

DUTCH PHILOSOPHY DURING THE HEYDAY OF LIBERALISM (1848-1870)

OPZOOMER AND BURGER JR. DEVOTEES OF SPINOZA

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INTRODUCTION

The year 1848 is an important watershed in Dutch history. The political reforms proposed by the leading liberal statesman J.R. Thorbecke (1798-1872) and accepted by king William II for fear of the violence of the European revolutions, finally dismantled the old oligarchic regime that the new monarchy had inherited from the ancient Dutch Republic (1579-1795). Both advocates and opponents saw in the new liberal constitution of Thorbecke the spirit of the Enlightenment and the French revolution at work. In this manner the Restoration Era ended and the period of liberal dominance both in political and cultural life came about. The rule of liberalism lasted till about 1870 when confessional parties gradually contested the liberal supremacy and the rise of Neo-Kantianism at the Dutch universities caused the downfall of positivism and broke its philosophical backbone. However, positivism was not the indispensable counterpart of liberalism.

In *De lage landen (1780-1980)* the Groningen historian E.H. Kossmann observed that the political victory of liberalism was preceded by and linked with a literary and cultural reform¹. In 1837 the writers Potgieter and Bakhuizen van den Brink established a general cultural journal, which they called *De gids* (The Guide). In the name of 'Truth and Beauty' they declared war upon the vested cultural and social interests. Only a merciless and impartial criticism would purify Dutch culture and in this manner it would regain the magnificence of the 17th century Golden Age. Their example was adopted in 1840 by the young Franeker professor of theology J.H. Scholten who in his inaugural address caused a great stir by openly declaring that whenever science and Reformed doctrine are in conflict traditional Faith has to yield. In 1846 the new Utrecht professor of philosophy pleaded the cause of cultural reform even more vehemently. In his inaugural address *De wijsbegeerte den mensch met zigzelven verzoenende* (Philosophy reconciling man with himself) - revolutionary also by being the first address delivered at a Dutch university not in Latin, but in Dutch - he called philosophy the only means to disclose the Truth about God and nature and end man's inner conflicts and thus lead mankind to real happiness.

By dealing with Opzoomer and his friend Burger I would like to argue in this paper that Spinoza's philosophy played an important part in developing a liberal *Weltanschauung* appropriate for modern man. Theologians were the first who became aware of Spinoza's transforming potential. It is telling that the first traces of 19th century Dutch Spinozism can be found in the theological dissertation of Johannes van Vloten (1818-1883), who from the 1860s onwards became the great pamphleteer of Spinozism and was instrumental

1 ERNST H. KOSSMANN, *De lage landen (1780-1980), twee eeuwen Nederland en België*, I, Amsterdam, Elsevier 1986, p. 162.

in the erection of a public statute of Spinoza at The Hague in 1880. In the concluding propositions of this thesis proposition 23 quotes *Ethics* 5p24, which intimately links the study of nature with theology and proposition 21 applauds Strauss's view of the relation between Schleiermacher and Spinoza. It runs as follows - the first five words of the sentence are in academic Latin the rest in German quoting Strauss - : «with good reason Strauss writes that “all the principles of the first part of Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* are only intelligible if they are retranslated into the formulas of Spinoza, from which they have been taken”»². Although at the end of the 1840s Van Vloten broke with the Church and soon afterwards with Christianity, because it had accomplished its mission towards humanity, in line with Schleiermacher his fellow liberals continued to consider themselves to be 'Christians'. The essential message of Christ, if demystified, would be in full harmony with Spinozism. By underlining the obsolescence of Christianity, I would like to argue, Van Vloten forms an exception during the liberal Era³. Actually Van Vloten himself realised that he was an outsider, because in the dedication to Jacobus Moleschott of the first edition of his Spinoza study (1864), he refers to an approving letter sent to him by the great 19th century materialist and biologist after the publication of *Aanteekeningen op Mr. Opzoomers (Krauziaansche) Beoordeling van Prof. Scholten* (1846), a critical review of the debate between the Utrecht philosophy and Leiden theology professor. The scientist predicted the scholar would find «little approval and even far less support among the Dutch public». In the course of the years, according to

2 JOHANNES VAN VLOTEN, *Specimen academicum inaugurale continens quaestionum paulinarum caput unum*, Leiden 1843, pp. 47, 46.

3 On Van Vloten's Spinozism, WIEP VAN BUNGE, *Spinoza Past and Present. Essays on Spinoza, Spinozism, and Spinoza Scholarship*, Leiden, Brill 2012 (Brill studies in intellectual history, 215), pp. 159-169.

Van Vloten, these predictions fully came true⁴.

In 2000 Siebe Thissen published his thesis on 19th century Dutch Spinozism. He argued that the first upsurge of interest occurred in Masonic circles. In the 1850s the second edition of Berthold Auerbach's Spinoza novel, *Spinoza, ein Denkerleben*, translated into Dutch, made a considerable impact, and the 'poetic Spinozism' of Franz Junghuhn gained some popularity in circles of 'amateur' philosophers. The example of Opzoomer demonstrates that already in the 1840s an intense interest in Spinoza had developed in academic circles. Although Thissen maintained that the interest in Spinoza formed a short interlude in the intellectual development of the Utrecht professor and that from the 1850s onwards he rejected Spinozism due to its speculative nature, I would like to argue that the positivist Opzoomer remained just as interested in the 17th century philosopher as the idealist.

2. THE IDEALIST OPZOOMER

Although in Italy Opzoomer is far less known than Jacob Moleschott, the Utrecht professor dominated Dutch social, cultural and intellectual life during the third quarter of the 19th century. Kossmann calls him a fascinating exponent of intellectual liberalism⁵. Through his many publications in papers and journals, dealing for example with universal suffrage, the poisonous mingling of politics and religion, and the emancipation of women, his influence reached beyond the bounds of the university.

4 JOHANNES VAN VLOTEN, *Benedictus de Spinoza naar leven en werken, in verband met zijnen en onzen tijd*, Schiedam, Roelants 1871², p. vii

5 ERNST H. KOSSMANN, *De lage landen (1780-1980)*, cit., p. 217.

Cornelis Willem Opzoomer was born in 1821 at Rotterdam. In 1839 he went to Leiden University in order to study law, but followed courses in theology and Semitic languages as well. There Thorbecke, who before entering the political arena was professor of law, was his teacher and he introduced his pupil to the philosophy of the German Idealist C.F. Krause (1781-1832). Like Van Vloten, Opzoomer studied the works of David Strauss and accepted the results of German Biblical criticism. He lost the orthodox Reformed Faith of his childhood. From that moment onwards the Bible became a «series of book collected by chance due to the religious needs of the Jews and the Christians». «Tradition lost its sacred nature and the Divine Revelation transformed into a disclosure of the human mind absorbed in God». The Gospel was according to him «a hornet's nest of fables»⁶.

In the prime of his twenties, the self-conscious student took the so-called theology of sentiment to task. According to the student such an ill-advised theology was advocated by professor J.H. Scholten and the Rotterdam minister J.J. van Oosterzee (1817-1882), famous all over the country due to the eloquence of his sermons and the fluent style of his prose. Both Oosterzee and Scholten acknowledged the weakness of the traditional historical proofs of the Christian Truth, but the religious sentiment, or the inner experience caused by the Holy Ghost in our inner self would produce an indisputable testimony of the Divine origin of this religion. - Schleiermacher developed this argument in his *Reden über die Religion* (1799). - Opzoomer harshly rejected this alternative of the traditional justification of Christianity and called the religious sentiment a mere 'abstract immediacy'. If one attempts to de-

6 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, 1846-1871, *redevoering op den dag zijner 25jarige ambtsbediening*, Amsterdam, J.H. Gebhard & Comp. 1871, p. 32 and ALLARD PIERSON, *Over Opzoomer*, «De gids» 57/1, 1893, p. 415.

scribe the content, this sentiment evaporates and lacking all concreteness it appears to be next to nothing. In the past the human mind has attributed all kinds of different interpretations to this feeling and only reason is entitled to judge and to determine which interpretation is the correct one. This implies that also in religion the intellect is superior to the other human faculties and if we are able to establish the Truth of Christianity it will be philosophy which will provide us with the means. Opzoomer finally observed that the philosophy of Krause is the most appropriate for such an end.

Opzoomer's lifelong friend and fellow student, the classical scholar D. Burger jr. (1820-1891) shared his enthusiasm for Krause and in 1845 he translated the first part of Krause's *Vorlesungen über das System der Philosophie* written in 1828 into Dutch. This edition would enable the general public to study the basics of philosophy⁷. However, the wave of Krausanism lasted only a few years. For Thorbecke threw himself into politics and both Opzoomer and Burger endorsed positivism and the so-called 'wijsbegeerte der ervaring' (the philosophy of experience). Although this strange interlude of a feverous Krausianism lasted only from 1843 to 1846, it formed the prelude to the rule of liberalism in Dutch culture. However, in his reply to Opzoomer Scholten acutely remarked that Opzoomer's recommendation of Krausianism was pointless while in Germany its peak had already passed for some time⁸.

In 1845 Opzoomer graduated in law and without a degree in philosophy and well before his 25th birthday he was appointed in Utrecht to an extraordinary chair of philosophy. The governors of the university had in mind

7 KARL C.F. KRAUSE, *Het opklimmende deel der wijsbegeerte*, Rotterdam, H.W. van Harderwijk 1845, p. III.

8 JAN H. SCHOLTEN, *Over het Godsbegip van Krause, brief aan J. Nieuwenhuis*, Leiden, Hazenberg 1846, p. 31.

Heinrich Ahrens (1808-1874), a Krausian active at Brussels, but the ministry objected to the idea of appointing a foreigner⁹. As said before, in his inaugural address Opzoomer spoke in Dutch, although he was an excellent classicist, because he considered Latin to be unsuited for philosophical discourse in the modern age. To a friend he wrote that «profound argument is possible in that language, *testor Spinosam*, but Spinoza's Latin is horrible: shocked Cicero would have torn his hair and to the listener it is an obvious absurdity». In order to illustrate the faulty Latin modern philosophy is forced to use, Opzoomer quotes from Spinoza's letter 50: «determinatio ad rem juxta suum esse non pertinet», etc¹⁰. This quotation shows that Opzoomer already at an early age was well acquainted with the works of Spinoza.

In his inaugural address Opzoomer adopted a more or less Hegelian view of Spinoza. He outlined an epistemological philosophy of history, which leads to Spinozism. In the beginnings of mankind science and knowledge presuppose an 'innocent' view of the world; man in his early age accepts the objects in the world as independently existing and unchanging. By being an extreme realist man lived in a childlike Faith in nature and its Creator, God, which produced tranquillity of mind. Undisturbed by philosophical questions his knowledge of God is mythical and the image of God manlike. Unable to reflect on the experience of the senses and without the ideas of reason man's knowledge is confined to the finite universe. Therefore primitive man is without real knowledge of infinite reality, God. The second stage in the epistemological development of man Opzoomer calls the 'struggle of research'. Its beginning is Descartes, when philosophy enters the stage and man starts

9 HENDRIK VAN 'T VEER, *Mr. C. W. Opzoomer als wijsgeer*, Assen, van Gorcum 1961, pp. 2-3.

10 HOMME J. SMIT and WIERT J. WIERINGA, *Correspondentie van Robert Fruin*, Groningen, Wolters 1957, p. 7.

to reflect on the origin of knowledge. Here, in an idealist manner Opzoomer outlines the development of epistemology between Descartes and Kant. Kantianism is its logical outcome, because it places the knowing subject in opposition to the known objects. The result is an unbridgeable rift between Faith and science, and reflection and action. Kantianism, however, also contains the key mankind may use to solve the conflicts which lacerate its existence. By the research of the laws of the mind we infer that the knowing mind and the things are both manifestations of the Absolute, that is to say the infinite whole of all things. By enabling man to know God, philosophy, according to Opzoomer, restores harmony in human life, because our emotional and moral life requires infinite existence as Kant observed in the theory of the postulates of practical reason. In this argument Kantianism logically leads back to Spinozism. However, according to Opzoomer even Hegelianism and Spinozism are not fully concrete, but in a certain sense 'abstract'. By their simple monism, which directly identifies God and nature, these philosophical systems are limited. That is why they had to give way to «the higher system of Krause»¹¹.

After this development of a historical epistemology Opzoomer continues by dealing with the concept of God and the relationship between God and nature. Does the reconciliation between the Infinite and the finite and the disappearance of the separation between God and creation imply a Spinozistic pantheism? His answer is at least in part negative, because the 'reconciliation', which is necessary to bring reason, intellect and will in harmony, requires more than the simple notion of the *Deus sive natura*. Referring to Krause Opzoomer defines God as «a finitude in an Infinitude». In this defini-

11 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De wijsbegeerte den mensch met zich zelven verzoenende*, Leiden, J. H. Gebhard 1846, p. 51.

tion God retained some aspects of its traditional personality. «God is a thinking intellect, which designs the order of the world, projects its end and will call it into existence»¹². Although Opzoomer's definition of God is not completely satisfying, since it is unclear how it avoids the incrimination of anthropomorphism, because 'intellect', 'will' and 'personality' refer to man, this address proves the significance that Spinoza acquired in the philosophy of religion that Opzoomer developed in the 1840s.

Apparently even Opzoomer was not quite happy with the conception of God presented in the inaugural address. In the same year, 1846, he reconsidered his position in *De leer van God bij Schelling, Hegel en Krause*. In the preface he dissociated himself from Krause and the German idealist is now put on a par with Hegel and Spinoza. «If a man is speaking honestly, he will call him a Krausian»¹³. Like Kant Opzoomer accorded to the knowledge of God primarily a moral value. It «awakens man to a new life» and «makes him realise his true vocation». That is why man may not dwell on daily life and be content with its simple pleasures. Such a change of heart requires the evolution of the mind - a theme already dealt with in the inaugural address¹⁴. In this historical process basic to mankind Spinoza was the first to bring forward an adequate insight into God. He explained the reason why God necessarily exists and he observed that He has to be conceived beyond time, which is only possible by distinguishing between eternity and infinite duration¹⁵. Spinoza also phrased the basic notion of Hegel's idealism that 'the Truth is the

12 *Ibid.*, p. 56. Or in CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De leer van God bij Schelling, Hegel en Krause, een wijsgeerige proeve*, part I: Krause (the other parts remained unpublished), Leiden, J.H. Gebhard en Co. 1846, p. 57 and 62: «we have to acknowledge that the Infinite is personal' and the Infinite has 'personality not at the expense of its infinity».

13 *Ibid.*, p. VIII.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 33 and 28.

whole', because Spinoza grasped the fact that if God is all, nothing can be thought outside God. Hence, ontologically and logically the plurality of the individual things, manifest in the universe, has its principle and cause in the unity of the infinite substance.

Opzoomer's new definition of God departs from the distinction Spinoza makes in *Ethics* Ip29, scholium. According to the Utrecht philosopher Spinoza is correct in saying that nature is the whole of all things (*ta panta*), that is to say the *natura naturata*, but the divine substance being its creating force is inseparable from nature and the whole as well (*to pan*). Therefore Spinoza rightly calls him the *natura naturans*. Therefore God and the universe are neither different, nor absolutely identical, as a rude pantheism will have it¹⁶. In God the extended nature and the mind are put together and united into a whole. According to Opzoomer our mind is to be compared with a ray of light within the infinite light in the universe and our body with an atom within the material universe. This notion of God, as Opzoomer is fully aware, excludes the notion of Creation, because both logically and ontologically the plurality of the *modi* is dependent on the principle that unites the cosmos, but also the First cause is basically linked to its manifestations in the finite world. They make God concrete and real. The universe, as is obvious, cannot exist and be thought without God, but Opzoomer underlined that also God cannot be without nature. By making man aware of this basic notion Spinoza immortalised himself in the history of philosophy. If God is deprived of his predicates, that is to say His attributes and the *modi*, He is nothing¹⁷.

In 1846 Opzoomer was not every inch a Spinozist. However, in a review Van Vloten, the self-appointed '*arbiter Spinozismi*', observed that in *De leer van*

16 *Ibid.*, p. 70 and JAN H. SCHOLTEN, *Over het Godsbegip van Krause*, cit., p. 16.

17 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De leer van God* cit., p. 86.

God Opzoomer stood by two traditional principles, that is the freedom of choice and the immortality of the soul. In 1848 he abandoned the first principle and in his 1851 logic the 'freedom of choice' followed 'its sister'. In this manner Opzoomer relies on the «results of earlier philosophy, that is to say the Spinozistic philosophy»¹⁸.

During the academic years 1847/1848 and 1848/1849 Opzoomer taught courses on metaphysics, which the law required for students of theology. In these lectures he demonstrated the absurdity of the Mosaic story of creation, demonstrated the eternity of the universe and rejected God's personality. In the university yearbook of 1849 these courses are included with the title 'Spinozam interpretari perget [continues] C.W. Opzoomer'. These lectures made such a deep impression upon the student of theology J.H. Gunning that he afterwards recorded that in these years Spinoza's *Ethics* was his Gospel. He himself stated that it took him his whole life to dispel Spinoza's ghost¹⁹.

Opzoomer's address and his further publications on theology caused a great stir and afterwards he admitted that in these years he feared dismissal from his chair²⁰. After 1848, when Thorbecke's revolution changed the social and cultural climate, he lost this fear. At least in part due to the liberal revolution the natural sciences at the universities expanded rapidly. In the wake of this sudden rise idealism gave way to empiricism and positivism. Opzoomer substituted Mill and Comte for Hegel and Krause, but he retained Spinoza.

18 In the «Algemeene Konst- en letterbode» 41 of 1851, but also published separately. In that edition pp. 2 note and 4.

19 JOHANNES H. GUNNING, *Spinoza en de idee der persoonlijkheid, een studie*, Utrecht , Kemink en zoon 1876, Baarn, Hollandia-Dr. 1919, inleiding.

20 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *1846-1871*, p. 14.

3. SPINOZA'S THEORY OF THE EMOTIONS IN THE HANDS OF OPZOOMER AND BURGER

In Utrecht Opzoomer came in touch with the natural sciences, which in the Netherlands were on the eve of their so-called second Golden Age - the 17th century being their first Golden Age. This sudden change put an end to what the Amsterdam professor of aesthetics and pupil of Opzoomer Allard Pierson (1831-1896) called the 'theological age'²¹. By his relationships with the leading chemist G.J. Mulder, the teacher of Moleschott, the physicist Buys Ballot, and the physician F.C. Donders Opzoomer took a new course. This emerged from the lecture *De twijfel des tijds, de wegwijzer der toekomst* (The incertitude of our age, the guide to the future), which in 1850 opened one of his courses. Vehemently Opzoomer rejected 'speculative' philosophy, that is to say the idealism he had adhered to in the preceding years, and firmly convinced of their social and intellectual value he recommended his students the positivism of Auguste Comte and the empiricism of J.S. Mill.

Eloquently Opzoomer outlined to his audience the general and comprehensive incertitude in the sciences, politics and society. In former days Christianity was the base universally accepted by all citizens and scholars, but now this common ground is forsaken. Philosophical systems follow each other in an endless row and where the one sees progress and gain, the other perceives disaster and arbitrariness. Real progress is only possible if the moral sciences adopt the example of the natural sciences and use their method. It is true, in the sciences formally reigned the same infinite series of controversies, but by generally «accepting the empirical method» certainty and progress is reached.

²¹ ALLARD PIERSON, *Over Opzoomer*, «De gids» 55/1, 1891, p. 419.

In the moral sciences such a progress will become possible if speculation is rejected and the scientists are guided by experience²². Like Mill and Comte Opzoomer assumed a direct link between philosophical, scientific and social progress. The methodological unity of the sciences Opzoomer attempted to justify in Spinozistic terms.

Experience teaches us continuously the interrelation between the corporeal and spiritual world, and from his idealistic period Opzoomer retained his monism, that is to say the firm belief in the unity of nature and mind. Contrary to most Spinozists, he refrains from explaining this unity in metaphysical terms and even Spinoza's famous theory developed in *Ethics* 2 about parallelism between the attributes of thought and extension, is left out of consideration, but unexpectedly he uses the theory of the affects of part three. Mind and body are distinct principles, Opzoomer argued, and a priori the one does not entail the other, but they coincide by their actions and effects. Their connection is to be explained by the genesis of the mind. Man is a being which is subject to basic feelings of joy and sadness. Nature causes in him the primary striving for happiness and avoiding pain. In this strife all our actions originate. Subsequently, our actions cause our knowledge, for without knowledge man is unable to act effectively. By insight into the superior forces of nature man can make them instrumental in serving his lusts. So, knowledge increases our power to survive. The same applies to our fellow men. Their doings are sometimes beneficial, sometimes detrimental to our survival. So the other is sometimes a foe and sometimes a friend to us. However, due to his immediate selfishness man considers the other to be only a foe, but gradually, by seeing his usefulness, he becomes his friend. In this manner our fel-

22 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De twijfel des tijds, de wegwijzer der toekomst*, Leiden and Amsterdam, J.H. Gebhard & Comp. 1850, p. 22.

low man becomes «a companion in nature, feeling himself related to». By this feeling of affinity nature causes the sentiments of sympathy and love to arise, and to constitute the undeniable natural links within the family, a nation and a state. So, like Spinoza Opzoomer bases this political philosophy on the theory of the emotions²³. In *De weg der wetenschap* (the way of science) he quotes the physiologist Johannes Müller (1801-1858) who called this part of the *Ethics* a '*Statistik der Leidenschaften*' and an «unsurpassed masterpiece»²⁴.

The same Spinozistic argument is to be found in the 1852 rectoral address *De philosophiae natura* that Opzoomer, compelled by Thorbecke, the minister of the interior at that time, delivered in Latin. In this manner Thorbecke caused the last important Latin text in the history of Dutch philosophy to be written. In the introduction - and that is why we deal briefly with this text. - Opzoomer refers to Spinoza, being the personification of philosophy in the Low Countries. «Many deplored, or rejoiced about the fact, that [the Netherlands] left little room for philosophy». In Germany the discipline is indigenous, but «on our infertile soil and in our temperate climate philosophy never flourished. [...] However, Spinoza by his example alone makes obvious that philosophy is most familiar to the Batavians and was transplanted from here to Germany»²⁵.

Although in the rest of his argument Opzoomer never mentions Spinoza but only Cicero, the anthropology he outlines is of a thoroughly Spinozistic nature and in accordance with the argument presented in his lo-

23 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De waarheid en hare kenbronnen*, Amsterdam, J. H. Gebhard & Comp. 1859, pp. 138-144 and 230-232.

24 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De weg der wetenschap, een handboek der logika*, Leiden and Amsterdam, J.H. Gebhard 1851, p. 31.

25 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De philosophiae natura*, Amsterdam, J.H. Gebhard et Soc.1852, p. 5.

gic. Just like every animal man by nature is left to his own devices and forced to strive for self-preservation²⁶. Man chooses all that contributes to his survival and keeps himself far from death and all things he may expect to lead to that evil. Hence man wants pleasure and abhors pain. The most effective instrument granted by nature for our self-preservation and happiness is the intellect. Only by knowing the causes of things and the laws of nature, which produce the phenomena, are we able to move things at our will and accommodate them, as far as nature permits, to our desires. These natural laws we establish by sense perception. This is the origin of science - of course the last notion does not really fit within the scope of Spinozism²⁷. In view of this anthropological foundation of all science Opzoomer prefers ethics and politics as being more relevant to our survival than pure physics.

Also Opzoomer's companion as propagandist of Krausanism Dionijs Burger in the 1850s transferred his interest in Spinoza from metaphysics to anthropology. Burger was the first of a long series of classical scholars, active as teachers at the Dutch *gymnasia*, who were also important philosophers. Like Opzoomer he was born in Rotterdam. At first he wanted to study theology, but his family and friends strongly advised against doing so. Due to a speech defect he would never be able to become minister. He changed his mind and went to Leiden in order to study classical literature. In 1843 he defended a thesis on Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*. In 1850 he became deputy headmaster at Doesburg and in 1857 principal of the gymnasium at Amersfoort. Burger made some translations of Plato's dialogues, but he mainly published on modern philosophy, especially on psychology and anthropology. Moreover, he made the Dutch version of Bertold Auerbach's *Spinoza, ein*

26 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Denkerleben, a novel about Spinoza, which went into two editions. In the preface he calls Spinoza «a prophet not without honour save in his own country». Germany, however, was fully aware of the fact that in his thought the seeds of modern philosophy are present. According to Burger its luminaries are Kant and Hegel.

The Dutch headmaster continued by observing that the significance of Spinoza's *Ethics* is not primarily historical. The book teaches modern man 'true happiness', 'real freedom' and 'tranquillity of man'. Hence, Spinoza's philosophy does not concern only 'the pure intellect', but man as a whole. Although Burger does not adopt Auerbach's view that Spinoza is the prophet of the 19th century and a direct precursor of the modern age – because the first part of the *Ethics* is pervaded by pointless speculation and filled with inconsistent metaphysics – the book deserves a large readership. This public will even include those who are unable to read its Latin. - In 1863 the HBS (the abbreviation of the Dutch Higher Citizens School), a form of secondary education without Latin was established. - The conviction that the readership of philosophy was enlarging might well be the reason why in 1858 Burger translated the *Ethics* into Dutch. This translation is the first Dutch version after the *Nagelate Schriften*²⁸.

Contrary to Opzoomer Burger is not primarily interested in Spinoza for scholarly reasons. In a professional journal he explained why modern man has to study the *Ethics*. «It firstly contains a wealth of information, based upon accurate observation and psychological analysis». «His statistics of the

28 PIET M. STEENBAKKERS, *De Nederlandse vertalingen van Spinoza's Ethica*, Delft, Eburon 1997 (Mededelingen vanwege het Spinozahuis, 74), pp. 13-17. Like the English version made by George Henry Lewes and George Eliot, who between 1854-1856 translated the *Ethics*, Burger's version remained unpublished.

emotions is a masterpiece of insight into human nature». «From a pedagogical point of view an ardent study of this theory is highly recommendable». Burger, therefore, is also interested in exploring the last parts of the *Ethics*. According to the Amersfoort headmaster Spinoza teaches us that virtue is the supreme good and in order to reach such a good enlightened insight is vital.

Accordingly Burger evaluated the *Ethics*²⁹. The first part reaches pantheistic conclusions, which modern man is «less likely to endorse», but from the third part onwards it teaches us to control our emotions. In order to take advantage of the *Ethics* we have to detach the ethics developed in this masterpiece from the disappointing metaphysics. We have to separate «the tenable and still useful from the defective». The final part of the *Ethics* provides us with a remedy against the emotions, which deprive us of our liberty. It teaches man how reason will be the guardian of the soul and our guide in emotional life. In a second contribution entitled 'Spinoza and the experience' Burger continues his argument on the two faces of Spinoza. He observed that Spinoza is not to be «conceived as a metaphysician engaging himself exclusively in infertile speculation and in developing abstract concepts. Such a philosopher is dead and of no significance in real life». For, contrary to Hegel, he did not attempt to infer finite reality from God. These ideas Burger argued for by quoting many propositions from the *Ethics*, using his own Dutch version.

Burger's most important study of Spinoza dates from 1860 and was originally written for his fellow teachers at the gymnasia as well. Due to the cordial reception, however, he changed his mind and he grew more and more convinced of the inevitability to present it to a larger audience. In the beginning of the pamphlet, Burger, not unlike Opzoomer in his inaugural address, out-

²⁹ *Bijdragen tot de kennis en den bloei der Nederlandsche Gymnasiën voor 1857*, Utrecht, Kemink 1858, p. 7-14. In the next volume the article 'Spinoza en de ervaring', p. 76-88.

lines a dialectical perspective on the development of human knowledge.

Whenever a whole consisting of opposites and subjected to a development begins its development, at first there is a state in which these conflicting things were not separated. If this development proceeds, one antithesis comes to the fore and it determines the development till by its one-sidedness and imbalance it is detrimental to the whole. At that moment the development of its opposite begins, of course in continuous struggle with the former, till it also has finished its course. Whenever, finally, both opposites individually are sufficiently developed, then will follow the period when both parts will be united in a organic whole.³⁰

The law just given is according to Burger universally valid, for the simple reason that the final stage is only to be reached by passing through the previous stages.

Burger's view of philosophy is the second relic of idealism in these articles. Like Hegel he states that philosophy conceptualises all conscious and unconscious existing ideas, representations and imaginations of a certain period. Although he is not the prophet of the modern age, yet by using this notion Burger makes him its gatekeeper. «Homer is the teacher of the ancient world, Plato of the Middle Ages, and Spinoza or our age, because these three men with perfect clarity formulated principles which really are the moving principles of these three periods»³¹. Moreover, although Burger is a principled liberal, he sees history as determined by 'ruling classes', because only they know the causes which move the process of history and of the classes only a few individuals, and not 'the multitude'.

A popular philosophy in the sense of a world-view held by a certain age is, Burger observes, based upon its notions of human nature. Its attributes are

30 DIONIJS BURGER, *Homerus, Plato, Spinoza*, Zutphen, Willem Thieme 1864, p. 1.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

in part of a spiritual, in part of a bodily nature. These are perceived as distinct only in a presumed first stage, called by Burger (following Opzoomer's inaugural address) the age of innocence; they are indistinct, because mind and body did not acquire an existence of their own. Deprived of his naiveté in this particular period man has to answer the question which principle takes preference: mind or body. In the first historical period the mind is reduced to the body and Burger calls its determining spirit Homeric sensualism. This stage is followed by evenly unilateral Platonic spiritualism, which dominated the Middle Ages. Spinoza, at last, was able to accommodate both philosophies in the higher unity of humanism created by his doctrine that mind and body are equally basic to man. Hence one principle cannot be reduced to another. It is, of course, remarkable that Burger calls Spinoza's metaphysics 'humanismus' – he uses the German form of the word and not the Dutch 'humanisme', because it is only in 1865 that Pierson, one of Opzoomer's most promising pupils and at that time minister at Rotterdam, in his farewell sermon, which he delivered when resigning the ministry, used 'humanisme' and gave it the modern sense of a world view that does not acknowledge any authority outside man. After this famous sermon this meaning became current³².

Spinoza's 'humanismus' implies a moral philosophy, Burger observed, which acknowledges the relative value of the body, but does not make it absolute. This metaphysics on the one hand teaches man that nature does not revolve around him, but on the other hand we realise the importance of earthly pleasures. In this manner it focuses on this world, discards all transcendent world and becomes directed towards one's fellow man. However, according to Burger, Spinoza is not a materialist, accepting only the bodily

³² ALLARD PIERSON, *Dr. A. Pierson aan zijne laatste gemeente*, Arnhem, D.A. Thieme 1865, p. 12.

world, because he did not deny the reality of the mind and its immortality. It is *Ethics* 5, which enables Burger to identify Christianity with his 'humanistic' Spinozism. Spinoza taught that after death something remained of the soul and in view of the inner connection between body and mind a part of the body has to remain as well. Burger concludes this outline of the *Ethics* by observing that the geometrical method adopted by Spinoza is only his manner to teach his philosophy, but it is not basic to his philosophy. Hence, Spinoza's philosophy is not a science, the conclusions of which are demonstrated with absolute certainty, but is a possible world-view open to modern man.

According to Burger Spinoza is a realist and a thoroughly practical scholar. That is why he denied the possibility of a full emancipation of women. Feminism is a whim of speculative thought and contrary to the observable facts. Burger underlined that Spinozistic humanism is a philosophy based on experience. Hence, it is false to consider him a 'rationalist', but he accepted the empiricist credo that all our knowledge originates in the senses. Like Opzoomer Burger acknowledged the existence of an inner sense, which perceives moral, aesthetical and religious feelings, and which is the source of our insight into the inner world of the mind. Therefore, Burger called Spinoza's humanism the predecessor of 19th century positivism and empiricism.

The new world of our age endorses 'humanismus', which emerges from all kinds of phenomena. By the progress of the sciences the human mind is advancing with giant strides and they spread their beneficial skills to all layers of society. Physics is practised by adopting the real method of observation, the health of the people is advanced according to scientific principles by the measures of the government. Poverty is no longer a virtue but a calamity, which prudent

measures will eliminate as far as possible.³³

From these last sentences emerges the social and political implications positivism should have.

Due to Burger's vague and little specified conception of human immortality Van Vloten accused him of pseudo-Spinozism³⁴. According to Burger, however, the *Ethics* in this manner shows the real value of Christian 'ethics'. Spinozism is the doctrine of the Gospel, but formulated in a philosophical manner.

Although after 1865 Burger did not publish on Spinoza anymore, it was not Van Vloten's continuous critique of being half-hearted and inconsistent which caused the decline of the 'Spinozistic humanismus'. In accordance with the 'zeitgeist' Burger returned to Kant and he grew convinced of a dualism between nature and mind. Also Pierson relinquished empiricism and in *De gids* of 1871 he observed that 'modern' physiology by proving the subjectivity of our experience paved the way for Neo-Kantianism and enabled modern man to escape the positivist dilemma of orthodox Faith and naturalist science³⁵. Also Opzoomer did not resist the general onslaught on positivism and after 1870 he returned to the study of law. However, just before that he closed the last gap in his positivism: the religious sense.

3. A SPINOZISTIC PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

33 DIONIJS BURGER, *Homerus, Plato, Spinoza cit.*, p. 41-42.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 32. For the resulting polemic: MICHEL WIELEMA, *Dionys Burger over Spinoza (1856-1865), een ongepubliceerde brief aan Johannes van Vloten uit 1861*, «Geschiedenis van de wijsbegeerte» 2, 1991, p. 89-98.

35 ALLARD PIERSON, *Een keerpunt in de wijsgerige ontwikkeling*, «De gids» 35/1, 1871, pp. 455-487.

Het wezen der deugd, published in 1848, is Opzoomer's first and only book on moral philosophy. It was written a few years before he converted to positivism, but it remained in print and editions appeared in 1854 and 1868. He only changed the title, which became *De vrucht der godsdienst* (the rewards of religion). This change is an indication that like Spinoza he identified morality and religion. Contemporaries did not fail to notice the religious mood of Opzoomer's moral philosophy and the modern reader will notice the reference to Schleiermacher's *Reden über die Religion* on the first page and the 'amen' on the last one. A religiously inspired morality is one of the links between Opzoomer's idealism and positivism.

From a Spinozistic point of view Opzoomer on the one hand rejected 'the lifeless' formalism of Kant's categorical imperative, which is psychologically unrealistic. His demand that a man even facing self-destruction would refrain from telling a lie, bears witness to an utter ignorance of the facts of human life. Moreover, by making practical reason a first cause, Kant denies the fact that man always is and will remain part of an infinite universe. By being part of nature man does not only know his duties, but he is also able to convert them into action. Therefore, Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reason, that is to say between the externally determined physical nature we live and act in and the noumenal world created by reason, in which we are autonomous and free, should not imply a metaphysical dualism. Opzoomer also rejected the existence of morally neutral actions, such as actions merely 'in accordance with duty', because in such a manner Kant reduces the moral life to law. However, Opzoomer also rejected the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill. Observation teaches us that pure self-interest is not the

only cause of human behaviour, because our actions result from an intricate interplay of our emotions with those of our fellow men³⁶.

The end of moral life is human perfection by restoring our link with the Infinite Reality, that is to say God. Only by being directed by God are we free. Such a freedom is only possible if love is the ultimate cause of our actions. Like Hegel he holds that the principle of universal liberty came into the world with Christianity. Christ liberated the peoples from the 'law' and the 'day of the mind and of freedom' had come. Christianity taught mankind this principle by means of religious imagination, but Spinoza by means of philosophical concepts. Opzoomer does not mention Spinoza by name, but the reference is obvious, because he quoted Schleiermacher's famous phrase in the *Reden über die Religion*: «strew for me flowers on the grave of that noble man»³⁷.

According to Opzoomer it is only reason by which we are able to know God. Only reason is able to lift man towards the infinite. «Beings without reason only perceive the infinite, man however can roll into the streams of eternity. Perishable things surround him, but reason speaks to him about the eternal, and makes all earthly treasures fade»³⁸. Notwithstanding his sermonizing tone Opzoomer does not plead for a Christian *memento mori*. Man is free whenever he is no longer a slave of the passions and affects and is capable of transforming the earth into a heaven. «He will be able to enjoy all pleasures, but he will be prepared to die on the cross if the well-being of mankind so re-

36 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De vrucht der godsdienst*, Amsterdam, J. M. Gebhard and Comp. 1868³, p. 20.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 22. Schleiermacher's phrase is taken from *Rede 2*: see FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER, *Über die Religion Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, Stuttgart, Reclam 1993, p. 28.

38 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De vrucht der godsdienst*, cit., pp. 64-65.

quires»³⁹.

Unlike Van Vloten, Pierson and Burger, who focused on the human subject in moral philosophy, Opzoomer is not a humanist. He was pessimistic about the possibilities of man to transform the world and was convinced that the human condition is and will remain determined by all kinds of evils and disasters beyond our powers. «In the poetry of all ages and all peoples a strident cry, often of despair, is to be heard»⁴⁰. Art and religion, however, teach us how to overcome our sorrows, that is to say by seeing our life from the perspective of God, or *sub specie aeternitatis*.

After discarding 'speculative thinking' Opzoomer saw experience as the only valid source of knowledge. We know external nature by means of the five external senses and deduction from these observations. As we saw before, the beauty of things and their moral qualities we know by our inner senses. With a certain distaste Wim van Dooren, the last historian to write on Opzoomer, regarded this doctrine to be an idealistic relic, which made his philosophy in comparison to J.S. Mill less radical both in a political and a religious respect⁴¹. Van Dooren was not the first to accuse the Utrecht philosopher of a lack of intellectual courage. In 1864 for example the Amsterdam professor J.P.N. Land (1837-1897) observed that Opzoomer had created a 'servile philosophy' with the only purpose to save theology. Lacking a critical sense he is not a real philosopher like Spinoza, he wrote⁴². Although Opzoomer did

39 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *Onze godsdienst: vijf reden*, Amsterdam, J.H. Gebhard and Comp. 1874, p. 11.

40 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *Onze godsdienst*, cit., p. 16.

41 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *Het wezen der kennis. Een Leesboek der Logica*, Amsterdam, J.H. Gebhard & Comp. 1863, ed. W. Van Dooren, Baarn, Ambo 1990, p. 28. Opzoomer himself refers to Comte's fight against the assumption of the inner sense, see *De weg der wetenschap*, p. 39

42 «De gids» 28/2, 1864, p. 369.

not deign to answer, he would well have accepted the critique of a 'servile philosophy'. Philosophy and all science is studied for the sake of human happiness and, as we saw earlier, Opzoomer developed his theory of the inner sense on a Spinozistic base. He introduced the discussion with a quotation taken from part 3 of the *Ethics*⁴³. Whenever the things in the external world affect our senses, in our mind both images of our things are created but also the feelings of pleasure and pain⁴⁴. Such emotions, however, not only originate in the perceptions of the five external senses, but also in the mental images, that is to say the ideas. A perception is not the only cause of our inner sensations, for we compare these perceptions with our nature. If they are appropriate to our nature, pleasure and appetite arise, which have a stimulating effect on our activity and lust. Striving for survival we love all things that give us pleasure. The laws of human emotion describe facts and they are therefore as objective as the laws of physics⁴⁵. By means of these laws, Opzoomer quoting Spinoza observed, man finally will be able to acquire the intellectual love of God and the highest happiness possible to him. By means of the religious sense man perceives his dependence on the Higher Power of nature. More than Spinoza Opzoomer underlines the sharp difference between the religious sense, which perceives nature in its infinity and religion, and the senses and the sciences, which are directed to the finite world.

A second ingredient of Opzoomer's moral philosophy, derived from Spinoza, is the concept of moral liberty. He adopted from the last parts of the *Ethics* the dialectic between slavery and freedom. «Spinoza attributes to reas-

43 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De waarheid en hare kenbronnen*, Amsterdam, J.H. Gebhard & Comp. 1862², p. 130.

44 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *Het wezen der kennis* cit., pp. 88-91.

45 CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *De waarheid en hare kenbronnen*, 1862², cit., p. 146-148.

on the power to liberate us from the disturbing force of the affects, and the acquirement of this freedom is possible by the love for God, in which he posits the highest human bliss»⁴⁶. In his last philosophical work, *Onze godsdienst* (Our religion) he acknowledges the need to abandon the freedom of choice in the light of the absolute dependence of all things on God. If we were able to choose freely, this choice would escape the divine omnipotence. The determination of all things by God is a doctrine which is in harmony with true religion and penal law. This doctrine does not imply fatalism: we can, whatever we reasonably want. Man is not an instrument in the hands of external powers, but he is free if he acts in accordance with the laws of his nature⁴⁷. Hence, real freedom does not require choice, but the determination of the will by the knowledge of nature and its laws. Like Spinoza there is in Opzoomer's philosophy no Kantian dualism between morality and religion on the one hand and the physical universe on the other hand.

With respect of the religious sense Opzoomer had doubts about its object. The obvious answer is God, but such an answer is insufficient, because who or what is God? According to Opzoomer the question is difficult to answer. All predicates we attribute to God, such as will or intellect, are inappropriate. They are inferred from the observation of our mind, that is to say they are finite. To argue from the finite universe to the infinite nature is impossible. The only predicates to be said of God are 'existing' and omnipotence. In this manner theology is deprived of all content and all conflict between theology and science becomes impossible. Imperceptibly Opzoomer reaches a conclusion comparable to a principle Spinoza established in the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴⁷ CORNELIS W. OPZOOMER, *Onze godsdienst*, cit., chapter 1 and *De godsdienst*, Amsterdam, J.H. Gebhard en Comp. 1864, p. 67-71.

Tractatus theologico-politicus: «it is a matter of indifference to religion if the propositions to which it is related are true, provided that they are pious. Even if God does not exist, so long as I trust in His wisdom and love, I possess true religion»⁴⁸.

Only the Leiden theologian Scholten continued to invoke the help of Spinoza in construing a conception of God acceptable to modern man. At the fortieth anniversary of his professorship his grateful pupils presented to the luminary of Leiden University a statue of Spinoza⁴⁹. However, the positivist Opzoomer accepted the conclusion that positivism's banishment of metaphysics invalidated the first part of the *Ethics*, but his interest in the other parts remained. Opzoomer became a great propagandist of the anthropology of his famous fellow-Dutchman. In such a manner Spinoza encouraged the breakthrough of liberalism into Dutch culture and contributed to its adaptation to the modern age.

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48 *Ibid.*, p. 405.

49 «De Hervorming» 25 September 1880. GERRIT BRILLENBURG WURTH, *J.H. Scholten als systematisch theoloog*, 's-Gravenhage, Haeringen 1927, pp. 28-29.