

## **Summary:**

### **The Spinozists. Philosophical Movement in the Netherlands (1850-1907)**

In the historiography of philosophy in the Netherlands, the nineteenth century has been considered the lowest point of Dutch philosophy ever. However, most historians failed to take notice of the rise of an urban philosophical culture, developing itself completely outside the academic discourse. In 1907, for the occasion of the founding of the first lasting Dutch philosophical journal (*Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte*), the Spinozist Jan Diderik Bierens de Haan, defined this popular culture as 'a philosophical movement'. Although he envisaged the birth of this movement at the turn of the century, however, this thesis argues that this layman culture or movement derived from secularistic tendencies in freemasonry, fysico-theology and liberal theology around 1850. If Hegel was right in pointing out that if one wants to become a philosopher, one has to be a Spinozist at first, this is especially true for the Dutch situation.

Within this culture or movement, Spinoza was embraced as the philosopher of the future, the architect of monism and intermediatism, who brought authenticity into a world dominated by alienation and appearance, and salvation to a society colonized by theological and scientific ideologies. Between 1850 and 1907, a growing stream of publications, lectures and controversies on Spinoza and Spinozism not only injected the slumbering philosophical climate of the Netherlands, however, they stimulated a popular interest in philosophy in general and contributed to the design of a cultural infrastructure, in which philosophical research, journals and societies would come to flourish for the first time in Dutch cultural history. In this thesis, the author argues that internal controversies amongst Spinozists are subordinated to a fundamental consensus:

#### **1**

Spinozism is more than just the philosophy of Spinoza. Spinozism is an attitude, a state of mind, the expression of an intellectual sensibility, a lifestyle, situated in a context of moral, social or political commitment. Spinozism implies a defence of common sense and one's personal convictions against all domesticating systems of thought, whether they be theology, Kantianism, Hegelianism, socialism, science or even Spinozism. Therefore, Spinoza's geometrical system of thought has hardly met any sympathy in the Netherlands. All Spinozists - with the exception of Willem Meijer - suggested a purification ('loutering') of Spinozism: an incorporation of useful elements into a personal lifestyle.

#### **2**

Spinozism, in its spiritual embrace of the world as a living, organic whole, criticizes Kantian dualism. In Kant's critique of pure reason, the existential chasm between 'the real world' and 'the world as we know it' has become unbridgeable. Spinozism melts

together a variety of soteriological orientations, in order to restore this unity and to bring peace, harmony and salvation to a modern world threatened by fragmentation and appearance.

### 3

Spinozism is usually blended with a Hegelian concept of history; it is connected with the idea of developing consciousness in the course of human history (Hegel's World-Spirit). Spinoza was a visionary who foresaw the end of history: the birth of a humanist, monist and thus authentic era in the history of mankind. Philosophy, in this case Spinozism, was considered to be able to restore The Golden Age, in which nature and culture were still a living, undivided whole. This theme of Paradise Lost/Paradise Regained seems inseparable from Dutch Spinozism.

### 4

Spinozists criticize modern 'microscopical' science (for its fragmenting and thus alienating implications) and advocate a 'telescopical' method of science, in which natural phenomena are viewed as singular particles of an organic cycle of life. Objectivity is not their goal: they strive for subjective accounts of natural phenomena, in order to combine scientific research, philosophical concepts and personal experiences. In this sense, Spinozism may be valued as a nineteenth century expression of 'mental ecology' or as a repressed method of intuitive science ( a 'loving or feeling intellect', as Kees Schuyt has called it).

### 5

Spinozism is philosophy in the Dutch language: for the first time in Dutch intellectual history, Spinozists have tried to transform their native language into a philosophical one. This experiment was supported by the poets of 'Tachtig' who, in turn, incorporated Dutch philosophical notions in their poetry and prose. In order to express their telescopical and soteriological worldview, many Spinozists preferred not to write scientific tracts, however, they generally produced 'panegyrics in fiction', as the academic professor Cornelis Bellar Spruyt pointed out in 1875.

From a philosophical point of view, Dutch fin de siècle took off in the years 1877-1880, with the commemoration of Spinoza's year of death (1877) and the unveiling of his statue at The Hague (1880). The year 1877 also marks the death of Opzoomerian academic philosophical scientism. The commemorations stimulated a renewed academic interest in para-philosophical themes, such as Spinozism, monism, secular salvation and the critique of modern science and alienated culture. The appointment of two monist-idealist professors in the last decade of the nineteenth century - Gerard Heymans at Groningen and Gerard Bolland at Leiden - dissolved the last boundaries between the popular philosophical movement and the universities. Around 1900, Dutch philosophy and culture were absorbed by a variety of soteriological notions, orientations and lifestyles - all shaped in a typical Spinozist fashion. If it is true, as many authors

have stated, that Dutch philosophy is characterized by a totalizing, soteriological critique of culture and by a broad, non-academic popular interest in philosophical themes, than it was the age of 'Spinoza fever' (1850-1907) that penetrated philosophical discourse in the Netherlands deeply with this typical colour and sound. Spinozism was philosophical movement - it shaped the soteriological tendencies of Dutch fin de siècle-culture.