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 ordinarus 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 P.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 Oratio de landabilis 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' 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 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 Moslem sources and the same openness 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 method of doubt, the cogito, and clear and distinct ideas, but largely rejects Cartesian physics.

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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 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 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 'spectatons' 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-
ONDERZOEKER, DE

itorial 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 enlight-
ented content of De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker. Other clues are the references in both
periodicals to translations of the works of Mendelssohn, Tolnay and Spalding by Petsch,
the critique in De Onderzoeker of Allard Hulshoff’s ideas about moral principles (Petsch
also cited 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 spec-
tatorial papers: they were far more learned
and philosophical. A substantial part of the
issues was dedicated to philosophical subjects
and therefore adopted an abstract style. The author
obviously had a profound knowledge of con-
temporary philosophical discussions and did
not hesitate to include long (translated) frag-
ments of the original works. He was aware of
the distinctive character of his publications:
he often apologized for his theoretical, philo-
sophical 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. Only 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
Perponcher, the author of a translated
fragment of Plato’s Republic; and the promi-

uenta: all that is, has its sufficient ground

is 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 to such
progression in the field of the arts, sciences and
philosophy. In the controversy between
Ancients and Moderns, the Querelle des anciens
des modernes, he argued in favour 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 analy-
tique sur les facultés de l’âme (1760) by
Bonnet, who claimed that human cognition
depended upon the physiological structure of
the nervous system. Sensory perceptions
causing movements in the nervous system,
which resulted in sensations of pleasure or
pain. The soul would prefer 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

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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 Wolffian 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 nation’s political preferences. Other pupils of Wesseling, such as Meinard Tydeman, Adrian v. 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 Amsterdam, where he died.

In 1758, Van Oosten de Bruyn was one of the six victorious contributors to an essay competition organized by the Legatum Stoilpiannum at Leiden, concerning the contribution of ‘heathen’ philosophers to moral thought. In the first half of his award-winning essay, making 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 Stoilpiannum 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 excelsendo nure 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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Philosooph 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 felt that he had exhausted his material. In 1778 De Opmerker 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 Effen, De Philantropo, 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. 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