MOENS, Petronella (1762–1843)

Petronella Moens was born in Cabaad, a small town in the province of Friesland, on 16 November 1762, and died in Utrecht on 4 January 1843. At the age of four she suffered from a children’s disease, which made her practically blind. In spite of her blindness she was very well educated by her father, the clergyman Petrus Moens, who read aloud to her the works of contemporary Dutch writers. Later she hired personal assistants to read aloud and write down texts for her. This enabled her to become one of the most productive female authors in the Dutch Republic. She presented her ideas to the public in an appealing and accessible way and covered nearly all genres of literature: her impressive oeuvre contains poems, essays, novels, children’s books, magazines and almanacs.

Today, Moens is remembered primarily as a literary author. Her philosophical relevance lies in the fact that she was a typical advocate of the mainstream moderate Enlightenment, and that she paid special attention to the emancipation of women and slaves. Of special interest are her contributions to the periodical press. Together with the writer and politician Bernardus Bosch (1746–1803) she edited at least five periodicals during the last two decades of the eighteenth century, of which De Menschenvriend (1788–97) and De Leerzame Praat-al (1790–92) were the most influential. When the co-operation between Moens and Bosch came to an end she founded at least five periodicals during the last two decades of the eighteenth century, of which De Menschenvriend (1788–97) and De Leerzame Praat-al (1790–92) were the most influential. When the co-operation between Moens and Bosch came to an end she founded De Vriendin van’t Vaderland (1798–9). Although Moens sided with the Dutch patriot movement and her writings reflected the ideals of the French Revolution, she expressed her views in a very
MOENS

moderate way. When it came to the issue of women's rights, for example, she did not plead suffrage but repeatedly stressed the intellectual equality of men and women and the importance of a proper education for women. Emancipatory views were also expressed in later works such as Dagboek voor mijn vrouwelijke landgenooten (1826–31) and Legaat aan mijn vrouwelijke landgenooten (1829).

Moens also held a moderately enlightened position on the issue of slavery. She wrote about this theme in several poems, periodical papers, and novels, such as 'Dichterlijke gedachten bij den slaavenhandel' (1791), 'Bij het afschaffen der slaavenhandel door de Fransche Natie' (1798), 'Jets over den vernietigenden slavenhandel' (1816) and the Utopian novel Aardenburg of de onbekende volksplanting in Zuid-Amerika (Haarlem, 1817).

The proposal was not successful. The book was translated into Dutch, French and English. Molinaeus follows Aristotle's Organon closely. With respect to 'invention', i.e. the finding of arguments, for example, he follows Aristotle's theory and is more interested in the structure of the arguments than in the discovery of arguments. According to Molinaeus philosophy is the knowledge of human and divine things, obtainable by the human mind. These things he calls in accordance with tradition the first notions. The instrumental art of logic, however, deals with second intentions, taken for example 'man' as species) formal parts of the essence of the first substance. First substances he considers to be the material parts of the second substances.

The subject matter of logic is the syllogism. In line with Zabarella (1533–89), Molinaeus discusses order and method in an appendix to demonstration. It should be remembered that Zabarella's Opera omnia had been published in Leiden in 1594. Order is defined as the disposition by the intellect of parts of a discipline, either to decorate speech, or to avoid confusion. Here, with Zabarella, he opposes the Thomistic view of Francesco Piccolomini (1523–1607) who took order to be a representative of the French church at the Synod of Dortrecht. However, the King of France prevented him from taking up this appointment, because of his contacts with the King of England. During the Dortrecht Synod, Molinaeus proposed a plan to compose a confession that could serve as a common basis for the Reformed, Lutheran, and Remonstrant churches. The proposal was not successful.

In 1622 Molinaeus left Paris again, to become professor of theology in Sedan and preacher of the Reformed Church. He continued to perform these functions with short interruptions until his death. The Elements Logica was published for the first time in 1596. It appeared in thirteen editions. The book was translated into Dutch, French and English. Molinaeus follows Aristotle's Organon closely. With respect to 'invention', i.e. the finding of arguments, for example, he follows Aristotle's theory and is more interested in the structure of the arguments than in the discovery of arguments. According to Molinaeus philosophy is the knowledge of human and divine things, obtainable by the human mind. These things he calls in accordance with tradition the first notions. The instrumental art of logic, however, deals with second intentions, taken for example 'man' as species) formal parts of the essence of the first substance. First substances he considers to be the material parts of the second substances.

The subject matter of logic is the syllogism. In line with Zabarella (1533–89), Molinaeus discusses order and method in an appendix to demonstration. It should be remembered that Zabarella's Opera omnia had been published in Leiden in 1594. Order is defined as the disposition by the intellect of parts of a discipline, either to decorate speech, or to avoid confusion. Here, with Zabarella, he opposes the Thomistic view of Francesco Piccolomini (1523–1607) who took order to be a representation of the structure of being. Moreover, order generates distinct knowledge. Method, however, is the instrument allowing the intellect to arrive at what was previously unknown. There is a twofold order in science, namely the order of composition, starting with the simplest things, and the order of resolution, beginning with the complex things in nature, and ending with simple things. Theoretical sciences proceed by composition, the arts in general and practical sciences by resolution. For example, in mathematics one starts with the unity point, etc., to end at composite figures. In the arts in general and in the practical sciences the procedure is reversed. Here we start with the end, and end with the simplest things. For example, in ethics one starts an investigation with some individual good, and an architect starts his art by studying a parti cular house. Molinaeus outlines the following contradiction: in general, the arts start from the end, but in the instrumental arts, namely logic and grammar, the elements are taught first,