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## 'IMAGES OF LIGHT AND SHADOW': Overt Spinozism bursts forth into Dutch cultural life (1854-1872)

### Spinozism as an 'extra-cultural' phenomenon

In the Netherlands, for almost two centuries, the philosophy of Spinoza was discredited by the positivists and smothered by orthodox theology<sup>1</sup>. Spinozist arguments were excluded from mainstream cultural and philosophical debate. In Dutch society, the designation of *Spinozist* was used as a popular term of abuse for thinkers who had passed out beyond accepted cultural boundaries. Such thinkers had often criticized the Christian foundation of western civilisation; their covert Spinozism was occasionally to be traced in philosophical novels, tracts on logic and clandestine manuscripts<sup>2</sup>. It was generally accepted that pronounced Spinozists had to be on their guard against repressive action taken by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities. The lives of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Spinozists such as the brothers Koerbagh, Anthony van Dalen, Jan Bredenburg, Pontiaan van Hattem, Willem Deurhoff, Frederik van Leenhof and Jacob Brill were dominated by insinuations, trials and even jail sentences.

Influenced by the so-called *Pantheism controversy* in Germany, Spinozism had revived during the last decades of the eighteenth century. Mendelssohn, Herder, Goethe, Hegel and other idealists brought Spinozism back to the centre of the philosophical debate, and this revival of interest even spread to Spinoza's native country. Here, the poet and freemason Johan Kinker enriched Kantian categories with Spinozist arguments. The small Dutch Kantian movement - led by Paulus van Hemert and Kinker - was closely interwoven with Amsterdam freemasonry. Kinker and Van Hemert considered their brotherhood to be the vanguard of Kant's policy of enlightenment<sup>3</sup>. By introducing Spinoza's monism into his well-known poem *Het Allevan of de Wereldziel* - written in 1812 - Kinker tried to bridge the gap between the Kantian subject and object<sup>4</sup>. He endorsed Spinoza's adage "*deus sive natura*" and defined Nature as "*the divine Aphrodite*".

His Goethean admiration for the living and complex unity of nature made him a determined opponent of any mechanical-scientific approach to what he called the "*higher life*". Kinker rejected all scientific patterns of development and differentiation because he thought that these limited concepts would only lead us further away from "*the electric all-power*", an entity which could only be located by Spinoza's intuitive science. When we take a close look at the reception of Spinozism in the Netherlands, we notice that freemasons played a large part in the diffusion of Spinozist, pantheist and naturalistic ideas. Masonic thinkers like Ignatius Aurelius Fessler and the Yorck lodge in Berlin (Fichte), influenced Kinker's

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Michael John Petry and Wim Klever (EUR) for their stimulating support during the period of research.

<sup>2</sup> H.J. Siebrand, *Spinoza and the Netherlanders. An Inquiry into the Early Reception of His Philosophy* (Assen 1988).

<sup>3</sup> A. J. Hanou, *Sluiers van Isis. Johannes Kinker als voorvechter van de Verlichting, in de vrijmetselarij en andere Nederlandse genootschappen 1790-1845* (Deventer 1988); J. Plat & M.R. Wielema, *Paulus van Hemert. Gezag en grenzen van de menselijke rede* (Baarn 1989).

<sup>4</sup> J. Koopmans, *Het Allevan of de Wereldziel, Taal & Letteren* (XV, 1905) 373-394.

intellectual development. Since theology determined the mental and cultural framework of society, 'suspicious' conceptions of God and Nature could only be expressed in extra-cultural circles - such as the masonic lodges.

In Dutch freemasonry, covert and overt Spinozism have a long history. The first lodges were established by the followers of John Toland, whose 'Spinozism' is now being investigated anew. But since freemasonry was more liberal than established cultural life, eavesdropping and social control were commonplace. Religious 'spies' were employed to inform local or national officials about people who showed too much interest in Spinoza's works. In 1822 for instance, Johan Rudolph Thorbecke - the future leader of Dutch liberalism - became a victim of this state of affairs. During his stay in Berlin he discussed a number of topics, and Spinozism was among them. This 'bad news' reached his father, who immediately wrote him a letter in which he urged his son to forget about Spinoza; being associated with his ideas would definitely ruin the career he had just started. The son replied that he had to write articles to earn a living, and that Spinoza was the subject he had become interested in. He saw the point of his father's warnings, however, and added: "*I know writing about Spinoza would lock doors in my country for ever*"<sup>6</sup>. His presentiment was right: later that year the board of the University of Leiden refused to offer him the professorial chair in philosophy because they felt uneasy about his Spinozism<sup>6</sup>. This situation is typical of the first half of the nineteenth century. Spinozist opinions circulated mainly in the lodges, since philosophical debate was an accepted aspect of the ways in which their members socialized<sup>7</sup>. The liberal revolution of 1848 pulled the freemasons out of their masonic shells, however, and some of them began to realize that a new era was dawning. They welcomed the social and cultural change, and started to criticize Christianity, especially its theocratic and dualist tendencies<sup>8</sup>. The fifties in the Netherlands are characterized by a flood of publications in which both implicit and explicit Spinozism are clearly in evidence. One of the most important books of this period was *Images of Light and Shadow from the interior of Java [Licht en Schaduwbeelden uit de binnenlanden van Java]* published in 1854. Although this work does not deal with Spinozism in particular, it does offer a new kind of scientific approach that was to become typical of Dutch Spinozists. *Images of Light and Shadow* initiated the flood of Spinozist arguments into Dutch cultural life in the mid-fifties. Besides its important treatment of ecology, the book also describes the four main spiritual ideologies of the time: Christianity, deism, pantheism and materialism, as well as their exponents. In this lecture I shall concentrate on this 'forgotten' book, and show how it relates to the steady increase in Spinozist conceptions typical of the period.

## **Nature subsumes all**

In 1850, after almost ten years of arguing, insinuating, and a whole series of intellectual disappointments, a group of freemasons founded the 'clandestine' lodge Post Nubila Lux<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>5</sup> From *Het Thorbecke Archief 1798-1872* (no place of publication given, 1962) 207.

<sup>6</sup> K.H. Boersma, *Johan Rudolph Thorbecke. Een historisch-kritische studie* (Leiden 1949) 89.

<sup>7</sup> Leo Apostel, *Vrijmetselarij. Een wijsgerige benadering* (Antwerpen-Baarn 1992) 165-174.

<sup>8</sup> Siebe Thissen, 'Vrij van praal en zinnelijkheid'. *Vrijmetselarij en wijsbegeerte in de negentiende eeuw*. This article will appear in *Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland* (2, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> M.S. Polak, *Die Loge Post Nubila Lux und die Gross-Loge der Niederlanden* (Amsterdam-Leipzig 1854); F. Gunst, *De*

which was not recognized by "het Grootoosten" - the federal organisation of lodges. Its members advocated a "School for contemplative philosophy". The founder of the lodge, Markus Polak, was a spiritist and a philosopher, and for many years he criticized the fact that only a quarter of the one thousand Amsterdam masons visited their lodges regularly. According to Polak, drinking-bouts and debauches were more common in Amsterdam than the quest for truth and knowledge. Post Nubila Lux was a secularized lodge: the amount of ritual had been reduced, and frequent meetings in which philosophical texts were studied, became the core of its activities. Polak and the other members wanted to institute a natural religion: they believed that with the help of Spinoza this religion would replace Christianity within a few decades. They repeated the same kind of words that Kinker had been using forty years earlier. Round about the middle of the century, the identification of God with "the divine Aphrodite" created an intellectual turmoil as interest in the natural and cultural life of the Dutch East Indies increased<sup>10</sup>. The most sensational piece of work produced by this movement was undoubtedly *Images of Light and Shadow*. It was written by the Dutch-German scientist Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn (1809-1864), who also published many books on geology, vulcanology, topography, botany and ethnography<sup>11</sup>. From 1849 until 1855 Junghuhn was a member of Post Nubila Lux, and the masons were pleased to make use of his personal experience as a traveller. It provided them with a unique opportunity to take a close look at the essence of natural religion as it worked in practice. *Images of Light and Shadow* was discussed in groups, and the first two editions, of approximately five hundred copies each, were distributed 'subculturally' by the lodges and their members. Who then was this Junghuhn, and why did this particular book cause so much trouble?

Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn led an adventurous and stormy life<sup>12</sup>. He was born in 1809 in the German village of Mansfeld, and was forced by his father, who was a surgeon, to study physics. But he soon gave up physics for the study of stones and plants. While doing his national service in the army, he got involved in a duel, which resulted in a ten-year prison sentence. By pretending to be ill, he escaped and enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. In Africa, Junghuhn continued his geological and botanical research. From France he passed on to the Netherlands, signing on in the Dutch-Indian army, since he had become interested in the interiors of Java and Sumatra. He established himself on Java as a serious scientist, and during his travels through the inhospitable interior he discovered the harmony between his mortal soul and the overwhelming presence of nature. Junghuhn lost his traditional Christian belief, and said that henceforth his only church would be "*that highly vaulted church, the roof of which is dotted with stars*".

For Junghuhn, a travel through the jungle was more than just a journey, it was a religious and esthetic experience. Nature made him laugh, cry and shudder. It made him forget his own identity and dissolved his Christian morals. We find not only this esthetic surplus in his writing, but also a new scientific approach to nature, which was based upon it. It was on

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*onafhankelijke loge Post Nubila Lux te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam 1884).

<sup>10</sup> On this increase of interest, see P.G.E.I.J. van der Velde, De projectie van een Groter Nederland. P.J. Veth en de popularisering van Nederlands Indie (1848-1895), *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* (105, 1992) 367-382.

<sup>11</sup> About Junghuhn's works, A.C.P. Schmidt, *Junghuhn: Biografische Beiträge* (Berlin 1909); R. Nieuwenhuys en F. Jaquet, *Java's onuitputtelijke natuur. Reisverhalen, tekeningen en fotografieën van Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn* (Alphen aan de Rijn 1980).

<sup>12</sup> A.W. Kroon, Levensschets van Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn, *De Dageraad* (1864) 415-462; O. Noordenbos en P. Spigt, *Atheïsme en vrijdenken in Nederland* (Nijmegen 1976) 161-163.

account of this ecstatic element in his awareness that Junghuhn produced not abstract and scientific treatises, but *literature* - comparable with that inspired by the naturalism of Thoreau, Emerson or Whitman. According to E.M. Beekman, what we have here is a naturalism built upon three frameworks, which coalesce into one consistent scientific method<sup>13</sup>. First, there is the purely scientific basis - just like any other scientist the author is concerned with collecting information concerning life and nature. Secondly, he tries to focus on his personal relationship with the overwhelming power of nature: this is the esthetic or religious aspect. Finally, he tries to interpret nature as a philosophical entity. According to Beekman, Junghuhn's main interest lies in formulating a "subjective manipulation" of nature. In his works, Junghuhn tries to get across the idea that many scientists are purveying a "microscopic" kind of research: they simply focus on natural objects and construct "views". But nature is a whole, a consistent entity, and colours - images of light and shadow - play an important role in the perception of it. Although the sense-organ of the eye functions as an important register, however, without light the eyes are helpless. Junghuhn pleads for a "telescopic" kind of research, in which "distant views" - or perspectives - are given a central position. In his article Beekman describes Junghuhn's intriguing attempts to build platforms in the trees, so that he could obtain "distant views":

*"So he constructed a platform in a very tall tree and in this 'airy observatory among Usnea and misty clouds' he waited for three days for the weather to clear. When it did, the sun with one swift illumination surveyed the vast scene before him and instantly 'projected' a 'map of the Batak region', in fact, one lone sunbeam suffices to disclose 'a small and alien world' he never knew existed".*

Although Junghuhn focuses his eyes to describe natural phenomena, he always returns to his distant views: nature is a dynamic whole, and she requires a nomadic and sensual mind. For Junghuhn, nature is always feminine, and his descriptions of her sound like a love affair. According to Beekman, Junghuhn tries to write in a charming way because he wants to convince the reader that the omnipresence of the 'divine Aphrodite' is inescapable. Beekman:

*"Encoded in Junghuhn's 'scientific' and narrative texts (which together form one paradigmatic discourse) is a notion of nature that is as supreme as any religion and as concrete as the most severe prescriptive law. Nature subsumes all. She is inimitable, beyond human consideration, Spinoza's natura naturans [...] there is no gap between sign and referent".*

In fact Junghuhn offers us a very early form of 'deep ecology' and it is not surprising that present-day proponents of this, such as Arne Naess, make use of Spinozism as an alternative scientific method<sup>14</sup>.

This strongly antropologically orientated book, *Images of Light and Shadow*, has as its starting point an intense conversation, on Java, between four men of science<sup>15</sup>. The

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<sup>13</sup> E.M. Beekman, Junghuhn's Perception of Javanese Nature, *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* (XII,ii 1991) 11-20.

<sup>14</sup> See, Arne Naess, *Spinoza and the Ecological Movement* (Leiden 1992).

<sup>15</sup> The full title of this book was: *Licht en schaduwbeelden uit de binnenlanden van Java. Over het karakter, de mate van beschaving, de zeden en gebruiken der Javanen; over de invoering van het Christendom op Java, het bezigen der vrijen arbeid en andere vragen van den dag. Verhalen en gesprekken van de gebroeders Dag en Nacht; verzameld op reizen door gebergten en bosschen, in de woningen van armen en rijken* (Amsterdam 1854). In 1854, the author was still anonymous and the book was written by "The Brothers Day and Night". In 1864, after Junghuhn's death, his name was put on the title-page

brothers Day and Night are scientists - or perhaps it is more appropriate to call them 'investigators of Nature', who have been sent off to Java to explore the interior of the island. As they fail to find coolies, they get stuck in the little village of Gnoerag. Here, Day and Night have long conversations with the inhabitants, and try to explain to their hosts their spiritual and religious ideologies. Brother Night - the orthodox Christian - is unsuccessful in his efforts to gain support for his dualist Christian belief. Brother Day (Junghuhn himself, a deist) is praised by the natives: they understand his lyrical approach to nature, and his description of nature's wholeness brings him close to the natural religion of the Javans. A few days later, at the coast near Gnarak, they meet two colleagues: Twilight - a pantheist - and Red Morning Sky - a materialist. At night, the companions sit around the campfire and explain their ideas on nature, ethics and religion. Although the four of them expect their systems to be mutually incompatible, they agree on one conclusion: the unprejudiced study of nature is the decisive condition for any kind of progress.

*Images of Light and Shadow* offered the first detailed explanation of the four competing moral and religious systems in evidence in Dutch society after 1848, beyond the bounds of the esoteric extra-cultural life of the freemasons. Although the debate had been opened, however, precautions still had to be taken. The book was not distributed through the bookshops but by means of the masonic lodges, and Junghuhn's name did not appear on the title-page. These precautions did not dampen the hostility which broke out after it had been published<sup>16</sup>. The reviews in the journals, without exception, were angry, militant and aggressive. The periodical *De Grondwet* even noted that "*never before in Dutch history has Christianity been under such a radical attack as it is now*". And, indeed, Christianity does lie at the centre of Junghuhn's attack. The author rejects the Holy Bible and presents nature as the one and only source from which a genuine knowledge of God is to be gained. He rejects revelation, the doctrine of redemption, the divine nature of Jesus, and the intermingling of Providence in earthly affairs. He detests Christian authority and condemns its brutal attempts to convert the natives into Christian slaves. He maintains that the natives have developed their own ethics, without the aid of any Christian church or sect.

In 1854 part one of *Images of Light and Shadow* was published by Jacobus Hazenberg at Leiden, and almost immediately public opinion turned against his publishing house. Hazenberg received anonymous threats, and decided to cancel the publication of the other parts. Parts two and three were published in 1855 by Franz Gunst of Amsterdam, a militant freethinker and member of Post Nubila Lux, who also published books by Markus Polak. It is probable that it was Gunst who translated Junghuhn's work into Dutch. The German version was published in the same year at Leipzig, by Th. Thomas, a freemason who also distributed Polak's works in Germany.

The historical importance of the book does not lie simply in its forthright attack on conformist Christian values. The leading figures of *Light and Shadow* - Day, Night, Twilight and Red Morning Sky - also existed in real life, in Dutch society, and it is possible to fill in their real names. But before I introduce them, let us take a brief look at the cultural impact of this revival of Spinozism.

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for the first time.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Sep, De receptie van Licht- en schaduwbeelden uit de binnenlanden van Java van F.W. Junghuhn, *Indische Letteren* (2, 1987) 53-64.

## Berthold Auerbach's portrait of Spinoza

Although for the time being Junghuhn's notorious text was generally condemned and ignored, interest in non-Christian themes had been awakened. We find a fine example of the changing climate in *De Gids*, which was, perhaps, the most important cultural magazine of the nineteenth century. This conservative-liberal monthly tried to avoid themes which might have provoked disturbances in theological circles. In 1843 for example, the Spinozist Johannes van Vloten was expelled by the editorial board for publishing a defence of the German Hegelian David Friedrich Strauss<sup>17</sup>. By 1855, however, things had changed. One of the editors, Petrus van Limburg Brouwer, published a thirty-four page review of an historical novel on the life of Spinoza<sup>18</sup>. This novel - entitled *Spinoza. Ein Denkerleben* - was written by one of the most popular German writers of the time, Berthold Auerbach. Auerbach's book was a revised edition of an earlier effort, dating from 1837, which had made little impression on the Netherlands. This is evidence enough that in these eighteen years radical changes had taken place in Dutch culture. Auerbach was also widely read in the Netherlands on account of his bestseller *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten* (1843), and some of his books, one might mention *Op de Hoogte* (1867), appeared in Dutch translations. He showed interest in country people and natural life without having recourse to blood and soil arguments. His manner of writing accorded well with the *Biedermeierstyle* and with Spinoza's naturalism<sup>19</sup>. He had studied at Tübingen, where Strauss introduced him to Spinoza's philosophy. In the novel he published in 1837, he presented Spinoza as the enlightened pioneer of modern Jewish thinking. Four years later his translation of Spinoza's complete works was published<sup>20</sup>. In the revised 1855 edition of his novel, he observed that he had not succeeded in freeing himself from Spinoza's "idyllic inner life", and he confessed to an almost religious devotion to his inspirer. He presents himself as a pantheist, and Spinoza as the greatest prophet of pantheism who had ever lived. Spinoza had done away with the contrast between passion and thought, and had offered a way out of the fragmented and disorientated beliefs of contemporary theologians. According to Auerbach, Spinoza had restored the wholeness of cosmic spirituality, which was why Auerbach had devoted the central chapter of the work to Spinozistic pantheism. But the most astonishing feature of this book - for the Dutch - was the detailed description of Spinoza's character. In the Netherlands, the echo of Pierre Bayle could still be heard. Everyone knew that Bayle had characterized Spinoza as a denier of God's existence. Auerbach presented him as a sober, honest and ardent seeker of truth, who had sung passionately of his "deus sive natura".

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<sup>17</sup> J. van Vloten, Het leven van Jezus, *De Gids* (1843) 421-433, 477-490, 549-553, 604-614. About his exclusion, C. Offringa, Johannes van Vloten: Aufklärung en liberalisme, *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (83, 1969) 155-157.

<sup>18</sup> P.A.S. van Limburg Brouwer, Spinoza. Het leven van een denker, *De Gids* (1855) 409-443.

<sup>19</sup> On the life and work of Auerbach, E.H. Kossmann, Lotgevallen, *Politieke theorie en geschiedenis. Verspreide opstellen* (Amsterdam 1987) 430-467 (Kossmann's grandfather was a friend of Auerbach); Gunter Helmes, Spinoza in der schonen Literatur. Bilder aus der zeit zwischen Vormarx und Weimarer Republik, *Studia Spinozana V - Spinoza and Literature* (1989) 119-147; Anne Lagny, Spinoza: personnage de roman chez B. Auerbach et E.G. Kolbenheyer, O. Bloch (ed.), *Spinoza au XXe Siecle* (Paris 1993) 459-482.

<sup>20</sup> *Spinoza's sammtliche Werke. Aus dem Lateinischen mit dem Leben Spinoza's von Berthold Auerbach* (5 volumes, Stuttgart 1841).

In Brouwer's review of this book, we come across a telling cry of self pity. On account of Dutch intolerance, Spinoza had had to find a new home in Germany. The indifferent Dutch had banished their greatest thinker, and now the German idealists had to teach us the ever present importance of his ideas. Brouwer maintains that it is time to bury old prejudices. Spinoza had shown that one can live an ethical and moral life without a belief in the personal God of the Bible. Although Brouwer still declines to acknowledge that he is himself a Spinozist, in his later articles he does defend Spinoza against his detractors. After Auerbach's and Brouwer's attempts to present a new Spinoza, more and more publications on Spinoza's life and works appeared in the Netherlands<sup>21</sup>. Some of them were written in a very popular style, since Spinoza was supposed not to have written for the elite, but for everyone dedicated to the art of thinking. In 1871 for instance, a family doctor from Middelburg, Samuel Coronel, wrote a popular biography of Spinoza because he had noticed that it was still the case that the seventeenth century Spanish general Ambrosio Spinola was better known in the Netherlands than the philosopher was<sup>22</sup>. In 1856 Auerbach's portrait was translated into Dutch by the classicist freemason Dionys Burger jr., who also wrote some interesting articles on Spinoza<sup>23</sup>. It was therefore the year 1855 which gave rise to the fresh flood of Spinozist arguments in Dutch cultural and spiritual life. Scientists and anthropologists such as Junghuhn made Christianity seem less self-evident, and their new Spinoza - as presented by Auerbach and Brouwer - seemed a perfect secular mirror image of Christ.

### **Night: Christocratic anti-Spinozism and Christian Spinozism**

Let us return to the *Images of Light and Shadow*. Brother Night is presented as a deeply religious Christian, clinging desperately to his beliefs, rejecting the primitive natural religion of the natives of Java. In Dutch cultural life we find the same kind of rejection, but here Spinozism and naturalism are the objects of scorn. Petrus Hofstede de Groot for instance, the spokesman of the Groninger school of theology, pointed out that the popularity of atheism in the Netherlands had increased since the thirties<sup>24</sup>. In the mid-fifties he accused Spinozists of introducing the concept of "self deceit" into spiritual life. Rationalist Spinozism led to people communicating only with themselves, and therefore contributed to the loss of a community of spirit within society. According to Hofstede de Groot, Spinozism constituted a direct route to a dangerous society made up of "discoursing beasts of prey"<sup>25</sup>. He argued that there can only be one final conclusion, Spinozism is nothing more nor less than "*a dangerous vortex, swallowing up both the ships and their crews*"<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Auerbach also paid visits to Spinozists in the Netherlands, who treated him as if he were Spinoza himself. About these visits, Flanor's Vlugmaren, *De Nederlandsche Spectator* (1878) 294-295, 302-303.

<sup>22</sup> S. sr. Coronel, *Baruch D'Espinoza, in de lijst van zijn tijd* (Zaltbommel 1871).

<sup>23</sup> The Auerbach translation by D. Burger jr.: *Spinoza. Het leven van een denker* (Amsterdam 1856, second edition 1863). His own ideas on Spinoza were published in *Homerus, Plato, Spinoza* (Zutphen 1860); *De metafysica van Spinoza*, in: *De Nieuwe Recensent* (1861); *Spinoza en de onsterfelijkheid*, in: *De Nieuwe Recensent* (1861); *De zedenkunde van Spinoza*, in: *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* (1862).

<sup>24</sup> P. Hofstede de Groot, *Theologica Naturalis* (Groningen 1834).

<sup>25</sup> Quotation from, J.B.F. Heersprink, *De Godgeleerdheid en hare beoefenaars aan de Hoogeschool te Groningen* (2 volumes, Groningen 1864).

<sup>26</sup> P. Hofstede de Groot wrote about Spinoza in this period: *Jezus Christus volgens Spinoza*, in: *Waarheid in Liefde* (1862) 789-802; *De waarde van Spinoza's wijsbegeerte*, in: *Waarheid in Liefde* (1862) 803-842.

In 1862 a Christian response to the revival of Spinozism appeared in a book written by an intellectually unstable but remarkable Dutch theologian, by the name of Antonius van der Linde. His Göttingen thesis *Spinoza. Seine Lehre und deren erste Nachwirkungen in Holland* merely provoked indignation among Dutch Spinozists. Van der Linde defined himself as a "Christocrat", and started a crusade against anything which seemed to him to be modernist. Although only a hundred copies of his book were printed, both devastating and adulatory reviews appeared in the journals. Van der Linde attempted to update the traditional but negative image of Spinoza as a disturber of peace and piety. He tried to convince his readers that Spinoza was a sadist, who spent his life torturing and killing insects and justified this dark habit by calling it research. Spinoza's life was not one of integrity, but of weakness and cowardice. Van der Linde maintained that it was on account of his cowardice that his main books had been published posthumously. He considered the *Ethics* to be "pie in the sky", and blamed Strauss and the Tubingers for demythologizing Christianity. He accused the Spinozists of creating a new myth around Spinoza. It is hardly surprising that Hofstede de Groot should have been delighted with the book. He agreed with Van der Linde that it was impossible to reconcile Christianity with Spinozism<sup>27</sup>.

Not all theologians agreed with them. Those of the Leiden school claimed the opposite, and proposed a marriage between Spinozism and Christianity. Wessel Scheffer, for example, noted that Spinoza's works had an important bearing upon contemporary problems concerning our existence - but did not agree with the way in which the naturalists were identifying God with nature<sup>28</sup>. According to him, although the *Ethics* treats nature as an autonomous exterior - or "natura naturans" - many naturalists regard it only as a nexus of modifications - or "natura naturata". He regards it as impossible to reconcile Spinozism with modern science, since Spinoza had no conception of procedures such as induction and analogy, which are now necessary to empirical research. Like Kinker and Junghuhn, Scheffer points out that Spinoza was interested not in "particular appearances" but only in "mutual connections". The core of Spinozism is the "imagination" and not the "intellect". Nevertheless, we need Spinoza as an ally in "these less ecclesiastical times" for he is "the Prometheus of religious enthusiasm".

The Leiden theologian Johannes Hendrik Scholten was even more explicit than Scheffer in attempting to reconcile Spinozism with Calvinism<sup>29</sup>. Christianity should not reject Spinozism, its object should be reconciliation with it. Spinoza's strict determinism was in fact one with that of Calvinism. Scholten maintains that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination is to be found in Spinoza's axiomatic assertion that all beings are modifications of the One Supreme Being or Substance. God is the sovereign principle, free will is an illusion. In 1881 - on the occasion of his forty-year jubilee as professor at Leiden - Scholten was offered a bust of Spinoza. Spinozism was no longer an alien element in Dutch spiritual life.

## Twilight: criticism of science

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<sup>27</sup> Hofstede de Groot, *De waarde van Spinoza's wijsbegeerte* (1862).

<sup>28</sup> W. Scheffer, Spinoza in een nieuwe gedaante, *Godgeleerde Bijdragen* (1863) 194-227.

<sup>29</sup> G. Brillenburg, *J.H. Scholten als modern theoloog* (Amsterdam 1927); H.G. Hubbeling, Synthetisch Modernisme: J.H. Scholten als theoloog, *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* (1961) 107-142; H.G. Hubbeling, Calvinistisch spinozisme, *Bzzletin* 121 (1984).

Let us now turn to Twilight, the pantheist and third participant in *Images of Light and Shadow*. By 1855 certain dissident members of Post Nubila Lux had become convinced that naturalism and Spinozism should no longer be confined to the extra-cultural circles of freemasonry. It was this conviction which led them to form a public association of freethinkers, which they called The Dawn (De Dageraad). This new generation of overt freethinkers accepted pantheism as one of their basic spiritual principles. Their most prominent philosopher, Alexander Francois Siffle, of Middelburg, exerted himself in introducing Spinoza to the Dutch public<sup>30</sup>. In a lecture given to the Zeeland Society of Sciences (Zeeuws Genootschap der Wetenschappen) in 1859, he made the point that a real 'Dutch philosophy' had now taken shape<sup>31</sup>. According to Siffle, the present was big with pan(en)theism, and he designated Spinoza the founder and primary exponent of this momentous tradition. He praised Kinker and Polak for the revitalisation of it, and thanked him for their efforts in spreading their ideas throughout Dutch society.

Siffle used Spinozism in order to criticize the current enthusiasm for empiricism and natural science. He maintained that Auguste Comte's advocacy of empiricism was nothing more than a reaction against competing idealist and religious systems. He saw empiricism as an 'emergency exit', a 'new dogmatism', set in opposition to the 'old' metaphysical dogmas. Modern thinkers had confined philosophy to arid intellectualism, so that it was no longer "the voice of the mind". Present-day scientists were trying to gain knowledge of nature, but they were not able to fathom the essence and the wholeness of it. Siffle pointed out that since empiricism destroys the perspective provided by the omnipotence of Substance, it is at odds with both philosophy and Spinozism - that is, the foundations of any true metaphysics. Not empiricism but "intuitive science" should be the primary principle of natural science<sup>32</sup>.

In spite of his metaphysical preoccupation, Siffle was not trying to follow Scheffer and Scholten and connect Spinozism with Christian metaphysics. Spinozism and Christianity are incompatible, and Siffle showed that there could be no justification for attempting to chain Spinoza to any church or theology. With his death in 1872, this critical approach to empiricism and natural science lost direction. The pantheist summer turned out to be a short one. Schopenhauer defined this 'fashionable' pantheism as a "decent man's atheism". The new generation of Spinozists was 'less decent', however, and went on to embrace overt atheism as well as scientific materialism.

### **Red Morning Sky: a modern scientist**

The last character in *Images of Light and Shadow* is Red Morning Sky, the exponent of scientific materialism. He is a sceptic who only accepts facts that can be weighed or measured by empirical research. He is not interested in God or metaphysics and considers the existence of God to be nothing but a primitive fable. In 1855 these

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<sup>30</sup> Siebe Thissen, A.F. Siffle: een Middelburgse Jacobijn of een negentiende eeuwse Spinoza? This article will appear in the December issue of *Zeeuws Tijdschrift* (6, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> A.F. Siffle, Verhandeling over B. de Spinoza, *De Dageraad* (1859) 97-116.

<sup>32</sup> A.F. Siffle, In welken zin bestaat er een bovennatuurkunde? *De Dageraad* (1862) 49-51; id., Hoe begreep Spinoza de eeuwigheid der ziel? *De Dageraad* (1869) 529-539.

"factualists" and "hedonists" had a bad reputation in the Netherlands<sup>33</sup>. Deists and pantheists often described themselves as true believers, but materialists detested all beliefs and religions: only facts, laws and knowledge could bring progress to mankind.

In the Netherlands, the most explicit representative of this materialism was the biochemist and philosopher Jacob Moleschott<sup>34</sup>. Moleschott had been trained in the famous school of physics established by Mulder and Donders in Utrecht. In 1850 he opened the *Materialism controversy* in Germany, with his notorious book on dietetics. He was also one of the founders of the World Union of Freethinkers (WUF), and in his circle of friends we find an international vanguard which included George Henry Lewes, George Eliot, Ludwig Feuerbach, David Friedrich Strauss, Cesaro Lombroso and Elisee Reclus. Of great importance was his close friendship with Berthold Auerbach. It was in his home that Moleschott met his later wife, and was initiated into Spinoza's philosophy. Auerbach and Moleschott considered Spinoza to be an honest seeker for truth whose life had been dedicated to science and research. Moleschott has recently been interpreted as "a nineteenth century Spinoza"<sup>35</sup>. He was always searching diligently for the fundamental laws of - as he called it - "the circular cause" or "wholeness" of nature. His denial of all metaphysics and his reduction of Spinozism to physics isolated him from other scientists in his home country. Disappointed, he left the Netherlands and took up posts in Germany, Switzerland and Italy. In Italy finally he found a new home and even became a senator.

In 1862 a second important book on Spinoza's life and works appeared, *Baruch d'Espinoza. Zijn leven en werken in verband met zijnen en onzen tijd*, dedicated to Jacob Moleschott, the new-age Spinozan scientist. The author was Johannes van Vloten<sup>36</sup>, who had written it in order to attack those Christian and pantheistic Spinozists who were attempting to link Spinozism with metaphysics. According to Van Vloten, Spinoza in his *Ethics* had put a definitive end to all metaphysics. His book on Spinoza was meant for the new generation of *human beings* who had broken the chains binding them to churches and metaphysical systems, and were preparing themselves for "a Heaven on Earth". Earlier, in 1855, he had praised modern science as the most important instrument of progress and happiness<sup>37</sup>. People were no longer "Christians", dependent on irrational dogmas, but "human beings", able to create their own history on the foundation of Spinoza's *Ethics*. In England, George Henry Lewes held similar views, and in Germany Kuno Fischer proposed similar arguments. Van Vloten was, therefore, expressing an international conviction. I do not think, however, that we should regard him as an orthodox materialist. He agrees with Fischer that "thinking" and "perception" are not merely transformations of matter, but objects of "animated matter". He concludes from this that present-day Spinozists have the important task of refuting "the mechanist image of Spinoza, making Spinozism adaptable in terms of modern science". He maintains that Spinozists should try to translate the mathematical approach to the passions into a

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<sup>33</sup> See, J.G. ten Bokkel, *De Kringloop des levens, De Dageraad* (1892) 520-559.

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Dordrecht-Boston 1977) 80-99; Siebe Thissen, 'Het Hooge Lied van het Materialisme'. Jacob Moleschott's metafysica, Michiel Wielema [et al.], *Jacob Moleschott: monist of materialist* (Rotterdam 1993).

<sup>35</sup> According to the philosopher V. Peeters, *Jacob Moleschott: de eenheid des levens* (Baarn 1989).

<sup>36</sup> Mea Mees Verwey, *De betekenis van Johannes van Vloten* (Santpoort 1928). This book contains a bibliography of Van Vloten's works, including almost sixty publications on Spinoza and Spinozism, written between 1855 and 1882.

<sup>37</sup> J. van Vloten, *Godsdienst en Natuurkennis, IJselkout. Mengelingen en bijdragen* (Deventer 1855) 174-192. In this compilation we find two more essays on Spinoza: *Spinoza en Leibnitz, Spinoza en Shakespeare*.

practical philosophy of life. In this new age, dominated as it is by science and scientific laws, the *Ethics* should be used as a guide, a compass. Van Vloten places Spinozism at the centre of not only the 'old' metaphysics, but also the 'new' empiricism. Spinozism reconciles knowledge - "natura naturata" - and contemplation - "natura naturans". According to his biographer, Van Vloten was striving towards a "purified Spinozism". Spinozism was to become an ideology, and Van Vloten was to free it of all the elements no longer of any use in a scientific age. 'Useless' aspects, such as the survival of the mind after death, were deleted in order to make it relevant to modern insights. Van Vloten was undoubtedly the most active Spinozist of the nineteenth century. He also contributed to the international debate: in 1862 he found a copy of the lost *Korte Verhandeling*<sup>38</sup>.

### Some provisional conclusions

Although the differences between deism, pantheism, Calvinist Spinozism and materialism seem obvious enough, in practice Dutch Spinozism fell into two main movements. Just as German philosophical life was dominated by Hegelians of the left and right, so in the Netherlands intellectual life was dominated by a debate between Spinozists of the left and right. Van Limburg Brouwer - who since the early sixties had been a firm believer in Spinoza - cherished Junghuhn's inheritance. In a series of articles on 'atheistic tendencies' in Buddhist and Hindu culture, like the Niricvara Sankhya, which he wrote for *De Gids*, he tried to demonstrate that natural religions have a lot in common with Spinozism. He thought it possible that Spinoza had used elements taken from the Sankhya religion in order to express his own monist convictions<sup>39</sup>. He denied that atheism had anything to do with Spinozism, pointing out that the denial of a personal God is as old as mankind. There is nothing new about Spinozism. It has nothing to do with development. It is simply a "repetition" of natural experiences. In his article on Eastern atheism, he urges his readers not only to read Spinoza, but also to study the natural cultures of India and the Dutch East Indies:

*"We in the West have to learn about mutual tolerance. Truly religious believers have to get used to atheists, who usually live as ethically as Christian people. When our tolerance turns into practice, we discover our humanity, and then the question of whether a person is a Jew, Christian, Catholic, Protestant, Brahman or Buddhist, no longer has any meaning".*

In 1872 Brouwer published his most important work on Spinozism. As in the case of Junghuhn, this was not a scientific book but a novel called *Akbar*. It pictures the spiritual life in medieval India during the reign of the emperor Akbar. As in Junghuhn's case, we are confronted with a "subjective manipulation" of nature. This naturalistic novel was enormously popular in the Netherlands, and between 1900 and 1940 over fifty thousand copies of it were sold. It is, therefore, certainly the case that the increase in knowledge concerning the anthropology of natural cultures stimulated the rise of Spinozism in Dutch intellectual circles. Colonialism unintentionally provided arguments which could be used in order to criticize the intellectual climate at home. In 1862 Siffle showed that right wing Spinozism of the Scholten kind was closely related to the "Brahman Yoga doctrine", and

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<sup>38</sup> Siebe Thissen, Kom gauw naor 't Nut, Van Vloten gieet debatteeren, *Trouw (Letter & Geest)* 9 januari 1993.

<sup>39</sup> P.A.S. van Limburg Brouwer, Oosters Atheisme, *De Gids* (1862) 425-447. Also interesting is his article on Spinoza and the Kabbala: *De Kabbala, De Gids* (1870) 1-30.

that left wing Spinozism of the Van Vloten kind was akin to the "Sankhya doctrine"<sup>40</sup>. Brouwer and Siffle were quite clearly trying to define their Spinozism completely independently of Christian notions, definitions and conceptions. Dutch Spinozists thought of themselves as "Yogi" or "Sankhyi".

By 1885 the climate had changed dramatically. The seventh edition of Junghuhn's *Images of Light and Shadow* received excellent and positive reviews in the major Dutch journals. The criticism which Junghuhn and the Spinozists had levelled at Christianity was no longer regarded as a threat to western civilisation<sup>41</sup>. One of the reviews was even entitled "*Good Wine Needs No Bush*". Flanor, the columnist of the popular radical journal *De Nederlandsche spectator* - himself an admirer of Spinoza - observed that "wisdom always derives from the East and reaches maturity in the West". Knowledge of natural life was being used to legitimize controversial systems of thought such as Spinozism. Spinoza's admiration for the living complexity of nature and Moleschott's notion of the "circular cause of life" were attracting a whole range of scientists and thinkers. In 1855, their 'deep ecological' attempts to evoke the wildness of tropical islands or the omnipotence of Substance, had scared many people off. According to Beekman, the notion of Nature prevalent in Dutch society, was nothing more than a decorative literary cliché. For this first generation of overt Spinozists, however, this discovery of nature constituted an enormous impulse to push on into the development of post-masonic ideas. They brought Spinozism back into philosophical debate, and gave expression to an alternative manner of thinking which was to dominate cultural life in the Netherlands until 1940<sup>42</sup>. Nature was no longer a decorative cliché, but a source of profound esthetic and religious experience.

Rotterdam,  
10 september 1994.

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<sup>40</sup> On this classification, see A. van der Linde, *Verspreide Opstellen* (Utrecht 1866) 445-446.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Sep, *De receptie van Licht en Schaduwbeelden*, 63-64.

<sup>42</sup> On the role of Spinozism in Dutch philosophical life (1855-1940) see, Siebe Thissen, een wijsgerige beweging en haar cultuurtaak, *Wijsgerig Perspectief* (5, 1994) 167-171.