ODE, Jacobus (1698-1751)

Jacobus Ode was born on 11 December 1698 in Zutphen, in the province of Gelderland. He studied theology at the Hardwijk 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. Roeil'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 Philosopherizing of the Ancients, 27 September 1723), in which he defends a very dilated kind of Cartesian method. Since Descartes' metaphysics had received more opposition than his physics, many early Cartesianists (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 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 experimentalism.

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ONDERZOEKER, DE (1768-72) / DE OPMERKER (1772-8)

De Onderzoeker appeared in weekly issues between 1 November 1768 and 19 October 1772 and was succeeded by De Opmerker, which appeared from 26 October 1772 until 12 October 1778. The two periodicals should be considered as one whole: they were both published by Johannes van Schoonhoven in Utrecht, and written by the same, anonymous author. The change of title was probably for economical reasons. It was common practice that when people subscribed to a periodical of which a number of issues had already been published, they were obliged to buy the earlier volumes too. Because of the change of title, new subscribers could easily enter without having to pay a large amount of money at once. The complete run of De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker consists of 10 volumes, containing a total of 520 issues of eight pages each.

De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker belong to the group of so-called 'spectatorial papers' or 'spectatos' that copied the popular formula of The Tatler (1709-10), The Spectator (1711-12) and The Guardian (1713) (by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele). In this type of periodical, which was introduced to the Dutch Republic by Justus van Effen, a fictitious author would comment in a moralistic and witty way on a wide range of social issues with the aim of improving the behaviour of his fellow citizens. In accordance with the specta-
torial 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, Toltare and Spalding by Petsch, the critique in De Onderzoeker of Allard Perpocher, the author of a translated work, and the fact that the Christian religion was the central subject of 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 Riemsnijder, who wrote some short poems and a piece of prose; W.E. de Perauten, the author of a translated fragment of Plato’s Republic; and the prominent proponent of Leibnizianism Abraham Perpenot, most likely the author of a poetical piece signed by ‘Amorbus Philomorus’.

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 Hulshoff of 1766, who, following sceptics like Shaftesbury, Hucshon and Hume, claimed that moral principles were founded in the ‘moral sense’. However, Petsh and Perrenot, 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 progress in the field of the arts, sciences and philosophy. In the controversy between Ancients and Moderns, the Querelle des ancients et des modernes, he argued in favor 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. Artist books should not be forbidden, although they could be harmatticous for bad readers. 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), unbelieving 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, Cherbury, Shaftesbury, Collins, Morgan, Toland, Tindal, Bolingbroke, Hume, Spinoza, Berkeley, Hobbes, d’Holbach, Lavater, 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 extensivly praised.

Many issues were dedicated to distinguishing the ‘real’ from the ‘delusional’ philosophers. The ‘real’ philosophers possessed love for the truth, diligence, percepience, the capacity to learn and cautiousness. Unlike the ‘delusional’ 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 years 1769–70 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. Artist books should not be forbidden, although they could be harmful for bad readers. 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), unbelieving 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 of the 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 explanation of the human body. 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 more technical elaboration of the way human beings formed their ideas, De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker relied on the Essai analytique sur les facultés de l’âme (1760) by Bonnet, who claimed that human cognition depended upon the place of the physical features of the nervous system. Sensory perceptions caused movements in the nervous system, which resulted in sensations of pleasure or pain. The soul would feel the first type of sensations, enlarge its ‘attention’ and act free upon the senses. Thus, the soul was not merely a passive substance, but it possessed various active faculties, such as feeling, perceiving, choosing, desiring and acting. The author of De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker deferred judgement on the precise connection between
soul and body. However, in both periodicals, questions like the mind-body problem remained subordinate to ethical topics. In 1778 De Opmeerker ceased to exist, because the author felt that he had exhausted his material. He also complained that spectacular papers in general had little influence on the moral behaviour of people; Steele, Van Erven, De Philosopho, De Denker and De Philosopho obviously 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 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 Opmeerker 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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