van Oosten de Bruyn combined 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. 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 Teyler’s Second 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 Orangist Petrus Wesseling, whose lectures he had attended at Utrecht, Van Oosten de Bruyn shared his tutor’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 Stolpiianum at Leiden, concerning the contribution of ‘hearth’ 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 teaching of Christ were able to provide man with true tranquillity of mind and the capacity to face death without anxiety. On the one hand this ambiguous phrase ‘intrinsic weakness’ enabled Van Oosten de Bruyn like Van der Marck to side with Voltaire, whose Poèmes sur la loi naturelle he repeatedly quoted with admiration, and Bayle, who is referred to with respect to human fragility. According to Oosten de Bruyn Christianity is merely the accomplishment of natural 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 Stolpiianum 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 exceldendo nata 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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