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 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. Roell’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 laudabili priscorum hominum philosophandi methodo (Oration on the Praiseworthy Method of Philosphizing 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 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 Mosiac 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 unconventional. 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 metaphysics.

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Mussenbroek, Petrus van, Oratio de certa methodo philosophiae experimentalis (Utrecht, 1723).
tatorial 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, Tollein and Spalding by Petch, the critique in De Onderzoeker of Allard Hulshoff's ideas about moral principles (Petch 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 speculative papers: they were far more learned and philosophical. A substantial part of the issues was dedicated to philosophical subjects and arguments, in 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' who 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 Riemssnyder, 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 promulgator of Leibnizianism Abraham Perrenot, most likely the author of a poetical piece signed by 'Arnobius Philomusus'.

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, Hucheson 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 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 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, 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, Wolf, 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, percepience, 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 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. Atheist books should not be forbidden, although they could be haram that were a source of political turmoil in the Leibnizianism. Sensory perceptions caused movements in the nervous system, which resulted in sensations of pleasure or pain. The soul would then decide on the basis of the qualities of the organ and act freely 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 judgment 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 Opmerker ceased to exist, because the author felt that he had exhausted his material. He also complained that spectatorial papers in general had little influence on the moral behaviour of people. Steele, Van Effen, De Philosopho 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 argue for the importance of a proper education. Yet, at the same time, the author of De Onderzoeker and De Opmerker 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.’

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, 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 merchant Peter 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, Adrianus 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 Stolpianum 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 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 Stolpianum to hold a second 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 novae patriae. 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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